

District Council Report for Faringdon Town Council

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Everything has changed in the country since last month's update - not least at the district council. Council officers are working long hours to keep regular services going, but as the response to Covid-19 intensifies some services will inevitably be affected. We have closed our Milton Park office and are moving staff from most teams in the council onto the Covid-19 response over the coming weeks and months.

Things are moving very fast so please be aware information in this report is correct as of 8th April but is likely to change day by day.

Please keep an eye on social media, emails and www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/covid19 for the latest.

Covid-19 Response

- Decisions are no longer being made by the usual democratic process. The Local Resilience Forum (LRF) for Oxfordshire has declared an emergency which means the line of command comes from Government, through the regional LRF to Oxfordshire. The District Councils are part of the Oxfordshire LRF along with the County and City councils, police, NHS and military.
- Our focus is supporting the NHS. We are collectively tasked with ensuring people can stay at home to reduce infection rates and minimise hospital admissions.
- We are working with the LRF to identify buildings across the district that can be used for food storage and overflow hospitals.
- We continue to support homeless people and are identifying safe places for rough sleepers to stay.
- Residents in need of food, supplies or other support who don't have support from friends or family nearby can use the following phone lines:
 - Anyone who is 'shielded' or vulnerable as identified by the NHS without a local support network should contact the dedicated team on:
 - 01865 897 820 Mon – Fri 08:30 to 20:00; Sat – Sun 09:00 to 17:00
 - shield@oxfordshire.gov.uk
 - Other residents who are isolating and in need of support or supplies throughout the district can contact
 - 01235 422 600
 - communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk

Council staff will either arrange support directly or put callers in touch with a local voluntary group – Faringdon Viral Kindness in this ward

- Faringdon residents can call Faringdon Viral Kindness directly for support 8am – 5pm on the following numbers:
 - 07754 135 057
 - 07936 034 458
 - 07936 041 385

Thanks to all those who have helped set up Faringdon Viral Kindness or have registered as volunteers. It is already providing a vital lifeline for those in need, helping people stay safe and letting people know that, even though they are on their own, they are not alone.

The group has been registered with www.oxfordshireallin.org with whom the councils are working to recruit volunteers.

- **Councillor Coronavirus Grants:** District Councillors have been given a small grant pot to help residents during the Covid19 pandemic. This money is available to community groups in our ward to pay for supplies that are not readily available through other sources and we have

elected to use this money to ensure Faringdon Viral Kindness has immediate funds available to carry out its work.

- **Council Meetings:** The government has just issued new regulations on council meetings which means we will be able to hold our Annual Council meetings later in the year rather than in May. The regulations also allow us to hold virtual meetings to make democratic decisions and we're currently reviewing how best to do this.
- **Waste Collections:** Currently collections are being carried out as normal. Our waste contractor, Biffa, has some staff shortages due to illness and self-isolation but is managing this by redeploying staff and using agency drivers. However, new crew members unfamiliar with the routes and/or fewer staff, mean it's likely that crews might not be able to complete all their daily rounds and so some bins might not be emptied on their usual collection day. If this happens please advise people residents to leave them out for up to three days (including weekends) and Biffa will try to catch up. Some non-essential services have been paused for the duration including new bulky household waste bookings new garden waste subscriptions and investigating abandoned vehicles.
- **Council Tax:** The government have announced a £500 million hardship fund. Under this scheme, people in receipt of Council Tax Reduction will receive £150 off their council tax bill for 2020/2021. This is in addition to any support they already receive. We are now confirming the amount each individual qualifying household will receive off their bill – as soon as this is complete, revised bills will be issued.

Where possible, people should continue to pay their bills as normal. If anyone is having difficulty paying their council tax as an impact of the Coronavirus situation, they should contact our council tax team on: 0345 302 2315 or at vowh.counciltax@secure.capita.co.uk

- **Support for Small Businesses:** The councils are prioritising extensions to retail rate relief to existing accounts and working to identify eligible ratepayers. Work is also taking place to identify and collate the necessary information to allow the councils to pay the Small Business and Retail Grants to those businesses that qualify. Those who can pay their bills should do so as normal, however those businesses who are genuinely having difficulty paying their business rates should contact our business rates team via: vowh.businessrates@secure.capita.co.uk.

The South & Vale Business Support team publishes the latest government advice and support on www.svbs.co.uk, including rates relief and business support grants. Businesses can also sign up to receive an e-newsletter via the website. The website also lists the latest job vacancies for individuals seeking temporary employment, exercises to stay healthy while working from home, and links to mental health organisations.

- **Parking Charges dropped:** To support key workers and volunteers collecting shopping all parking fees have been suspended in Vale car parks. This means people no longer need to get a ticket from the machine – reducing the risk of infection further.
- **Councillor Surgeries:** We have suspended face to face councillor surgeries for the time being but are, of course, happy to take phone calls and emails from residents and town councillors at any time.

Local Issues to Faringdon

- Development South of Highworth Road (P20/V0775/RM): A new reserved matters planning application has been made on the land south of Highworth Road. We are currently discussing this with the relevant planning officer to get a full understanding and look forward to Faringdon Town Council's feedback.

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