

## **WEST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL COVID 19 BRIEFING**

### **West Sussex COVID 19 cases**

Members will be given the most up to date position on reported cases of the disease within the County at the meeting.

### **West Sussex response to COVID 19**

#### **Hospital discharge and capacity – residential and domiciliary care**

We have adequate acute hospital capacity in West Sussex, with occupancy levels below 60%, against a usual position of 99-100%. This equates to 3-4 large wards of acute beds. Our local system also now has a significant amount of empty community bed capacity ready for a rise in demand. There is currently no delay in patients requiring a transfer of care and we are able to offer temporary assistance to neighbouring systems such as Surrey.

Hospital discharge hubs are now running, overseen by an 8-8pm 7-day joint placement hub and Capacity Oversight Centre which has been set up in partnership with local NHS organisations. As new patients become ready for discharge, teams are working hard to ensure that they are discharged safely with minimal delay.

To support the expected increase in the number of people leaving hospital we are undertaking the complex task of forward planning with our capacity modelling, working with our public health team. We continue to work with the CCG to secure more domiciliary care, care home and nursing home beds, and voluntary services.

Our local NHS partners have asked us to give a continued focus also on mental health discharges and our teams are responding to ensure these can continue in a safe and supported way, in the context of a reduced workforce.

We will continue to work with the CCG to secure more domiciliary care, care home and nursing home beds, and voluntary services to support the expected increase in the number of people leaving hospital.

#### **PPE**

On Friday the 10<sup>th</sup> of April Public Health England declared that the UK was in Sustained Transmission Status meaning persistent spread of the disease within the community. Subsequently, the guidelines were updated on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April by the Department of Health & Social Care recommending enhanced PPE requirements across care settings and transport services. These changes have further increased the acute need for PPE, particularly face masks resulting in the demand exceeding the supply for PPE.

The Government delivered, over the weekend, the second half of the initial PPE drop to the Sussex Resilience Forum for local authority social care needs. The first half of that first

supply was delivered on the 7<sup>th</sup> April. We are pressing the Government for further drops as a priority.

To date we have had an agreed process for West Sussex to receive requests, triage them and issue PPE, managed through the Fire & Rescue Service Stock Control System and the Fire and Rescue Service also have three vans with emergency stock to meet urgent requests which can be delivered 24/7.

However, the change in the PPE guidance and the resulting increased demands on our supplies means we need to continue to look at the services we run which require PPE, assess relative priority and consider how we make sure those services can be run safely with the stocks we have available.

We continue to explore all possible supply routes for PPE and to raise the issue of the lack of adequate supply of PPE with Government, through all available routes. The Deputy Leader raised the issue at the County Council Network – who continue to lobby Government on behalf of all counties – and the Chief Executive continues to raise it in her role as Lead CEO for the South East region as does the SRF.

### **Temporary Mortuary**

Further site visits have been undertaken in Sussex in conjunction with the contractor who has the government contract for temporary mortuary provision. Temporary sites are being explored that are near hospitals or existing mortuaries across Sussex. Currently planning is for an allocation of 8 storage units from the government procurement route. The need for these sites and any additional capacity will be reviewed in line with revised PHE modelling predictions which are expected later this week.

We continue to press Government, via our MPs and through other routes to confirm the delivery of these additional mortuary places so that operational work to install and prepare the additional storage ahead of peak can commence.

We are working closely with the District and Boroughs as well as funeral directors to ensure we have a good understanding of the capability of the crematoria and cemeteries across the County.

We are also giving thought, through the SRF partnership, to the need for bereavement support.

### **Shielded Cohort**

Shielding is a measure to protect the most extremely vulnerable people in our society against Covid-19 by minimising all interaction between them and others to protect them, and to maximise NHS capacity to save lives.

1.5 million people identified by the NHS as clinically extremely vulnerable to Covid-19 have been advised by the NHS to stay at home for at least 12 weeks to 'shield' them from

contracting Covid-19. Of those, 900,000 have received letters from the NHS indicating that they have one or more of six clinically medical conditions that places them at highest risk if they get coronavirus.

Another 600,000 people are estimated not to be on this 'NHS List' and will be identified and referred to the Shielding Programme by their GPs and specialist clinicians.

Individuals who are clinically extremely vulnerable can register via a website or call centre number for support during their recommended stay at home period. There are three types of support offered for people who live alone and do not have the support of local family and friends:

- Essential grocery supplies: a standardised weekly parcel of food and other household goods such soap and other hygiene products will be delivered through government channels
- Medicines: the NHS has special arrangements for individuals to have medicines delivered by local community pharmacists /
- Social contact / basic care needs: local authorities will lead on care and well-being needs.

