

Cllr Kim Forward 22/05/20

Hi, it's Kim here again the leader of your council, with my weekly video update on council news and services.

Well a lot has happened this week from the government's announcements of further easing to lockdown measures and a grant fund for reopening high streets safely to the return of our public council meetings which are virtual of course... and much more.

I have been reflecting on just how much the council has been doing to support the town since the start of this pandemic such as delivering food and prescription medication to those in need; answering all the phone calls to the Hastings Community Hub and finding the right help for people; keeping waste services running; operating the cemetery and crematorium within new guidelines and working with businesses to help them access the vital government grand funding for which they are eligible. And of course keeping our other services have been available for you.

Council employees are key workers and a lot of what the council does, in good times as well as right now, is done in the background. It is the day to day work of keeping our town running. I am proud that when the pandemic struck, the council, side by side with its partners, was there for its town.

The full detail about all the council has done, since the pandemic started, to manage the impact on the town and keep our services going can be found in a report which will be published on our website today and it is worth a read to get the full picture.

The government's announcement last night was a surprise to us and we, along with all the other councils, weren't given any advance notice or consulted on the impact to our town. Our position remains the same that the town remains closed to tourists and that residents are still urged to stay home and stay safe as much as possible. So the council's public toilets and other amenities like tennis courts remain closed and this decision has been made to help ensure your safety. Please continue to help us publicise this message. It is well known that the town has one of the lowest infection rates in England and we want to keep it that way. Opening the toilets would also mean taking our limited cleansing resource away from essential services like the crematorium and street cleansing operation.

As a result of our message the town remained quiet for much of the bank holiday weekend although Monday was busier than we would have liked. Thank you for your support, assistance, co-operation and understanding and for taking the 'stay safe stay home' message seriously and following the guidelines. We know a large number of people support our position and you are helping to keep Hastings safe. We must continue to look out for and look after each other....our recovery from this pandemic depends on it.

We will review our position weekly as things develop, with particular attention to the 'R' rate, the effectiveness of the government and NHS's new track and trace system and in light of the work we will be doing with the County Council and Public Health to develop a local outbreak control plan.

Subject to scientific advice the government intends to allow non-essential retail stores to open in a phased way from June 1st and safety will be our guiding principle here as well.

They have announced a grant fund for councils to help them do this. For us this amounts to just over £82,000. Although it isn't much money we will make the grant from the government go as far as we can to help make our shopping areas as safe possible when the shops begin to open. Unfortunately there's the same bureaucracy and form filling as would normally apply to schemes worth millions of pounds which is time consuming but we will do our best.

As we had no advance warning we are still working to understand the government's guidance about the fund and consider how best to use it and we will update you through social media and our website.

Last night signalled the end of Thursday evening's clap for the NHS and carers. This has become such a powerful symbol of our appreciation of these dedicated people and the importance of the work they do, often at great personal cost, and I hope that we all continue to value their work all year round.

As always, the community hub is still here to help you. For urgent support please call 0 1 4 2 4 4 5 1 0 1 9, or for less urgent requests complete the online form. Please reach out if you need help.

I am aware of how difficult this time has been for many of you and of the sacrifices that have been made. As we begin our slow, tentative steps towards recovery we need to continue to be kind and considerate towards each other and understand that for some life continues to be extremely difficult, for some new concerns are emerging and for all of us the compassion we show towards each other will help us through.

Please stay safe and well.

Thank you for listening.