

25th September 2020



Chief Executive

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Good afternoon,

Preparing for potential outbreaks of Covid-19 is something we've discussed previously as we mitigate and manage local cases as part of our Local Outbreak Plan. Looking at events elsewhere in the country we had to be realistic in expecting there to be cases locally and making sure we are ready to respond to those.

Over the weekend we learnt that a number of police officers based here in West Berkshire had tested positive for Covid-19. When the positive tests were reported Thames Valley Police acted quickly to ensure the appropriate steps were taken to minimise any spread of the virus. This included making sure those who had the virus or were showing symptoms began self-isolating as well as referring anyone who had had close contact with them to the NHS Test and Trace service. Crucially though, it also involved a wider partnership response in line with our Local Outbreak Plan.

In the past few days we have been working closely with Thames Valley Police, Public Health England and other partner agencies to review the situation and ensure that collectively we are doing all we can to minimise the spread of the virus. It's inevitable that there will be cases in our communities and occasional outbreaks, and as well as the preventative measures we can all take, it's also how we respond to these that will make all the difference.

It feels over the last ten days or so that the pace of change in response to Covid-19 is picking up again. Yesterday the new NHS Covid-19 app was launched and the onus is on us all now to download it, to use it and to help protect our loved ones. The more people who use it the more effective it will be, and we urge people across West Berkshire to embrace it as another step we can all take to help tackle the virus as well as to keep our district open.

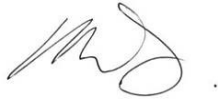

Elsewhere we have also seen a new package of support unveiled by the Chancellor to help local businesses and in particular to protect jobs wherever possible. This will be welcome news for many of our local businesses and is one of several initiatives launched recently to protect jobs. At the Council we're working hard to support the implementation of these schemes locally so that our communities get the most benefit from them. Earlier this week we began working on the process for distributing a recently announced £500 grant for self-employed residents who are asked to self-isolate – and we'll share more details about that soon.

To give another example, the Kickstart Scheme aims to support young people who are currently on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment. New job placements, funded by central Government, will support participants to develop the skills and experience they need to find work – which is crucial at a time when the job market will be fiercely competitive. Not only are we looking at how we might create some placement opportunities within the Council, but also we've registered with the scheme to help other smaller businesses in the area to offer placements themselves where they need support through the process. If your business is interested in the scheme, please get in touch with our Economic Development Team, who would be happy to advise you on how to take part.

Aside from the immediate response to the latest coronavirus response we continue to work on the district's longer-term recovery, and this includes progressing with our new climate change bond scheme. Known as a Community Municipal Investment*, it has so far raised more than £700,000 from more than 500 investors. As the first council to offer a product like this, we are really pleased with the response – and there's just a month left to invest if you'd like to take part. Cllr Ross Mackinnon recently took part in a Green Fest event talking about the CMI's benefits for investors who want to combine a low risk financial return with an immediate positive local impact. And as children return to school, Aldermaston Primary and the Willink secondary schools are also generating their own green electricity thanks to panels installed over the summer funded by the CMI. We're now looking at a range of exciting environmental initiatives to benefit from the next tranche of capital investment.

Finally, we are continuing to consult with local communities on three important strategies; our Housing Strategy, our Culture and Heritage Strategy and our future plans for the London Road Industrial Estate. Each will contribute towards making sure West Berkshire remains a great place to live, work and visit and will guide the work of the Council in the coming years. If you haven't already done so help shape our future plans by taking part in the consultations at <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/consultations>.

Yours sincerely,

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**Capital at risk. Investments are long term and may not be readily realisable.*