A website and contact centre have been set up nationally by Government to help people register whether they need support during their stay at home because they do not have a local support network who can help them. WSCC continue to receive data downloads indicating those who have registered and will require support to access food supplies. Those who are in urgent need (e.g. require food before their parcel is delivered) are signposted towards the Community Hub for a locally delivered response.

### **Community Hub**

We are working in partnership with Districts and Boroughs to ensure residents get the support that they need. In addition to those who contact the County or the Districts and Boroughs we are working across social care and with our D&Bs to identify groups of individuals who may be in need of support during this time but fall outside of the Shielded Cohort and have not contacted the Community Hubs. For example, this might include those having an assisted bin collection, or in temporary accommodation. We will seek to proactively contact these residents.

We are establishing a partnership approach to source and distribute food, supplies and alternative provision to residents in need. This will focus on ensuring we can meet the urgent need for food, medicine delivery as well as accommodation and other support requirements (e.g. for those being discharged from hospital). This is a quickly evolving process and a verbal update will be provided to Cabinet so as to best reflect the current picture

The Community Hub is not an emergency service but where the locality numbers only work during usual office hours, callers are signposted to the WSCC telephone number if they need help and support out of hours. All contact into the Community Hub is being responded to

by a dedicated team of staff in our Customer Service Centre including a number of staff who have been redeployed from other business areas and provided with training to provide the extended hours coverage. In addition to those managing inbound contact, there is a Community Response Team to ensure that individual critical needs, such as food and medicine are met in a timely fashion and follow-up calls.

The Community Hub is now running 0800-2000hrs, 7 days a week. We can be contacted online via the website or on the phone 033 022 27980.

We are providing the customer front door for Arun, Chichester and Mid Sussex. In Crawley, Horsham and Adur & Worthing local websites and/or telephone numbers have been set up (details are below). We are working with Crawley, Horsham and Adur/Worthing to ensure that our activity joins up; we share data and however vulnerable residents seek to access services, they receive support from the right place.

- Crawley details are; <https://crawley.gov.uk/coronavirus/supporting-community/vulnerable-and-older-people> or 01293 438000
- Horsham; encouraging those who are not receiving support from existing statutory services and need help picking up shopping, medication or would like a friendly phone call please register online with Horsham District Council <https://www.horsham.gov.uk/community/coronavirus-community-support>
- Adur & Worthing; directing people to use this link to register or identify someone as in need of support <https://www.adur-worthing.gov.uk/coronavirus/community-support/>

We are working with all Boroughs and Districts about how to publicise the offer. This will include a leaflet drops Horsham and Crawley have undertaken local publicity.

## **Volunteering**

District & Boroughs are managing volunteers either via newly initiated approaches (e.g. Adur & Worthing) or utilising the established Voluntary and Community Sector (e.g. Mid Sussex). We have a volunteer offer form on our website, all offers are reviewed to establish specialist skills that WSCC requires (such as social care experience) and then all local community offers are passed onto D&Bs for local management.

## **Offers of support from business**

We have been delighted with the support offered by businesses across West Sussex and as we become clearer on anticipated needs will be working to build innovative partnership responses. Businesses can make contact either via the website or the phone number. We will ensure that key stakeholders, especially large local businesses are treated appropriately.

## **Testing Facilities**

We are working with relevant authorities, including Public Health England to investigate potential sites for testing for COVID 19 in the County area. A site has been operating from Gatwick Airport and a second site for West Sussex in the south of the county is being established at Bognor hospital. Testing sites are currently for NHS staff.

We have been pressing Government to expand the testing of staff to priority non NHS staff in the public sector.

## **Schools**

Most schools remained open over the Easter Holiday period either individually or through a partnership with other local schools. We have reduced cover over the bank holiday weekend with a smaller number of schools open on Good Friday and Easter Monday for key worker children only, providing childcare to key workers booked in advance. Volunteers from schools are staffing these with broader support from the Education and Skills team.

The number of children requiring care has been steadily decreasing and schools are consolidating requirements if it makes sense to do so. However, we are now seeing an increase, particularly among children of key workers and this is likely to rise in coming weeks.

Home to school transport continues to provide transport to school when required and throughout the holiday period. Schools, particularly our special schools are becoming desperately low on PPE. Schools are increasingly under pressure as more staff self-isolate. We are developing a protocol and MOU with schools, including our Multi Academy Trusts, on creating hubs where we have insufficient staff to open all schools and also to agree mechanisms for the local authority to redeploy staff according to need, including those who work in academies and are not council employees.

