

Current Cases

There have been 1378 recorded cases in West Sussex according to the latest data from Public Health England. An infection rate of 160.4 per 100,000 residents.

Total care home deaths since early March are 1,185. I don't have exact figures but the average number of care home deaths across the county is around 50-60 per week, so an estimate of Covid19 related deaths in care homes for the period is circa 500. NB Covid related deaths does not necessarily imply that was the cause of death. Most of the excess was in the 4 weeks commencing 10th April, with 544 in that period.

There have been no Covid19 deaths in West Sussex for three weeks.

Track and Trace

West Sussex has been allocated £3.2M from HMG to support track and trace efforts across the county. It's unclear yet as to whether this funding will be sufficient to cover costs as it has been based on the Public Health Grants formula. I am seeking further clarity on this.

Finance

In common with others, the county council is facing unprecedented financial challenges from the Covid19 situation. The anticipated shortfall in the current financial year is circa £80 million. WSSC has received further funding support from HMG of £36M, which leaves a shortfall of £44M. However, this will be further impacted when the reconciliation of council tax takes place towards the end of the financial year. It is anticipated this will add a further £10M-£20M deficit.

The impact on business rate loss is unclear, however the county's liability is limited to £10.4M; thereafter the deficit in this area is govt funded.

Across the 39 county and unitary authorities, HMG has commissioned research which shows a potential funding gap anticipated to be £1.3 billion, rising to £2.6B in 21/22. The Treasury is now looking at what key areas need to be protected, we'll have to wait to see the outcome of that as we continue our work on mitigation. The legal requirement to set a balanced budget has not gone away! The three current priority actions are:

1. Review services – but we have found some new good ways of working that may positively impact finances
2. Continue to pressure HMG over funding
3. Consideration of council tax rise above 2% without need for public referendum

The government has been talking about councils using reserves to finance spending; however WSSC is already committed to significant expenditure from reserves to improve children's services and fire & rescue.

There can be no doubt that some extremely difficult decisions on services that residents value considerably are looming. Additionally, the capital programme is being reviewed. Ringfenced funding for projects will be protected but others will be problematic.

We must assume opposition parties will use these challenges to campaign vigorously against us and the outlook for county elections in May next year will be very difficult, given they will take place against that backdrop.

Education

Primary school attendance as of last Friday was up to around 33% of reception, year 1 and year 6 pupils and all West Sussex primary schools were open as of 15th June. There is a challenge as to how many pupils can attend, given the requirement to maintain social distancing. Sadly, there are some significant reports of parental abuse towards heads and council staff from parents whose children are not yet able to return.

Secondary schools have also returned. Locally Warden Park Secondary Academy has now re-opened. All Year 10 students are to have 'immersion' learning days for each of their core subjects on a rotational basis forming bubbles with their teachers and TAs. 15 is the maximum in each bubble, between now and the end of term each child is scheduled to have 2 immersion days for each of the core subjects. The school has been organised in a one-way system and each bubble starts and finishes at staggered times. Social distancing on school transport remains a challenge. All children, from each year, are being provided with on-line learning.

West Sussex Plan

A reset of the West Sussex Plan – what used to be known as the Corporate Plan - is taking place. Some of the key factors include:

- Budget resetting and financial resilience
- Continuing focus on improvements to children's services and fire & rescue
- Continuing improvements in more open governance
- Continuing the enabling of more independent living for elderly and vulnerable

More items allowed at recycling sites

From Monday 6 July, residents will be able to deposit more items at our Household Waste Recycling Sites. There are still restrictions on certain materials and social distancing rules apply.

'Select and Collect' service coming to Haywards Heath Library

From Monday July 6, West Sussex Library service is introducing a 'Select and Collect' service. People will be able to reserve specific titles in the usual way online or by phoning their local library.

Birth registrations open for 2,000 West Sussex babies born since lockdown

The Registration Service has restarted birth registration appointments at certain locations across the county, including Haywards Heath. They anticipate they will need to register in excess of 2,000 births in the coming months, as lockdown restrictions stalled all birth registrations from the end of March.

Pete Bradbury

West Sussex County Councillor