

COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT – June 2020

Dear Residents,

Please find a brief county council report. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me on the contact details below.

The face-to-face Annual Full Council meeting held last Thursday with only twenty one councillors present was abandoned due to a disagreement between the Leader of the Council, Kay Cutts and a member of the Ashfield Independents Group. The meeting has now been rearranged for next Thursday and will take place virtually, with all members of the County Council able to attend and to vote. The meeting is primarily to appoint the new chairman of the County Council and to seek agreement for the setting up of a new Covid-19 Resilience, Recovery and Renewal committee to review the Council's response to Covid-19, to develop policies to assist the renewal of the local economy and to again address the future of local government in Nottinghamshire. A few committee meetings are now being held online, but by no means all, and this makes it very difficult for opposition members to scrutinise decisions made by the ruling Conservatives and Mansfield Independent Group.

Local Authority staff are still working from home if possible and some staff have been redeployed to other roles within the Council e.g. youth workers are working within our children's homes as youth centres remain closed. The County Council is now looking at how to transition work spaces in office buildings and other locations towards readiness for potential re-occupation within government guidelines. It is expected that traditional office spaces will undergo significant change and that for many staff flexible and home working will continue to form a significant part of the working week well into the future.

The Government's Test and Trace Service is now up and running. Although it is very early days to judge the effectiveness of the system, it is reported that the system will not be working at full capacity for a good few months. The App that was supposed to be part of the national system has been beset by problems and the system has started without it. The latest data indicated nearly a hundred people in Nottinghamshire had tested positive and contacts had been traced for many of the infected people. Nottinghamshire has been asked, along with other upper tier authorities, to produce a local outbreak control plan as part of its public health responsibilities. This will describe the full range of arrangements which may need to be called on to control transmission of the virus and include planning for local outbreaks in schools and other local settings. The Government is providing £300 million to roll out these plans across the country.

As of 1st June there have been 1,415 confirmed Covid-19 cases in Nottinghamshire. This represents a rate of 171.9 cases per 100,000 residents. This compares to an average rate of 272.4 in England and 191.2 in the East Midlands.

On the 10th May Boris Johnson announced a phased return to primary schools starting with nursery, reception, Yr.1 and Yr.6 on 1st June. Prior to this the vast majority of schools have been open only to vulnerable pupils and children whose parents were both key workers. However, the number of primary schools taking in more children from the named year groups on 1st of June has been far short of government expectation. This is mainly due to the number of staff available for work and the building restrictions in individual schools. In order to comply with social distancing rules, health and safety regulations, pupils are being taught in “bubbles” or groups of eight pupils. This obviously restricts the number of pupils that can safely be taught within our local schools. Designing a safe learning environment for staff and pupils alike has been a logistical nightmare for head teachers and the risk assessments have run into fifty pages or more. Many parents and staff are understandably anxious about an increased number of pupils returning to school until a properly tested track and trace system is up and running effectively.

We are now moving into a different phase in this pandemic. It is to be hoped that the worst is behind us. Lockdown has been harder for some of us than others. For those who have lost loved ones, for those in abusive relationships, for those vulnerable and elderly living alone it has been hardest of all. Some things are slowly returning to normal, but I think we will all have to adapt to a “new normal” for a long time to come.

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