There is a significant risk we fail to deliver the required school places for the new academic year due to slow down in the construction industry. Officers are working as quickly as possible to develop contingency plans.

## **Children's Services**

Despite challenging circumstances, we are continuing to meet statutory duties. All children known to social care and early help have had their case files RAG rated to ensure that managers retain effective oversight of risk. There is clear guidance in place to support staff in discharging their duties, which is in accord with all government guidance.

The Executive Director is ensuring that there continues to be a robust focus on service improvement, despite the challenges, and on children's trust arrangements.

Services are working closely with education colleagues to support the attendance of vulnerable children at school. Figures remain low, but social workers and schools are continuing to support families to increase attendance.

There is growing evidence that the market for external placements, and our in-house foster care placement arrangements, is shrinking. Providers are increasingly unwilling to accept new placements. The commissioning team are working to secure additional capacity.

The service has seen an increase in contacts from families, not previously known to it, where one or both parents have developed Covid-19 and are struggling to meet the needs of the children. The service has responded by putting in place an enhanced duty rota, across a range of services, to meet anticipated increase in contacts and demand over the bank holiday weekend. This enhanced duty rota also includes an extension to the domestic abuse duty rota which will now be available over the weekend.

### **Trading Standards**

Both Districts/Boroughs (via Environmental Health) and WSCC (via Trading Standards) have been designated by Secretary of State to enforce emergency regulations regarding business premises closures within their areas. As part of local planning Trading Standards (TS) and Environmental health (EH) across East and West Sussex have put in place a separation of roles based upon premises type to avoid any unnecessary duplication of effort. A SPOC within each Service has been established to ensure that wherever complaints are received they are quickly routed to correct Service without needing to re-signpost the person making the complaint.

Guidance issued by the HSE on 3<sup>rd</sup> April has now confirmed that businesses that are correctly open but not observing social distancing guidelines may be dealt with under the Health and Safety At Work Act 1974. District and Borough environmental health teams will be taking the lead on these matters.

TS has been receiving a small number of complaints about price hiking/gouging by WSCC businesses profiteering from current situation. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) is being supplied with details from TS across the UK in relation to this aspect and the CMA is keeping the Government informed.

TS had also been receiving a small number of COVID19 related complaints about such things as local businesses incorrectly describing the performance of face masks and these are being dealt with at a local level. The National Trading Standards body is working closely with National Crime Agency and responding to intelligence being submitted from TS across the UK as to scams affecting residents. WSCC TS is using media channels to put out warnings and to ask for information on COVID19 related scams.

Additionally, the Trading Standards Service has experienced a spike in enquires from West Sussex residents about such issues as refunds for holidays, as a result of the current situation. Civil advice is provided on behalf of TS by a national helpdesk run by Citizens Advice.

## **Fire and Rescue Service**

South Coast Ambulance Service (SECAMB) have formally requested support from West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, along with other Fire and Rescue Services in the region. SECAMB are experiencing significant pressures and have asked for FRS support, particularly in relation to logistical support to move around large volumes of PPE, mechanical engineering support, and mixed crewing of ambulances.

The FRS are working with SECAMB to support their request and are collaborating with neighbouring FRSs to ensure a consistent regional approach. FRS support will help to ensure there is sufficient provision within the county to support residents. The level of support provided will be kept under constant review to ensure there is no detriment to the provision of fire cover within the county.

## **Services to residents**

Libraries, Ceremonies, Birth Registration and the Record Office are closed until further notice. Death registration is by phone. The Library Service is maintaining contact with vulnerable residents and providing an adaptive service in particular to those who rely on audio books, live alone and are isolating.

## **Household Waste Recycling Sites**

Household Waste Recycling Sites remain closed, as they do across the country.

We are working hard with district and borough councils to ensure regular household waste and recycling collections can continue and are monitoring fly tipping. To date we have seen only a small increase in fly tipping.

Government has recently issued some guidance on opening of HWRC. We are seeking clarification from Government on how this guidance is consistent with the wider Social Distancing requirements. It is likely to be related only to a situation where normal community waste collections are disrupted. This is not currently the case anywhere in West Sussex.

In the meantime, we are keeping plans for how and when it would be appropriate to reopen our sites under close review, including how we manage the likely surge in demand on reopening.

We will reopen HWRC only when we are sure residents and staff will be safe and our action does not conflict with the current overriding Government instruction to Stay Home, Protect the NHS, Save Lives.



