

## Chairman's Report 9<sup>th</sup> April 2020

These are undoubtedly difficult and troubling times for Shepton residents, especially for those of us who are now isolated. All of us have had our daily routines completely changed, and find ourselves adapting to a world we have never experienced before. At the time of writing, the Prime Minister is in intensive care. If the head of the government is stricken, it makes perfectly clear that we are all at risk.

Local government, working with agencies and volunteer groups, is at the frontline dealing with the coronavirus outbreak. In partnership with local agencies and organisations, the Town Council has launched a dedicated **Shepton Mallet Coronavirus Network** website: [www.helpshepton.info](http://www.helpshepton.info). This gives comprehensive details of sources of help and support during the Covid-19 outbreak, and will be extended and updated on a regular basis as circumstances change.

The Town Council is also offering support on the Freephone number **0800 061 4089** (8am to 10pm every day) to signpost where people can receive appropriate support.

Mendip District Council and Somerset County Council now have a single phone number **0300 790 6275** for anyone in Somerset who needs coronavirus-related advice and support from their councils. This line is manned every day by professional staff from 8am to 6pm. Working in partnership with all district councils and county councils, the government has sent a letter offering support to the most vulnerable members of our community. If you know of anyone in poor health, in isolation and in need of support, who has not received this letter, please alert the council.

The numbers above will not cover medical advice. People will need to continue to use the **111 NHS** online service and only ring the NHS helpline, **111**, if they can't get help online.

Volunteers have launched a new website: [www.coronavirusshepton.co.uk](http://www.coronavirusshepton.co.uk) where essential local services that include shopping, prescription delivery, dog walking or even just a friendly chat are available. The Shepton Mallet Coronavirus Support Group can be reached on **01749 200 200** at any time.

The Town Council is providing financial support, including a £2000 grant, to help the Coronavirus Support Group meet its running costs. We will be working in partnership with the County and District Councils to co-ordinate efforts to provide support for our citizens.

Due to the emergency, the government has changed the law to allow local democracy to continue to function using online technology. Via phone and videoconferencing, council meetings can now be conducted remotely. Members of the public will also be invited to join meetings. Details of how to take part in future scheduled meetings will be announced soon.

The normal work of the council continues. The Town Council has a small, dedicated team of officers, led by our Town Clerk. The staff are home-working, supporting and maintaining the services we provide.

The government still recommends that people take exercise once a day and our public park remains open for walks and jogging. We have a duty of care to make sure Collett Park stays safe: that the bins get emptied, that we check for sharps and broken glass and maintain an element of security.

This week I was extremely disappointed to hear that members of our ground care staff had been verbally abused while working for us in Collett Park. We cannot tolerate our staff being intimidated in any way. These incidents have been reported to the police.

One of the greatest worries throughout this emergency is the volume of misinformation on social media platforms. Only follow advice from trusted sources including local and national government and the NHS. Sharing malicious tittle-tattle can adversely affect people, especially causing distress to the vulnerable at this time of great uncertainty and isolation.

We should remember the BeKind Campaign that was founded by Lucy Alexander in 2017. She launched BeKind after her son, Felix, took his own life because he was abused online. Think how your actions might impact others, be it on the Internet or in person. Respect the hard working council staff, shop workers, NHS staff and all who are essential to get us through this crisis.

One of our great national treasures is our NHS. After the Second World War, the Labour government, led by Clement Attlee, launched the NHS at a time when our country was on its knees financially. During the lockdown, I'm hoping I'll get a chance to read "Citizen Clem" by John Bew to understand how the NHS was conceived and created.

If we follow the government's advice of staying home, only venturing out for essential shopping, exercise or work, we can slow the spread of this virus, and it will allow the NHS to cope.

"Stay Home, Protect the NHS, Save Lives"

**Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council**