

## District Councillor Report (16/11/2020) – Matt Jennings

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Lockdown

**As you are all aware the key points are:** The public must stay at home, only leaving for specific reasons, including:

- For education. Nursery, school, college or university
- For work, if you **cannot** work from home
- For exercise and recreation outdoors, with your household, on your own, or with one person from another household
- For medical reasons, appointments and to escape injury or harm
- To shop for food and essentials
- To provide care for vulnerable people, or as a volunteer.
- Workplaces should stay open **where people can't** work from home.
- Single adult households can still form exclusive support bubbles with one other household, and children will still be able to move between homes if their parents are separated.

### Covid

#### SDC Covid Cases –

- Here in the Stratford District we are at around 168 per 100,000 – 1731 cases cumulative total
- Warwick District is around 265 per 100,000 – 2255 cases total
- Regrettably in SD we have had 176 coronavirus related deaths registered to 30<sup>th</sup> Oct whilst Warwick has had 97
- This could be linked to higher Student population in Warwick District

**Local Testing Site** – It has been agreed this is to be the Stratford Leisure Centre car park. This is subject to final testing of the site on 19 November, however, it is expected that construction of the facility will be undertaken on 21&22 November.

### Elizabeth House

In lockdown we will maintain as many services as possible. That said, it is clear that some services will have to cease for the duration of the lockdown, this includes the following:

- Main Reception – Elizabeth House.
- Visitor Information Centre (VIC)
- Shopmobility
- The leisure centres in Alcester, Shipston, Southam, Stratford and Studley

### Business Support

Stratford-on-Avon District Council will once again be administering the business support grants offered to local businesses that have to close during the second lockdown that started on Thursday 5 November.

Businesses that meet the criteria, which are required to close will now be able to receive grants worth up to £3,000 a month.

## Eligibility

To be eligible for the grant, the business would need to have been open as usual and providing in-person services to customers, but has been required to close due to the entirety of the second national lockdown.

## Payments

*Businesses required to close in England due to local or national restrictions will be eligible for the following:*

- i. *For properties with a rateable value of £15k or under, grants to be £1,334 per month, or £667 per two weeks;*
- ii. *For properties with a rateable value of between £15k-£51k grants to be £2,000 per month, or £1,000 per two weeks;*
- iii. *For properties with a rateable value of £51k or over grants to be £3,000 per month, or £1,500 per two weeks*

The Council has received £2.7m to allocate to businesses which have been forced to close during the national lockdown. We will be looking to make payments to those affected as soon as possible.

In addition the Council has received a further £2.6m to use as a discretionary scheme to support business who are not covered by the main scheme. This amount however is meant for the whole of 2020/21 and 21/22. We are currently working on proposals on how this fund could be best used.

## Other District News

**Affordable homes** – a record total of 491 new affordable homes were built in the district in the last (financial) year.

*Highlights of last year's affordable housing development programme include:*

- *Schemes built in **Bidford-on-Avon, Bishops Itchington, Brailes, Ettington, Great Alne, Long Itchington, Long Marston, Lower Quinton, Meon Vale, Napton-on-the-Hill, Newbold-on-Stour, Shipston-on-Stour, Southam, Stratford-upon-Avon, Stretton-on-Fosse, Tredington, Welford-on-Avon and Wellesbourne.***
- *The completion of community-led rural housing schemes on sites at: **Brailes; Great Alne** (using grant funding provided by the District Council); and **Stretton-on-Fosse.***
- *The completion of a specialised housing scheme at **Rosalind Court, Stratford-upon-Avon,** providing 102 apartments for older people.*

## Recycling

Stratford-on-Avon District Council's Cabinet approved proposals for a joint waste and recycling contract with Warwick District Council. A sign of our ever closer working relationship which should benefit the residents of both districts. The new contract, if agreed by Full Council, will commence in August 2022 some 21 months hence but it is essential that we start the process now.

Part of the new contract proposals includes the introduction of a joint 123+ services - moving to a 3-weekly collection of residual waste to encourage further recycling.

Our recycling rate at around 60% and Warwick District Council's of 55% are well ahead of the Government's target of 50% by this year. By moving to a 123+ approach with weekly food waste collections, two weekly recyclable waste collections and three weekly residual waste collections, we hope to build on the great efforts already made by our residents.

Benefits of the new collection model are :

- increased recycling levels,
- reduced levels of waste going to landfill,
- separate food waste collections,
- more efficient use of refuse vehicles and reduction in mileage travelled through smarter routing especially on the border between Warwick and Stratford districts.
- Fulfilling climate emergency promises and will support the ambition of both councils to achieve carbon-neutral status for their districts by 2030.