## Payment of Council Tax

Government has distributed a hardship fund to Districts and Boroughs to help residents in need. The guidance states that any working age resident in receipt of benefit from a council tax reduction scheme will now have their bill reduced by £150 or less if their bill is already below £150. The increase in residents applying for universal credit will mean that more residents will be eligible for the Council Tax Reduction scheme and the additional relief offered through the Hardship Fund.

## West Sussex Economy

The impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on West Sussex businesses and the economy is considerable and widespread, as elsewhere.

In discussion with the Cabinet Member, officers have been developing the role the County Council can best play. Our offer to convene a `Coronavirus (COVID-19) West Sussex economy group` as an extension to existing approaches to shared economic development priorities was welcomed by partners.

A group made up of the Districts and Boroughs, the three spatial area partnerships, the South Downs National Park, the county tourism partnership, and the C2C LEP Growth Hub are working together to:

- Assess the impact of coronavirus on the economy and businesses
- Support the response through sharing insight and approaches and ensure effective promotion of the support available to businesses, most significantly from the Government's support measures

### *Impact on businesses and the economy*

The current approach to assessing the impact on businesses and the economy is to collate a countywide weekly report from intelligence and partner contributions, and to add that to the Coast to Capital LEPs insight. The LEP submits a weekly report to BEIS, which is also be shared with partners. The information in the West Sussex report and in the wider LEP report can be used by all and is intended to avoid duplication of effort in collating impact information. In time, the approach is likely to be more sophisticated, including through working with the Council's Insight function.

Key themes in the first West Sussex weekly report include significant concerns around:

- *Gatwick, the airlines and their far-reaching supply chains*: 2017 reports estimated the impact of Gatwick at around 200,000 jobs supported by the airport across overseas visitors and international trade, including 4,000 in hotels around the airport; it is also estimated around 9,000 Crawley residents are employed in on airport roles, and around 45,000 businesses in the Gatwick Diamond are connected to the airport supply chain;



- *the service sector reliant on discretionary consumer spend, including tourism:* 2018 the value of the tourism sector in the county was estimated at 2.05bn supporting 37,000 jobs, with the sector currently shut down;
- *the impact on aspects of the horticulture sector:* The West Sussex Growers have reported many issues including the challenges for those in the ornamental sector of horticulture.

The report also highlights concerns around those not covered by the Government support package for businesses and the self-employed which is assumed to be having an impact on the numbers turning to Universal Credit. The C2C LEP has reported that outside London, the area is seeing the second highest increase in unemployment alongside Hertfordshire. (This relates to the whole C2C area, we do not currently have a figure for West Sussex).

Two additional areas of concern highlighted by the County Council are:

- *care:* a sector which is fragile and under considerable pressure, with further workforce challenges likely to arise from staff needing to self-isolate or be shielded due to underlying health conditions
- *skills:* whilst there are innovative solutions with schools and colleges adopting virtual teaching methods, learning and apprenticeships are clearly disrupted, especially for young people. There are issues for apprenticeships, where completion is often reliant on work-based assessments, and there are concerns about the sustainability of the smaller training providers in the coming months.

### *Response and supporting businesses*

The main features of the [Government's Business Support package](#) are the Job Retention Scheme; the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme; the Business Interruption Loan Scheme; and the elements being administered by the Districts and Boroughs i.e. business rates holidays for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses; and cash grants for some retail, hospitality and leisure businesses, and those already receiving Small Business Rate Relief and/or Rural Rate Relief.

Districts and Boroughs have reported the considerable task they are undertaking to make the payments, overseen by S151 officers and Revenues and Benefits. Weekly reports on grants administered will be submitted to BEIS, and we will seek to collate and share information on beneficiaries.

The Districts and Boroughs are reporting that many businesses are in crisis and are seeking advice to navigate through the support available and make decisions on the best approach. We are working closely with the C2C LEP Growth Hub who currently have capacity to support. They are offering advice sessions and webinars.

The C2C LEP also launched a Backing Business small grants scheme to provide immediate support to local businesses to enable adaption of business operations. Due to overwhelming demand the scheme is currently closed for any new applications. C2C has committed to reporting on take up of the grants so we can track beneficiaries in the county.

Where support is available for businesses in specific sectors these are being widely promoted. We are progressing work with the LEP on tailoring Growth Hub support to meet the needs of our key sectors, starting with tourism through the County Council hosted Experience West Sussex Partnership.

