



**WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **Councillors Covid-19 Outbreak Briefing**

6 April 2020

### **Service Update**

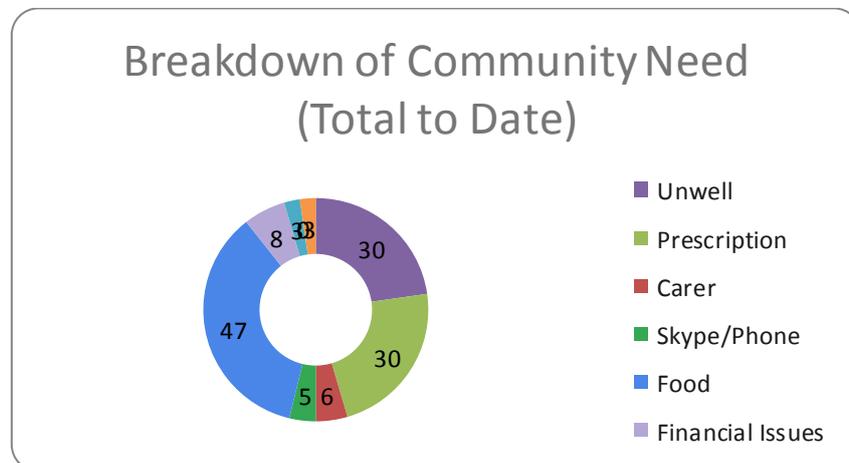
- **Resident Services:** Across Resident Services, there is 75% officer availability and the highest percentage of officers home-working since the crisis began.
- **Council Tax Support Hardship Payments:** Council Tax Support Hardship payment qualifiers have been identified (where we will be adding £150 to the 2020/21 Council Tax Support entitlement), which will provide support for 665 households, totalling £99,000
- **Customer Services:** Customer contact has levelled out since the last briefing, and resources are back to normal.
- **Waste:** 22 Ubico staff are self-isolating. The bulky waste service remains non-operational, but all other services are running.

### **Community support/resilience hub**

The local hub is now fully established and has been up and running for the past week, taking referral calls regarding extremely vulnerable (Shielded) individuals from the County Council seven days a week as well as from local residents.

We have a dedicated localities team lead by Heather McCulloch which is being passed complex cases to deal with, and works closely with partners across the voluntary sector to resolve these. Where possible all enquires are being dealt with by the call handlers and we have been building an information sheet that supports them to do this, which includes alternative on-line delivery options etc.

To date the local hub has received 55 calls from residents dealing with 132 different service needs as set out below:-



The local hub is also making outbound calls to all residents on the government shielded lists to verify their circumstances. For West Oxfordshire we now have some 528 residents on the extremely vulnerable (shielded) list.

As previously advised, the contact number for vulnerable residents needing support is 01993 861077 and we anticipate this will be open throughout the Easter weekend.

### **General Comment from the Chief Executive**

In response to the crisis the Council has made some significant changes to its operations, staffing deployment and management arrangements. A major new activity that is underway is our support to vulnerable people and to local communities working in partnership with towns and parishes and the voluntary sector. A new team had been set up to operate a call centre and respond to community needs 7 days a week with staff redeployed from other areas of Council work. Staff are also working hard to implement and pay the new Business Grants announced by Government.

Existing areas that have also needed redeployed staff due to the crisis include Customer Services and Communications. Within Publica as a whole 113 staff have currently been redeployed to new Covid 19 response roles, and this illustrates the scale of the transformation so far. Ubico has also responded to the challenges it faces to maintain vital services by juggling crews and staff around.

New management arrangements are in place to help the Council manage its response on this fast moving issue and these are linked to regular partnership arrangements with Publica partners, Oxfordshire partners and the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum.

### **Leader warns against complacency**

Councillor James Mills, Leader of the Council, issued a press statement on Friday urging residents to stick strictly to the Government's advice and stay at home in the coming days and weeks, with the peak of the coronavirus pandemic yet to come.

The full statement is available [here](#).

### **Stop loan sharks campaign and helpline**

This is a time of increased financial pressure for some people. Find out more at [www.stoploansharks.co.uk](http://www.stoploansharks.co.uk) and please share the helpline number 0300 555 2222.

### **Love thy neighbour**

With so many people abiding by Government instructions and staying at home, the Council has appealed to residents to be as considerate as possible as we continue to navigate our way through the Coronavirus situation. Read more at <https://news.westoxon.gov.uk/news/love-thy-neighbour>.

### **Grants and community support**

Support to Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations is emerging at local, regional and national levels. We are researching new sources of support and will update our information as further support is put in place. Oxfordshire County Council has issued a summary of current sources of support (included in [Annex A](#)). One of the more significant sources of funding is Oxfordshire Community Foundation's launch of a dedicated Coronavirus Resilience Fund to support organisations respond to Covid-19 and recover stronger – see: <https://oxfordshire.org/> The District Council has included a link to the new Oxfordshire Community Foundation Fund on our website. We have also agreed local funding (earmarked from the Government's Covid-19 funding) for pressing priorities in terms of support (of up to £500 funding) to help local organisations support their community through the challenges of

the Coronavirus pandemic where there is an immediate priority that needs urgent support. We will also look at further potential support drawn from our own grants budgets for less immediate funding requests. Enquiries relating to the need for Council support should be directed to our response team email at [response.hub@westoxon.gov.uk](mailto:response.hub@westoxon.gov.uk)

### **Council, Cabinet and Committee Meetings**

The Regulations which allow the holding of remote meetings were approved by the government last week, and came into force on Saturday.

