

17th April 2020



Chief Executive

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Good Afternoon,

We want to start this week's letter by saying **thank you**. The past four weeks have not been easy for anybody in our community but there are so many of you who are going above and beyond to keep West Berkshire going through this difficult time.

We want to thank the community for adhering to social distancing guidance and for not visiting our towns over the sunny Easter weekend. We wouldn't usually celebrate historic lows in footfall in our town centres but it's fair to say that this year is quite different. Please continue to follow this important guidance as it really is making a difference.

We want to thank NHS staff, Carers and Keyworkers who are working so hard to keep us safe. We celebrate them on our doorsteps every Thursday at 8pm, as I am sure many of you do, by joining in with 'Clap for Our Carers'. We are sharing videos of West Berkshire Council members and staff taking part every week and would very much like to see yours, too. Use the hashtag #WBCCommunityLove if you would like to share on social media.

We also want to thank the 73 community groups, many of which are run by Parish and Town Councils, for delivering food, medicine and other support to hundreds of vulnerable residents across West Berkshire. Without your help, we wouldn't be able to make sure that those in need and unable to leave their homes would have access to what they need. We cannot emphasise enough how grateful we are for what you are doing.

Finally, we want to say a special thank you our own staff who are still serving the community. We are proud of them all and hope that the community shares our appreciation, particularly:

Our **carers** for looking after our vulnerable residents

Our **Community Support Hub** for coordinating an average of 70 requests for help every day, with around 25-30 at weekends.

Our **Veolia** colleagues for continuing to collect residents' waste

Our **Countryside Team** for helping to keep West Berkshire beautiful so that we can enjoy our daily exercise

Our **schools** staff for caring for our keyworkers' children and continuing to deliver free school meals to those who most need them

Our **Emergency Planning** team for working day and night to keep West Berkshire safe

Our **Business Rates Team** for working flat out to administer £29m of grants to 2,200 businesses

Our **Registrars** for keeping this vital service going

You may have noticed that we have been highlighting some of the good feedback we have been receiving about our work and that of community groups and businesses on our social media. It means so much to us to hear that we are all making a difference, so please continue to share these with us.

As you may have seen in the local press, we have unfortunately had to postpone the opening of **Highwood Copse Primary School**. This is very disappointing for us, especially as we know many parents were looking forward to sending their children to the school in September. As a result, we have allocated children who expressed a preference for this school a place at another of our primary schools. We are, however, pleased to report that **98% of children have been allocated one of their top choice schools**. This is above the national average and we are very pleased to see that West Berkshire schools continue to be so popular with parents.

Our **Business Rates Team** has now been in contact with the vast majority of businesses eligible for Government Grants by email so far. All businesses must be contacted individually, which is causing some delays, but the team is working as quickly as they can. We have also deployed additional staff into the team to speed this up. We know that's no comfort to those who are waiting for funding so they can keep their business going, but please be assured we will be in touch very soon.

As we did last week, we'd also like to encourage you to sign up to our **newsletter**. The first edition of this went out last week and was very popular with residents. You can sign up for this service here:

www.westberks.gov.uk/ebulletinsubscribe

In the coming weeks, we will be focussing on what we can do to help the community, including our business community, recover from what has been a very testing time. We have already joined a dedicated Berkshire-wide Task Force with our colleagues at Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership and will also be bringing together professionals within the Council to work on a plan for our district. We know this work will not be easy but we are committed to ensuring that West Berkshire has what it needs to thrive in the future, a desire we know you will all share.

Once again, we wish you and your family a happy, healthy week ahead.

Yours sincerely,



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