

# Winchester City Councillor Report

## April 2020

### 1. Introduction

Winchester City Council's principle focus at the moment is on addressing issues arising from Coronavirus. As well as seeking to deliver the vast majority of its services as usual, it has been continually updating advice and guidance released from Government to offer the best support possible for residents and businesses across the District during the COVID-19 infection.

The definitive list of advice can be found on the Council's website at <https://www.winchester.gov.uk/covid19>.

### 2. Council Tax support and benefits

Council Tax is payable over ten months, with the first payment due this month. No payments are then due in the final two months. There is an option for those in financial hardship to apply to move the two payment free months to this and next month, dependent on individual circumstances. Anyone wishing to take advantage of this should contact the Revenues and Benefits team at the Council.

Similarly, council tenants having difficulty with rents should contact the Council at the earliest opportunity. The Government has introduced provisions relating to rent deferment whilst possession proceedings for non-payment of rent are not permitted at present.

Residents are also encouraged to sign up to benefits where available to provide some longer term security.

### 3. Shielding and community support

The Parish has received a separate update in relation to the arrangements for shielding which is the national system to support the 1.5 million most vulnerable citizens.

As part of the nationwide response, the Council and other districts in Hampshire have been working with the County Council to establish a new system to make sure that anyone who needs help because of the current 'lock down' can get through to someone who can help.

Anyone who needs assistance with problems arising from their self isolation or shielding at home should ring the County Council helpline on **0333 370 4000**. This is available from **9.00 am to 5.00 pm 7 days a week**. The County Council will decide who is best able to assist them via a triage process, and some may be referred to Winchester City Council if it is considered they are the appropriate agency to help them.

The Council has also prepared a list of community support groups and may refer calls onto them.

Residents needing help should continue to use local support where they have contacts. Otherwise, they should call the helpline number given above.

More information can be found on the Council's website at:

<https://www.winchester.gov.uk/get-help>

It should also be noted that the Council are continuing to offer urgent housing repairs for council tenants but are otherwise rescheduling repair and routine maintenance for them until later in the summer.

#### **4. Refuse collection and other waste issues**

Waste and recycling collections are continuing for now on their usual cycle. It may be necessary in due course to remove some aspects of the service. This may start with the removal of garden waste collection and residents are asked to consider composting as an alternative. Bulky waste collection has been paused for now.

The bin collection teams will be starting earlier than usual and so residents are advised to put bins out the night before.

Hampshire County Council has closed the waste depots across the county. There has been a concern that this may lead to more fly tipping, although there is little evidence of this as yet. However, Winchester City Council's fly tipping and prosecution work is continuing and is viewed as a priority during the lockdown. All incidents of fly tipping are being investigated, and dealt with as per the Council's normal regime, including a fixed fine or prosecution where there is any evidence. Residents are encouraged to continue to report any incidents of fly tipping so that the Council can investigate and address these - please do not assume someone else has reported it.

The grounds team are still working although as a result of absences they are having to prioritise keeping open spaces safe.

Pest control has been paused and the teams redeployed onto other areas.

#### **5. Bonfires**

Residents are actively encouraged not to have bonfires. Coronavirus is a respiratory illness and bonfires could well be unhelpful to those affected.

#### **6. Business support**

The Council's website (see link above) also includes a link to a detailed page covering support available to businesses. Letters have gone out to 2,700 businesses to ensure they are aware of business rate relief and business grant availability. £29m has been received from Government to cover the direct costs of these measures. Businesses are encouraged to make applications without delay.

## **7. Virtual meetings**

Most physical meetings across the District have now been cancelled or have been moved to virtual meetings. This includes meetings of parish councils and parish meetings. As we would now be in a purdah period due to the local elections, this has not proved too problematic to date, with the exception of planning meetings, which have been cancelled for April. However, this will become more of an issue as time passes, especially for meetings that are required to take place.

The Coronavirus Act 2020 provides for the Secretary of State to make regulations to allow deferment of some meetings and for virtual meetings to be convened where possible, for example via Skype, Zoom or Google Teams. The Council are currently reviewing the implications of this and more details will be available in due course, including advice on annual meetings.

## **8. Planning applications**

Planning applications can continue to be made and will be considered, both those dealt with by Winchester City Council and the South Downs National Park. As referred to above, Winchester City Council's planning meetings for April have been cancelled. The Council is considering in light of the new regulations how going forward meetings can be held, evidence considered and site visits take place.

## **9. Elections**

The Coronavirus Act 2020 has also postponed the elections due to take place this May. There was no election scheduled for Winchester City Council for the Upper Meon Valley ward (in which this parish is located) but other wards did have elections scheduled which have now been postponed. Similarly the election for the new Police and Crime Commissioner for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight has been postponed.

As a result of the postponement, those in elected posts that were up for election will continue in those posts for another year.

These elections will now occur next May, at the same time as the Hampshire County Council elections. Postponed elections will be for a term one year shorter than usual, to reflect the deferred year. Any by-elections which may arise in the meantime will also be deferred until next May.

## **10. Wickham Fair**

The 2020 Wickham Horse Fair has been cancelled due to the Coronavirus crisis. It was due to take place in May. However, following consultation between representatives from the event, the police, Hampshire County Council and Winchester City Council, the police have announced the cancellation of the event. It is hoped that the cancellation will prevent attendees travelling unnecessarily to the event.

It is expected that the event will return next year.

## **11. Eastleigh Plan**

The inspector has this month issued a report regarding areas of the Eastleigh Local Plan where she continues to have significant concerns and setting out options for taking matters forward.

Her report in particular identifies major problems with Options B and C, which are the two that most directly affect the Upper Meon Valley ward and in particular Upham and Owslebury parishes. In her assessment, she finds herself unable to conclude that Eastleigh's approach to the site selection represents a justified and evidence-based approach.

Her conclusion, which is to be welcomed, is that the plan either needs to be substantially modified or withdrawn.

## **12. Boomtown**

Music festivals occurring in May and June this year, such as the Isle of Wight Festival and Glastonbury, have generally been cancelled as a result of the ongoing Coronavirus situation. Various local festivals and events have similarly had to be cancelled.

Boomtown is due to take place in August this year. The organisers have announced a reduction in the maximum numbers of members of the public attending of 20% from last year's figure.

However, it is unclear whether in practice restrictions will have been lifted in sufficient time to allow site set-up to occur or for significant numbers to attend. The Council is working with the police and the organisers as to the best approach.

**Laurence Ruffell   Hugh Lumby**