

COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT - 25/03/20

I want to update members on the County Council's response to the COVID-19 outbreak. From last Thursday (March 19th) all committee meetings were cancelled. Elected members and all staff who can work from home were told to do so. Since then youth centres, children's centres, day centres, libraries, country parks, recycling centres, council offices and of course, schools have all closed. Youth centres and children centres are available by phone and some one-to-one sessions with vulnerable young people and families are still taking place. Schools are open for children whose parents are working in essential jobs and for vulnerable children. This provision is also to be available in the forthcoming Easter holidays. I have contacted some of the schools in my division and the take up of places was quite low, staff are however, understandably concerned about their own and their pupils' health. The County Council is prioritising providing the most essential services for elderly and vulnerable people and vulnerable children through adult and children's social care services and other public health commissioned services. The Council has made £1 million available for charities to bid into if they require immediate funding- not a huge amount considering the size of the county. And ten years of austerity with over 50% reduction in government funding, staff illness and shortages will no doubt have a detrimental effect on the County council's ability to respond to this crisis.

The Council has been tasked by government to set up a Community Support Hub, the purpose of which is to enable those residents requiring help to access support and to ensure those volunteering can be deployed most effectively in their local area. The Hub can be accessed on 0300 500 80 80, Monday to Friday 8am-6pm. If members could publicise this number in any way that would be very helpful. There are already a great number of volunteer groups set up in West Bridgford and across the county and if all groups are listed on the Hub it will help coordinate the volunteer help available. The County Council Divisional Fund (£5,000) has also been made immediately available to councillors so if any members know of any organisations in my West Bridgford division (Lady Bay, Trent Bridge and part of Abbey ward), who need financial help please contact me asap.

I have also contacted Anne Bremner at the Friary. The Friary is still open five mornings a week to rough sleepers. Anne is providing food parcels, but the usual services (access to a doctor, shower facilities, washing facilities, IT support etc), are not now available. At present the Friary has plenty of food and has been supporting other foodbanks in Rushcliffe that have been established in the last few weeks. Although we are all aware that it is our civic responsibility if we are not working in essential jobs to stay at home, more needs to be done in this frightening crisis for those who don't have the luxury of a home to stay in, and for those whose home is not a place of safety.

This pandemic is unprecedented. The loss of control of our lives, the loss of income, the inability to plan and the worry of whether ourselves, or some member of our family, will succumb to the virus is frightening and worrying for us all. The chief executive and senior officers of the County council are meeting daily to review their response to COVID19. The situation is changing on a daily basis but the Council's priority must be to ensure that vulnerable adults, children and families are getting the support they need to keep them as safe and healthy as possible in these incredibly difficult times, as well as the duty of care they have to their staff. I know many members are volunteering to support vulnerable residents in our community in a variety of ways. I know this support is valued and appreciated and will undoubtedly be needed for many months to come.

I hope everyone is staying home, keeping healthy and staying well.

Liz Plant- County Councillor West Bridgford North