

# Dorset Council, West Purbeck, May 2020 Report

## **Coronavirus**

We are currently in the front line of this programme implementing a variety of government initiatives and schemes and the situation is very fluid, changing daily. I am loathe to write a report that is very out of date by the time it appears in print! As a result, I have been writing progress reports every few days to Parish Council clerks and others, leaving them to forward as appropriate.

We have instituted weekly update meetings with Dorset Council's (DC's) MPs and me, the leader, the Chief Executive and others as required. These have proved very useful and all the MPs have commented as to how effective and proactive DC is. We are using our MPs to act as a focal point on our behalf and we have Simon Hoare (North Dorset) arguing our case for funding to meet the additional duties placed upon us and Chris Loder (West Dorset) as the focal point for improving Digital and Superfast Broadband coverage. We are also answering a lot of their questions because we are strangely in a situation where we are sometimes better informed than they are! In addition, the DC Coordinated response Team are working with the major voluntary Sector Organisations who have also publicly stated their satisfaction with the arrangement, but as always, still much more to do.

## **Community Shield**

Obviously, the key and most important element of DC's response to the Corona virus pandemic is how we help reduce the impact and spread of the infection. Government has passed many responsibilities down to Councils to achieve this. Laura is leading on this and has been holding daily meetings to manage and coordinate our response to support those individuals and families that are extremely vulnerable and need to shield from face-to-face contact for a minimum of twelve weeks. Every week we hold a video conference for all our Councillors and at these meetings Peter answers all the written questions that Councillors have submitted, and Laura updates the Council on the sterling work she is doing. She has also been appearing on TV, Radio and Social Media, in her effort to get the message across.

There are potentially 6700 vulnerable people, although this number is growing. We are conducting a phone assessment with everyone on the list, with teams stood up 7-days a week to do this. As of mid-April, in excess of 1400 assessments had been completed. The aim is to support household to help themselves, providing additional support as required (such as food parcels, medicine deliveries and connecting volunteers who can check on them). The primary challenge remains the availability of online grocery delivery slots. We are encouraging those who can, to make other arrangements so that they free up capacity for our more vulnerable people.

## **Broadband**

Following on from my previous pieces about Broadband. We have now collected and collated a very large amount of information regarding the poor performance of BTOpenreach in the implementation of Superfast Broadband in the rural areas of Dorset. We requested one of our Dorset MPs to join us as the Westminster lead in a campaign to improve this situation dramatically. I am pleased to say that Chris Loder (West Dorset) is that MP and he is proving very effective and influential. I have already held several sessions with him on the subject although he needed little effort to bring him up to speed as he used to be a District Councillor for West Dorset and knows the poor coverage both personally and across Dorset. We have agreed to hold a video conference with the CEO of BTOpenreach with myself and Chris. Chris is then going to attempt to facilitate a meeting (electronic of course) with the relevant Minister to argue our case. I hope this will help to force BTOpenreach to listen to our complaints and to pressurise them to improve dramatically.

## **Garden Waste**

The service will restart from April 27th as we now have enough staff to cover it which we did not have due to illness and reallocation to other more urgent tasks. We still do not (currently) intend to reopen Household Recycling Centres as they are not deemed essential and the requirements for social distancing would be difficult to enforce and would take away from our already stretched staff; but we hope to restart this as soon as possible. There has been much speculation about potential for increased fly tipping. As a matter of interest, the latest statistics for April show that fly tipping is down based on the same period last year, but we will continue to monitor this.

## **Good News**

The virus has led to almost unrelentingly bad news, so I am going to end with a small but good news story. Dorset Council has been supporting people calling in to the helpline, but they've also been proactively working with people in, some might say, unusual ways. They supported a lady who has been shielding with her husband, and who were advised to sleep separately to ensure their health and safety. As a result, she had been sleeping on a recliner chair in the lounge as they didn't have a spare bed. This was really not helping her get a good nights' sleep, nor her general health. The team was able to secure a grant from Dorset Poverty Action Group and they bought a single bed. The highways team kindly collected it from the store and delivered it. The lady rang to say a big thank you as it was the first time, she'd slept the whole night in weeks and she's already feeling better. And she's also linked to a volunteer to help with collecting prescriptions. The bed was delivered just in time for her birthday. What a great gift and another example of Dorset's approach to supporting people through this!

## **Useful information available**

There is a great deal of information on the Dorset Council website, this includes contact information and ideas for things to do, including for children when they're at home. Here are some of the links:

- Online resources for families <https://mailchi.mp/dorsetcouncil/online-resources>
- Schools and families: <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/emergencies-severe-weather/emergencies/coronavirus/schools-and-families.aspx>
- Information and landing page: <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/emergencies-severe-weather/emergencies/coronavirus/coronavirus-covid-19.aspx>
- Co-ordinated Community Response: Information about our co-ordinated community response is available on the DC web site

There remains a great deal of good advice on how people can protect themselves online at [www.nhs.uk/coronavirus](http://www.nhs.uk/coronavirus). Finally, any Dorset resident who needs additional support should be encouraged to call the Community Shield helpline: 01305 221000 (open 8am-8pm everyday).

## **Surgery**

We are not holding face to face meetings at the moment. However, we would be delighted to ring and talk to you. Please ring or email us with the subject matter so that we can prepare ourselves. Peter's email address is [peterwharf@hotmail.com](mailto:peterwharf@hotmail.com) telephone 07986600799 and Laura's is [clrlaura.miller@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clrlaura.miller@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk) telephone 07814 569563.

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