

FREEPHONE GRAPHIC SENT SEPARATELY

Chairman's Report 26th March 2020

The full implications of the Coronavirus has been made painfully apparent to all of us, and our lives have changed in ways unthinkable even a week ago.

The new government instructions announced this week by the Prime Minister have had to be made to save lives. Here in Shepton we must adhere to these measures, or see the NHS overwhelmed and unable to cope with the predicted spike in emergency Covid-19 cases.

If you're in a high risk group, you could become seriously ill from Coronavirus. It is imperative that you stay at home, and get others to do your shopping, or collect medical supplies for you. The people most at risk include the elderly, pregnant women and anyone with health conditions that might weaken or compromise their immune systems.

It is vital that someone is keeping up contact with anyone who is deemed to be at greater risk. Volunteer groups have sprung up all across the country offering services to residents who may need help and support. Already Shepton residents have received a leaflet giving details of how to contact a group of local volunteers who are offering to collect shopping, prescriptions and give support if needed.

We want everybody to be safe and in touch with at least one other person to make sure they are okay. At this time, when many residents face isolation, it is important that you do not hand over money or bank details to anyone you do not know, either over the phone or at the door. Neither should you give or lend your debit, credit card or a payment card to a stranger, or allow them access to your home.

At all levels of local government, we are reacting to new directives from national government. The Town Council is working in close collaboration with Mendip District Council and Somerset County Council. The advice we have received has, at times, been confusing and incomplete, and things have been moving so quickly that's been hard to keep up. Be assured that working together, we want to do all we can to serve our residents.

The Town Council has set up an emergency helpline: Freephone 0800 061 4089. This number will be manned by council staff and elected councillors. You can also contact us by email: info@SheptonMallet-TC.gov.uk. If you are isolated and have concerns or need help, make sure to maintain contact with somebody who can assist you.

These are extraordinary times and the wave of panic buying of certain products in our supermarkets has not been helpful. All the major food retailers have repeatedly assured us that they can cope with supplying their stores if people act responsibly. Their staff say that most people have been supportive and sensible, but sadly some people have been downright rude and aggressive towards other customers and store workers. The emergency seems to have brought out the very best and very worst in people. As one hard working member of staff in Tesco told me: "It's a pity it's taken the Coronavirus to make people realise just how important a job we do".

Many of us will see reduced incomes and we all face uncertainty in the weeks ahead. The government is guaranteeing 80% of salaried staff incomes, but the growth of the gig economy means we have many self-employed and casual workers in our community. At the time of writing these people feel forgotten. They are hoping the government will offer them the financial assistance they need to help them survive and support their families.

In different ways, we are in this together for the long term. We all have our own relatives and neighbours that may need our care and help. Charlotte, our Town Clerk, has recently had confirmation that her elderly mother in the north of England has contracted the Covid-19 virus. After ensuring that all that can be done is being done for her Mum, Charlotte remains in post working hard for our community.

Our staff and councillors are working remotely to reduce the risk of spreading Coronavirus. We are putting in place emergency measures to protect the public and will be dealing with any issues as they arise until the pandemic passes.

These are trying times, but if we stand together, we can come out the other side of this crisis with a stronger community and a better understanding that co-operation, kindness and collaboration are precious and hold our society together.

Please, rich or poor, old or young, healthy or vulnerable: heed government advice. If you have concerns or questions regarding Coronavirus refer to the NHS 111 advice website:
<https://111.nhs.uk>

Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council