

8<sup>th</sup> January 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](mailto:nick.carter@westberks.gov.uk)

Good afternoon

In any other year we would have started this first weeknote of 2021 by wishing you a Happy New Year.

This year it doesn't feel quite right, given that we once again find ourselves in lockdown and facing Covid restrictions for some time to come. However, we hope that you managed to have a restful time over Christmas and that you enter 2021 sharing our optimism for better times to come this year.

Although lockdown provides some short-term pain it does feel like we have turned the page and moved on to a new chapter in the fight against coronavirus. No doubt you will have seen the news about the start of the national vaccination programme following the approval of both the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines. It won't change things overnight but it will protect millions of people from the virus in the coming months.

Vaccinations are something we are often asked about, with residents looking to the council for information on their availability locally. Whilst we have an extensive public health remit, the vaccination programme is being delivered by the NHS.

They are working hard to roll-out the vaccinations – it is being done as quickly as possible and on an unimaginable scale. Vaccinations have started in the district and we understand residents are keen to find out what is happening in their area and when they can get their jab. We are likely to start receiving regular updates about vaccinations next week and we will share what we can with you. In the meantime, if you don't hear too much about the vaccinations don't assume the work is not happening – they are just very busy. The jabs are being prioritised with the over 80s and most vulnerable first, so please be patient and your GP's surgery will let you know when you are eligible for a vaccination.

This activity will allow us to move out of lockdown but the Prime Minister has indicated that this is unlikely to be until mid-February – and even then it will be a gradual return to normal. Lockdown can be hard in many different ways – feeling lonely, not being able to see loved ones and of course for many the challenge of juggling work with home schooling. Our schools, supported by our Education team, have been working incredibly hard over Christmas and into the new term to ensure disruption to education is kept to a minimum.

At first the focus was on keeping schools open, but as the new strain of Covid took hold they had no choice but to close. At short notice, schools have been busy letting parents know what is happening and putting in place online learning programmes. Colleges, primary and secondary schools will remain open only for vulnerable children, and the children of critical workers. We understand the challenges of families living, working and learning in close proximity, but these arrangements are for the best if we are to beat the virus.

Six weeks is a long time for young people to go without seeing their friends and we know there will be a temptation for some to ask what the harm is in meeting up. Young people may, generally speaking, suffer less severe effects from Covid-19, but they can still act as silent spreaders of the virus and we would ask parents to remind them of the importance of these latest lockdown restrictions.

It's a difficult time for everyone right now but here at the Council we are working hard to continue supporting our local communities. We are better prepared for it having gone through this before which means, for example, recycling centres remain open on a booking-only basis and the library service continuing to provide a limited operation. Shortly before Christmas we held an event to recognise the efforts of our employees through Covid-19 and it was great to end the year hearing about the achievements of our teams throughout Covid.

All this work continues of course, and yesterday was the first of this lockdown's Clap for Heroes event. This time around it has been broadened out to include not just carers but also all those community services which have played their part in the coronavirus response. If you were on your doorstep applauding last night we say thank you very much – we're sure our teams will appreciate the show of support.

Yours sincerely,



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



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