The technical and other implications are being considered, as is the absolute necessity for any meetings in the near future, and more information will be available as soon as possible.

### **Ubico “Flash Briefing”**

The most recent update from Ubico was circulated on Friday 3 April.

### **Costs and Funding**

A number of Councillors have queried the financial impact of the current situation on the Council. The Chief Finance Officer has estimated that the impact of additional costs and lost income could be in the region of £1.7 million for the first three months of the response to Covid 19 and could be as high as £2.4 million over the course of the 2020/21 year.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will be issuing a data collection form to Chief Finance Officers this week to gather information about the financial pressures local authorities are experiencing as a result of the pandemic. This data collection is for planning purposes, in order to help MHCLG identify where the greatest pressures are likely to be going forward and inform its assessments of likely future costs.

This collection form will be re-issued on a monthly basis to gather more up-to-date information as the situation changes.

### **Financial Statements**

In light of the current situation and priorities, the government has announced extensions in deadlines so that the draft accounts will be due by 31 August and the audited financial statements by 30 November.

### **Public Access**

Our receptions/front desks remain closed, until further notice. We have procedures in place to assist any emergency cases but are guiding all other customers to our website and telephone lines whilst Coronavirus demands we protect our staff.

### **Business information**

The latest newsletter for business was circulated on Friday, including to all members of the Council.

The Government has produced an [FAQ document](#) covering some of the most common questions raised about the grant schemes.

The process for paying government grants is being tested today, and the business rates team remains confident of processing grants, where we have all the necessary information, by 10 April. Please encourage any eligible businesses that have not submitted their details to download the form from the Council’s website at <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/coronavirus-business> and return it as soon as possible, by email to [local.taxation@westoxon.gov.uk](mailto:local.taxation@westoxon.gov.uk).

Sport England has announced a £195 million package of emergency support to help clubs and community organisations cope with the short and long-term impact of the COVID-19 crisis. Details at <https://www.sportengland.org/news/195-million-package-help-sport-and-physical-activity-through-coronavirus>.

Please encourage any businesses you know to sign up for the newsletter we are producing for them [here](#) and check out all the latest information we have on the website [here](#).

### **Website information**

Our website and social media channels have all the latest information concerning how we are operating in the midst of this emergency situation. We encourage you to follow them and check the website regularly.

Website: [www.westoxon.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.westoxon.gov.uk/coronavirus)

Twitter: [@WODCNews](https://twitter.com/WODCNews)

Facebook: [@WestOxfordshire](https://www.facebook.com/WestOxfordshire)

Please note that the coronavirus webpage includes links to other pages of interest, including the [community support](#) page.

### **Other information**

The following links are also useful and recommended for periodic visits:

Oxfordshire County Council: <https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/coronavirus-information-from-the-government/>

NHS Advice: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

### **Town and Parish Councils**

The Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (OALC) is continuing to provide advice and guidance on matters specific to Town and Parish Councils; please see <https://www.oalc.org.uk/local-news> for news and updates provided.

The Regulations relating to remote meetings (as also referred to [above](#)) also apply to Town and Parish Councils, and OALC has published guidance produced by the National Association of Local Councils in the members' area of its website.

### **Contact reminder**

If you need to contact the council we have set up two ways for members of the District Council to do this, and using one of these will ensure your request is managed appropriately. Obviously we are dealing with a major global emergency so we will prioritise service requests.

Tel: 01993 861005

Email: [councillor.contact@westoxon.gov.uk](mailto:councillor.contact@westoxon.gov.uk)

# Sources of support available for Voluntary and Community Sector organisations during the response to COVID-19

Support to Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations is emerging at local, regional and national levels. As more information becomes available and further support is put in place, we will ensure this information is updated and published on our websites at [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk) and [www.cherwell.gov.uk](http://www.cherwell.gov.uk).

Current sources of support are listed below.

## Support and Advice to VCS organisations

- [Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action](#) (Oxfordshire's infrastructure support organisation) is providing support, advice and information for the VCS, including on how to access the schemes listed below.
- [Oxfordshireallin.org](http://Oxfordshireallin.org) contains advice and guidance for Community Support Groups responding to COVID-19.
- National guidance for the charity sector is available [here](#).
- Sector specific support includes:
  - [Oxfordshire Communities First](#)
  - [Oxfordshire Youth](#)
  - [Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils](#)

## Access to funding opportunities

- The Oxfordshire Community Foundation have launched a dedicated and significant Coronavirus Resilience Fund to support organisations respond to Covid-19 and recover stronger see: <https://oxfordshire.org/>
- The Thames Valley Police Property Act Fund is available to support organisations responding to COVID-19.
- National government support available to employers and organisations is often available to the VCS including the Small Business Grant Fund. A further national government support package is anticipated for the VCS although details have not yet been confirmed.
- There will national government support package, with no details yet confirmed. When these details are confirmed, they will be posted here.
- Other national providers have launched schemes including the Arts Council that has launched a £160 million Emergency Response Package.
- Local support may also be available, including from some town and parish councils.