

SODC Councillors' Update

We would like to pay tribute to the many dedicated volunteers working with the Crowmarsh Covid-19 Response Group for their efforts to keep our community supported and cared for during these difficult times. It has been heartening to see the many small acts of kindness that have sustained our spirits and underlined how lucky we are to live alongside such thoughtful and selfless people.

According to the most recent statistics we have seen from the Community Hub being operated by the team at SODC, there has been a relatively small number of referrals to the Crowmarsh group, which indicates what a great job this local group is doing. The newly established community support network is working effectively. One of our desires is to ensure that this local mobilisation and neighbourliness isn't lost once the emergency subsides, and we will be working hard to see what the District Council can do to support such volunteer groups in the future.

Remember we have some of our allocations of £2000 from our annual Councillor Grant allowance to support Covid-19 support groups.

Council Operations

Many normal council-run operations are continuing to operate, including waste collections, taxi licensing (renewals only), payment of benefits and housing services. All known homeless people in the district have been housed safely. Bulk waste collections have now resumed, as has the doorstep collection of small electricals, linen, and batteries. We can also take on new brown bin customers again.

Safe cycling and walking

We were pleased to hear Grant Shapps announce wide-ranging legislative reform to enable local authorities to prepare for the easing of the lockdown restrictions by increasing facilities for walking and safe cycling. There is strong support across Oxfordshire for such measures and we will be pushing hard for the new arrangements to work for rural as well as urban communities. Our County Councillor, Mark Grey, is collating ideas to put into the mix with others from across the county.

Council Finances

SODC had been allocated an additional £1.4m in funding from the latest round of support from central Government, bringing the total awarded so far to £1.45m. While this is welcome, our officers have calculated that a full year's losses under the current circumstances would amount to £4m, which is a combination of the additional costs incurred plus the loss of income from services. The Government has recently withdrawn its previous commitment to recompense Councils for all lost income and has said it will only cover the costs of activities which they have requested. We can only wait to hear more on this from MHCLG, but in the meantime our finance team is providing regular feedback to them on how much the crisis is costing and how it is being spent.

The higher allocation in this latest tranche of funding emphasises the important role being played by District Councils in the current emergency; we are proud of the way SODC staff have stepped up to the challenge and responded to the new demands placed on them.