

District Councillor report to Thame Town council November 2020

Cllrs David Bretherton, Kate Gregory & Pieter-Paul Barker

District Council services

For the time being, the majority of public-facing services are operating as normal. The best way for people to access SODC services now, throughout the lockdown and beyond, is via the new website, southoxon.gov.uk, which is also the best place to get the most up to date information on the pandemic and any impact it is having on services. SODC services not currently operating are:

- The offices on Milton Park remain closed to the public, as they have been since March.
- Gyms and leisure centres are closed to the public, for more information go to the Better UK website. - better.org.uk
- Most Community centres and halls to close except for a limited number of exempt activities
- Cornerstone Arts Centre remains closed to the public. Cornerstone is in use for elements of our Community Hub.

Business Grants

A more detailed update on the impact of the lockdown on businesses and what support grants will be available, will be given very soon. In the meantime, please continue to direct businesses that need help and guidance to svbs.co.uk

SODC has not received full details on the government's next business grant funding scheme yet, but do know that it will provide all councils with funding so grants worth up to £3,000 per month can be distributed to business premises forced to close due to the restrictions.

Businesses required to close in England due to local or national restrictions will be eligible for the following:

- For properties with a rateable value of £15,000 or under, grants of £1,334 per four weeks
- For properties with a rateable value of over £15,000 and below £51,000, grants of £2,000 per four weeks
- For properties with a rateable value of £51,000 or over grants of £3,000 per four weeks.

More detail will be provided on this as soon as the administration process has been confirmed.

Additional Restrictions Grant

The government has also announced that SODC will be receiving a pot of funding for discretionary business grants. SODC are currently in discussions on the best way to administer this scheme, which will be informed by some more government guidance expected soon.

Councillor Capital Grants

The Councillor Grants programme will open very shortly in line with previous rules. If you know of any organisation that could benefit from these capital project grants please let us know. The amount available will be up to £5K per councillor, which means up to £15K for a Thame project.

Black Lives Matter – motion

Cllrs Alexandrine Kantor (Wheatley) & Kate Gregory proposed a motion on Black Lives Matter which was passed, with the following resolution:

Council resolves to show leadership in the campaign to rid our district of bigotry and racism by creating a Diversity and Inclusion Strategy which will ensure that Council is inclusive to BaME and other diverse and hard to reach communities: in its staff recruitment, in its representation and in its service provision.

Changes to SODC Constitution

At the Council meeting on 8 October a number of changes were agreed to be made to the SODC constitution. Among them was the removal of the requirement for local members to stand down from the committee when discussing an app in their ward. This is already proving helpful in deciding applications at Committee but may also hinder members who also sit on town/parish planning committee.

SODC Local Plan

The consultation about the Inspector's proposed Main Modifications to the South Oxfordshire Local Plan has now closed. The responses received are with the Planning Inspector to review before finalising his examination report which will recommend whether the Local Plan is 'sound' or whether it can be made 'sound' with modifications. The Plan, which is still under a Direction from the Secretary of State, will be considered by Council in early December.

Government's proposed reforms to the planning system

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils have written separate letters to Robert Jenrick objecting to most of the Government's proposed reforms to the current planning system.

Planning Call-in

At the Council meeting on 8 October it was agreed to continue the reduced call-in process for Planning applications. That means that for MINOR applications where a planning officer's recommendation does not agree with that of a Town/Parish council the application will not be automatically referred to the Planning Committee.

A ward Councillor still has the right to "call-in" any application but is requested to carefully consider the planning reasons before doing so.

It was also agreed to remove the requirement for local members to stand down from the planning committee when discussing an application in their ward

Community groups

SODC needs the ongoing help of our incredible local community and voluntary groups to support our most vulnerable residents through the lockdown. They have all been contacted this week to explain the situation and let them know what help we would welcome from them and to let them know that the council are here to support them as well.

SODC are also advising community groups of details of the grants and funding streams available to them through the *Emergency Assistance Grants*.

Support for the "clinically extremely vulnerable"

The government is now using the term "clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV)" instead of "shielded" for people who are most at risk of dying or becoming seriously ill after contracting Covid-19. There is new guidance for people in this situation.

Most people who were on the old shielded list are now classified as CEV, but there are some exceptions. Some people have been added to this list who weren't on it before. SODC have approximately 9,500 residents classed as CEV – around 500 more than were on the final shielding list at the end of the first lockdown.

The government was sending them a letter last week asking what help they still need and to register for the help. This info is being sent to County Council and then to SODC. SODC will be making direct contact with all individuals by phone or e-mail and also writing to everyone (9,500) on their original list in case anyone has been missed.

The Community Hub process

We are publicising the Community Hub as much as we can to make sure those who need support will get it. If you know of anyone who may need help please ask them to contact the Community Hub. 01235 422600 or on-line communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk.

When the Government decided not to provide funding for free school meals during half-term recently, we worked with local schools to get food vouchers to families in need. Please direct people in need locally to Citizen's Advice who distribute the food vouchers on behalf of SODC.