The County Council's communications' channels are promoting the support available, hosted on the [Business West Sussex](#) web site.

#### *Comparison on response activities*

A broad review of the response activity by other upper tier authorities and LEPs has indicated a similar picture to the one in West Sussex. Like us, upper tier authorities are signposting businesses to the government package, other advice and support, and to the LEP Growth Hubs. From the information we have seen, only Coast to Capital and Buckinghamshire have released new grant funding to provide immediate support to local businesses to enable adaption of business operations.

Our neighbouring LEP Solent has released a grant scheme for rural small and medium sized enterprises located on the Isle of Wight.

#### *Recovery Plan*

In time, the focus of work for the County Council will be on the recovery phase. We will work with the LEP, our District and Borough partners and others with the intention of ensuring a comprehensive recovery plan which reflects the diversity of the West Sussex economy.

For now, officers are keeping apprised of any developments where there might be recovery opportunities for the county.

#### **Suppliers**

To help with supplier's cash flow we are moving to earliest possible payment following the normal control procedures. In practice this will allow suppliers to be paid as soon as possible, rather than 20 days for local SMEs and 30 days for other suppliers.

We will also provide a flexible approach in supporting existing suppliers and customers with individual contractual challenges in the current circumstances, to support business and market sustainability and complement the support already put in place by Government. To help expediate supply of services where needed we have activated our waiver procedure to ensure we can award contracts as quickly as possible while ensuring value for money.

Also, we are using options to extend current contracts when the current environment makes it impossible to run a meaningful tender.

## **Corporate Estate**

All Directorates have confirmed which assets will remain in use which will allow resources to be committed where they are needed and to redistribute scarce cleansing products from vacant properties. It should be noted that where an asset is closed there will be no support provided in terms of hand sanitiser, heating etc.

In addition, the FM team will collate the backlog of necessary compliance work to ensure, that assets are ready to be reactivated as quickly as possible once staff can travel freely. However, it should be noted that once the restrictions are lifted assets will return to use gradually to ensure that they are safe for occupancy.

Suppliers are now seeking agreement to undertake works given recently published Government guidelines. It is likely that small works, including grounds maintenance will restart in the coming weeks subject to compliance with the relevant guidelines/

## **Member Meetings within new regulations**

In accordance with the regulations published last week the County Council will use the new powers to hold virtual meetings in public during the current public health emergency.

With immediate effect and until May 2021 Councils can schedule formal scrutiny and decision-making meetings provided they meet the following rules

- The usual five clear working days notice of the meeting applies
- Agenda and papers are published on the Council website
- All members of the committee must be able to hear everyone else and speak
- The public must be able to hear everyone who is entitled to speak

In addition there is no requirement for an annual meeting of Councils during 2020 and all appointments to roles and committees can continue until May 2021.

## *Current Plans*

It has been agreed that West Sussex County Council will not hold an annual meeting this year.

Where West Sussex County Council holds virtual meetings, all meetings will be audio cast on the council website so members of the public can listen in using a computer or smartphone. A link will appear on the morning of each meeting.

We are now reviewing how to use the new legislation to hold essential business while members are unable to meet in person. Arrangements for future committee and cabinet meetings will be communicated shortly.

### *Member contact*

Members have been advised to use [members.covid19@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:members.covid19@westsussex.gov.uk) as the single point of contact for any specific Covid-19 enquiries.

### **Financial Implications of COVID 19**

West Sussex County Council has received £20.528 million of additional funding from Government, to support the actions being taken to support the actions to suppress the Covid-19 virus.

The formulae used by Government to distribute this additional funding was predominantly weighted towards Adult Social Care, recognising the key relationship between social care and the NHS and their lead roles in suppressing the spread of the virus. However, the funding was not ring-fenced and it is clear that the additional expenditure will not solely be incurred by Adult Social Care but will impact across the whole Council.

In addition, our Districts and Boroughs have received government funding for a Hardship fund to support council taxpayers, funds to pay business grants and funds for homeless support.

The financial implications arising from COVID are still emerging. Areas of pressures identified to date are as follows:

- Financial pressures due to a potential uplift in the price we need to pay care homes for our clients
- The number of our residents requiring support in residential placements and home care resulting from the rapid discharge from hospital
- An increase in Children in Need resulting from the lock down situation
- Cashflow issues due to a reduced collection of business rates and council tax
- Loss in income due to reduced collection of council tax, business rates and commercial income such as car parks, leisure centres and garden waste.

**It is likely that additional expenditure and lost revenue will be significantly higher than the £20.528m of funding provided by Government to date.**