

Update on fighting coronavirus in Buckinghamshire



Dear Resident,

In one of my video updates at the end of last week we heard from Sarah Livadeas. She is Chief Executive of the Fremantle Trust, which runs a number of care homes in the county.

We all know our elderly residents are some of the most vulnerable at this time. They're more at risk from the virus itself and the impact it's having on normal life.

It was fantastic to hear from Sarah how care homes in Buckinghamshire are adapting and are keeping things going for residents in our 'new normal'. This includes everything from organising 'virtual visits' from loved ones using new technology, to keeping up activity and fitness classes remotely and even still having some of their regular entertainment using social distancing outdoors.

Some staff have even moved into care homes themselves to reduce their movement and therefore the risk of infection. It's such a challenging time for the care sector and I want to pay a huge tribute to all our care home staff and carers and, of course, our unpaid carers looking after loved ones. They are all carrying on in the most difficult of circumstances.

Please keep taking a look at [my daily video updates](#) – the guests are all making such a valuable contribution and are keeping us up to date with some great information and advice.

Our Adult Social Care team is checking in with all vulnerable residents we are aware of by making many regular phone calls and by supporting in other ways too. Please tell us if you know of someone who might need our help by calling the Adult Social Care team on 01296 383 204.

Please also carry on using our [online community hub](#) for details of local support and how to volunteer to help.

Keeping in touch with loved ones in hospital

I know life is especially hard for hospital patients and their families at the moment. Most visits can't happen because of the strict infection controls in place, but Buckinghamshire Healthcare

NHS Trust (which runs our hospitals in the county) has put lots of support mechanisms in place to help patients and their loved ones at this time.

They've set up 'virtual visits' and are helping patients connect with family and friends on their own phones or using hospital iPads. They've also set up a dedicated email address for anyone who wants to 'send a letter to a loved one' – bht.lettertoalovedone@nhs.net. And both the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) and the Chaplaincy service have been extended. The PALS service (call 01296 316 042 or email bht.pals@nhs.net) provides advice and information on the hospital trust's services for patients, carers and relatives, and the Chaplaincy team gives emotional and spiritual support to families and carers of patients in hospital. To make an appointment with this team contact Lindsay van Dijk, Lead Chaplain, by emailing lindsay.vandijk@nhs.net or calling: 07557 633 289.

Having a loved one in hospital is always hard and I do hope these extra measures provide some comfort to families and patients at this particularly difficult time.

Make sure you use mental health support services if you need to

The current emergency and lockdown will be impacting us all in different ways, and for some will be causing additional anxiety and distress for lots of different reasons. Life might be especially hard if you have an existing mental health issue – or you might feel your mental health is being impacted in a new way by these circumstances.

It's really important to keep in mind that **all our usual health support services are still running**, even if they're having to do things differently. If you have a health issue you would previously have called your GP about, please still do so; they are still there and are able to help. **This is the same for local mental health services.**

If you are feeling stressed, low, anxious or frustrated there are many ways to talk to someone. One such route is via 'Improving Access to Psychological Therapies' (IAPT) – free mental health support services provided by [Healthy Minds Bucks](#).

Here you can get quick access to talking therapies, support and advice. Healthy Minds Bucks has also updated its website to include a range of short videos and links to help you look after yourself and your loved ones during this very challenging time. **Please do take time to [take a look](#) if you're struggling.** These services are all still there for you – and you can self-refer if you need to.

Business grants – could your business qualify?

We have now paid out a massive £63.5 million in grants to Buckinghamshire small businesses and businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors to help them through the coronavirus crisis. I'm grateful to the team who've worked tirelessly to process what is approaching 5,000 applications in a very short space of time.

Buckinghamshire Council is processing the grants which are funded by the government and there are still grants available from this funding to local businesses who qualify. Please take a look at [the information about these grants on our website](#). The money is intended to help local businesses meet expenses when incomes are severely curtailed by this crisis. Please do check in case your business might qualify for this help.

School transport

I want to say a big thank you to our regular school transport providers who've adapted through this crisis to keep serving our communities where the need is greatest. During the current school closure period, our school transport providers are – at short notice – transporting children of key workers and our vulnerable children to school on a personalised basis where no other safe and reliable transport option is available.

They've also been taking staff from our adult care teams to and from work and have been transporting 'shielded' and vulnerable adults to medical appointments and care providers. I'm very grateful that they've gone to these efforts to help people make these essential journeys when they wouldn't otherwise have been able to.

#ProudofBucks

And while we cast a spotlight on the brilliant community effort across the county I must include our own Buckinghamshire Council staff. Many colleagues are splitting their time or are temporarily working in entirely new roles so that, as a council, we can keep our frontline services running plus direct resources at the current emergency.

Some examples of how Buckinghamshire Council staff have been redeployed include:

- working in our eight Local Support Hubs
- working directly in some of our local care homes
- working in the new 240-bed care and reablement facility we set up at Olympic Lodge
- supporting our Adult Social Care service by making individual phone calls to 1,200 of our most vulnerable residents
- co-ordinating supplies of food to vulnerable people and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to care and support staff who need it

These are just a few of the many examples of how we've re-prioritised our work and is one part of the wider **#ProudofBucks** effort going on across the county helping all of our communities through this crisis.

Please keep letting us know of other great stories of community spirit using the **#ProudofBucks** hashtag on social media (@BucksCouncil on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#))

Tell us about your VE Day plans

We already know we won't be marking this day as originally planned, but I know communities across Buckinghamshire are making alternative arrangements to celebrate the 75 years since VE Day on Friday 8 May. Obviously any ideas have to incorporate the up to date government guidance on social distancing, but this doesn't mean we can't still mark the day in style.

Whatever you have planned, from picnics in the garden to adorning your street in bunting, we'd love to hear about it. Please email VEDay@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.

STAY CONNECTED WITH OTHERS WHILE STAYING AT HOME

Maintaining healthy relationships with people you trust is important for your mental wellbeing. Think about how you can stay in touch with friends and family while you are staying at home – by phone, messaging, video calls or social media.

Lots of people are finding the current situation difficult, so staying in touch could help them too.



Finally

We have all come so far in the efforts we've made to stop the spread of the virus and to protect the NHS. Please, can I urge you all to keep up your amazing work. Keep the social distancing going and stay at home other than for essential journeys.

As ever, stay safe and stay well.

Martin Tett

Leader of Buckinghamshire Council

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