

25th June, 2021



Chief Executive

West Berkshire Council
Council Offices
Market Street Newbury
Berkshire RG14 5LD

Our Ref: nc/rab

Your Ref:

Please ask for: Nick Carter

Direct Line: 01635 519101

e-mail: nick.carter@westberks.gov.uk

Good afternoon,

We had hoped that the next time we wrote to you we would have moved into Step 4 and seen the easing of most, perhaps even all, the remaining restrictions. As you will have heard, the increase in cases has caused the move to be paused until later next month if conditions allow it.

Certainly the signs are positive with the Prime Minister voicing his optimism ahead of the next review and with good progress being made here in West Berkshire. We can't shy away from an increase in cases recently and need to stay on top of the data to make sure we continue to do what's needed to keep the virus at bay. To add some context, however, we remain well below the national average, hospital admissions remain low, and the vaccination programme continues to go well. Vaccinations are now available to all adults and in the district with more than 78% having had at least one vaccination and more than half have had both doses.

The challenge now is to make it as easy as possible for those still waiting for their vaccinations to have them. Next week, a new Health on the Move bus, funded in part by the Council, will be in the area acting as a mobile vaccination centre for groups less able or willing to travel for their jab. It will be at Two Saints in Newbury with our homeless community in mind and in Lambourn to ensure that people working rurally in our racing community receive their vaccinations. These are for pre-booked appointments only, and we hope to open it up for drop-in appointments at more locations in the future.

Regular testing remains paramount while the vaccination programme continues. It will take time for everyone to have both doses and for full immunity to be reached so please continue with community and home testing for a while longer to keep yourself and others around you safe.

Now our focus is just as much on the future and our aspirations for a comprehensive and long-lasting recovery from the pandemic. The delay in the move to Step 4 means our support for the local economy is as important as ever. In the short term, our Welcome Back Fund will help smaller businesses to get back on their feet over the summer. Looking to the future, we are about to start the next phase of consultation on the future development of Newbury Town Centre.

Elsewhere there is more good news with our Holiday Food and Activities Programme on track for a bumper summer of support for those children who need it most. Open to pupils who receive Free School Meals, the programme provides a range of fun activities which provide enriching, physical and nutritional activities to promote wellbeing.

We ran a pilot programme during the Easter holidays and it was really well received. Such was its success that we've received additional funding from the Department for Education which will allow us to double our programme during the summer. There will now be 28 primary schools taking part and we have plans for community activities for children aged 12 and over too. Children receiving Free School Meals were amongst those most impacted during the pandemic so being able to provide these activities is something we're really pleased about.

Our recovery strategy sets out an aspiration to seize the positives from the pandemic and undoubtedly one of these has been the work of our voluntary and community groups. It has been remarkable what has been achieved and we want to do more to support the groups that support our communities as we come out of the pandemic. This week we've launched a survey for all voluntary and community groups, which builds on previous work we've done and seeks to find what support these groups would benefit from in the future. These voices will be important in helping shape what we do next to give the groups what they need to flourish in future years.

You can find out more about the voluntary and community sector survey and take part here: <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/voluntarysector>

Yours sincerely,



Lynne Doherty
Leader of the Council
lynne.doherty@westberks.gov.uk



Nick Carter
Chief Executive
nick.carter@westberks.gov.uk