

Hi, it's Kim, here with this week's Hastings Borough Council update. I hope that you are keeping safe and well.

This week marked 100 days since we first went into lockdown. Our world has changed significantly since then and I appreciate how difficult these 100 days have been in various ways for people. My thoughts are with those who have lost family members and friends. We have come together as a community to be there for each other and this care is helping us through. Nothing epitomises this more than the key workers who have been supporting us with their diligent work throughout this time. Thanks to everyone who is helping us through.

If you or someone you know needs help or support the Hastings community hub is still here for you. Call 01424 451019 if you need urgent support or fill out our online form for less urgent requests.

We have seen the number of new COVID-19 cases fall and the lockdown ease, but the threat and impact of this coronavirus hasn't gone away and what has happened in Leicester this week serves as a reminder of that. Along with partners we continue to do what we can to support the town and manage and minimise the impact of the virus.

It is good to see the high streets open again with more openings from tomorrow we must proceed with caution and look after each other. Social distancing and regularly hand washing remain the most effective ways to stay safe and prevent the spread of the virus. We all have a part to play in the safe recovery of our town.

As part of our support for businesses we have updated and improved the information and resources available on our website since last week's announcement of further re-opening and will continue to add more information as new guidance is produced by the government.

We are still encouraging businesses to check if they are eligible for the small business or retail leisure and hospitality grants. Although you may be opening again, you could still be eligible for this grant. So far, we have given out £19,755,000 to 1704 businesses. Please go to our webpages to find out if you are eligible.

We have also begun making payments to eligible businesses for the discretionary grant scheme and we will continue to contact businesses over the coming weeks.

As residents we can help by buying local wherever we can -just a few local purchases a week can make the world of difference to a small business who has suffered as a result of COVID-19.

Our local businesses are working hard to follow the new guidelines and make sure they are operating safely, and this is very challenging for them. Customer and employee safety is the priority for them. Even though lockdown is easing we know that it isn't feasible for some local businesses to open now, but we look forward to them opening again when it's possible for them.

As a result of the new operating restrictions our town's new full capacity will not yet be able to be what our pre-COVID-19 full capacity was.

We have been working hard, like our businesses planning and preparing for the reopening of council facilities in as COVID secure way as is possible.

From July 4th we aim to have all our public toilets open and available from 9am-6pm with enhanced cleaning schedules in place. We will also be opening our playgrounds and the West Hill Lift will be carrying passengers again. We are doing our best to make these facilities safe, but they are used at your own risk.

We will keep you updated about the re-opening of our museum which will take a bit longer and you can check in on the latest news on the museum's website and social media feeds.

I know that many of you are really struggling financially as a result of the pandemic and I am sorry if that is the case for you. The council's financial position has been hit hard as well. The council had already made significant budget cuts earlier in the year and the £4.9m cost so far of COVID-19 in terms of loss of income and increased expenditure has made things much worse. Without much more money from central government we, along with many other local councils, won't be able to continue to deliver council services at the same level. We welcome the prime minister's pledge last weekend that there will not be a return to the government's austerity policy. We are waiting to hear further details and to see if this pledge is followed through with because if it is, that would mean sustained long term funding for our town.

Although COVID-19 has been the forefront of the council's work we are still very much aware that the climate change emergency is still with us. Since declaring an official climate emergency, we have developed a strategy and an action plan which will put climate change considerations at the heart of any decisions the council makes. There's a brand-new section of our website which gives advice and information for residents and businesses and explains how the council is playing its part. We can all help to make a difference as even small changes can have a positive impact on our environment. We must work together to tackle this emergency. Thank you for all that you are doing.

Finally, this week it's children's art week! If your children or grandchildren love doing arts and crafts, then please check the Hastings Museum and Art Gallery Facebook page for mystical and magical things as the theme is myths and legends at the moment. Although our museum isn't ready to open on July 4th the fun resources and exciting online activities are still there just as they have been since lockdown has begun!

That's it for this week: let's stay kind and supportive of one another, keep social distancing, respect our town and where we can buy local.

Thank you and please stay safe.