

13th November 2020



Chief Executive

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Good afternoon,

Across West Berkshire people have been paying their respects this week as part of the annual Remembrance events. In the district we have a proud tradition of remembering the fallen, and the opportunity to remember together is something to be cherished. This year Remembrance events could not go ahead on the same scale as before, but there were some small ceremonies and many more people choosing to pay their respects at home. Although we remembered in a different way this year, it still felt a poignant occasion as we paid our respects to those who had lost their lives for the freedoms we enjoy today.

As we begin to look ahead to 2021 we hope that in time larger events can begin again. News of a vaccine this week gives us a reason to be optimistic, coming as it does at a time when we are in lockdown and seeing an increase in Covid-19 cases nationally. It is certainly a positive step forward for us and while there is light at the end of the tunnel, we also need to accept that things will not change overnight. Covid-19 will continue to be with us for a while longer and we all need to continue to play our part to reduce transmissions and keep each other safe.

For now, we must live with the latest lockdown measures, and we continue to support residents and businesses through this. The lockdown has brought yet more changes for our local businesses with regards to which can stay open, and for those that do how they can stay open safely. Overwhelmingly businesses are doing a great job at following the guidance, and we are working hard to support them in doing so. However, we are also taking action if they ignore the rules.

Much of this work has been done by our Public Protection Partnership, a shared service of environmental health, licensing and trading standards and which also includes Bracknell Forest and Wokingham Borough Councils. Officers have been out across the district both during the day and late into the evenings visiting a broad range of businesses. To give you a flavour of the breadth of this work officers have visited everything from car washes and kebab vans to opticians, corner shops and supermarkets.

The purpose is both to support businesses but, where appropriate, to enforce Covid-19 legislation. When enforcement measures are undertaken we are not only acting on regulations but also the need to create a fair environment for all businesses to operate in. Equally important is to provide some reassurance to local communities that the rules we are all subject to are being upheld.

As well as visiting businesses, the team also reacts to intelligence from local people as well. They're able to offer support to businesses who are unsure of the current regulations and chat through their measures where improvements can be made, or congratulate them on a job well done! So many businesses have gone to a huge amount of effort, with ever changing rules, that our officers appreciate the overwhelming effort to comply and keep people safe.

In some cases there's genuine confusion on behalf of the business owners as to if they can or can't be open. Any business who has been witnessed breaching Covid regulations will continue to be monitored as part of our ongoing patrols until officers are comfortable that regulations are now been adhered to, or ultimately to take enforcement action if necessary.

We want to thank Thames Valley Police, who are working closely with us to ensure a joined-up approach with regards to the enforcement of Covid-19 measures.

The start of this second lockdown last week coincided with the launch of our local contact tracing arrangements – and this is another area in which the Public Protection Partnership is leading the way, together with our public health team. We spoke a little about this last week but essentially it supports the NHS Test and Trace service – with our local team working to track down people who have tested positive but not been reached by the national system.

Thirty people have been trained to do local contact tracing, with the team working on a rota seven days a week and covering West Berkshire, as well as Bracknell Forest and Wokingham. Here in West Berkshire the team had a quiet start to the week which suggests local people are doing a great job completing the national Test and Trace details as they go out and about – and that they are responding to calls from the national service. We received five contact requests yesterday and we look forward to hearing how successful the team has been in tracking down those people.

Food poverty does remain a real concern for some people, and this week the Government announced a new package of measures to support children and families over the winter with food and bills. This is undoubtedly good news and we are looking at how we can put the allocation we will receive to best use. We will update you on our plans for this in a future Weeknote.

Don't forget help remains available to those in vital need of food or other support. If this is you, please contact our Community Support Hub on 01635 503579.

Yours sincerely,



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