*The model will also see changes to the food waste collection by not entering the residual, recycling or green waste streams, instead the intention is for it to go to an anaerobic digester further removing harmful greenhouse gases from landfill. Food waste, in particular releases methane gas when decomposing and is up to 35 times worse than CO2 for our climate. This is a big step in reducing harmful greenhouse gases from our waste stream.*

*This proposal is good for the environment as well as mitigating the inevitable increase in gate fees and waste disposal costs when the current contract expires in July 2022.*

*Both Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon District Councils are committed to improving their services for the residents of South Warwickshire and are investigating joint working and shared services.*

*Management roles in ICT and Neighbourhood Services are already being shared across the two councils, as is the prospect of a joint Local Plan for our communities, to secure long-term benefits. Combining waste collection under one contract, is the next service to be proposed for joint working by both councils. The contracts for both councils finish around the same time, which presents an opportunity to review procuring a combined service across the whole of South Warwickshire, serving 126,000 households.*

## **Council Budgets**

We are now turning our minds to the Council Budget for 2021/22 and the Medium Term Financial Plan, which runs for five years from 2021/22. Even before the announcement of the lockdown the picture did not look good. We have established a cross party Council Recovery Advisory Group to ensure that we fully understand the position and that we appreciate the scale and nature of decisions that we will have to take. There is much detailed analysis work underway. The missing part of the equation at the moment is the level of funding that we will receive from central government and the scope we will have for raising council tax. Until we have that information, which we may not get until January then we will not know the scale of the actions we have to take.

Contributing to the uncertainty is the fact that increases in unemployment reduce the tax base, so, in the short term we will take a big hit from rapidly increasing unemployment across the District.

The reality of the situation is that we are down by over £4.25m and this figure is increasing – we will have to increase council tax by as much as we are allowed and we will probably still have to reduce services.

**Scam Alerts** – There are a number of scams reported including :

### **Bitcoin Investment Scam**

*Investors are warned to beware of bogus 'investment experts' operating via social media group sites providing investment advice on Bitcoin and other investments. Such 'experts' often claim they have fool proof 'systems' that enable them to beat the market. They may use fake graphs and charts to make it appear they are successful. Warwickshire residents have reported losing thousands of*

pounds after allowing these 'experts' to invest money on their behalf or after following their advice. It is unclear as to whether money was invested badly or simply stolen. Investors requiring financial advice on how and where to invest their money should speak an authorised individual or business.

- Use the Financial Conduct Authority website to obtain information on authorised individuals and businesses in your area: <https://register.fca.org.uk/s/>
- Beware of investment scams, visit: <https://www.fca.org.uk/scamsmart>

### **Back of the Van TV Seller Warning**

Warwickshire Trading Standards has received reports of individuals selling televisions from the backs of vans in car parks and at motorway service stations. Such individuals can sometimes be very pushy and intimidating. The products may be being sold at 'bargain' prices.

You can't tell a good trader from a bad one on the doorstep or in a car park! Trading Standards advises consumers not to buy TVs or other consumer goods if they are approached unexpectedly in a car park or on the doorstep. It's very hard for a consumer to locate a trader again in these circumstances, if the goods later turn out to be fake or faulty.

Trading Standards also understands that there are bogus traders selling TVs that have been taken from recycling centres before they are re-packaged in boxes and bubble wrap with fake labels.

Always buy from genuine traders you know and trust. This way, if something does go wrong you can find the trader and exercise your consumer rights. For more advice visit: <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/tradingstandards>

### **PPI Money Back Scam**

Warwickshire consumers have reported receiving scam phone calls from people claiming to have obtained PPI compensation for them. Some residents have reported making failed PPI claims in the past. The fraudster suggests that normally they would have to charge a 40% commission fee, but this could be circumvented if the consumer takes out a policy for life insurance or a funeral plan.

Trading Standards suspect that these callers are simply high pressure sales people trying to sell consumers financial products that they would not normally be interested in, with the bogus promise that they would receive PPI compensation. Residents are advised to put the phone down on bogus callers.

### **Bogus HMRC Callers Target the Self-Employed**

Fraudsters falsely claiming to work for HMRC are now targeting self-employed people in Warwickshire stating that they have been 'flagged for tax fraud and evasion' and that a 'warrant has been issued' for their arrest. They have been described as being very convincing. The callers are also spoofing HMRC telephone numbers to make them appear genuine. This is the latest in a long line of HMRC related scams. Always put the phone down and never reveal any personal or financial information under these circumstances. More on spoofing: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-telecoms-and-internet/advice-for-consumers/problems/tackling-nuisance-calls-and-messages/phone-spoof-scam>

### **Email Account Takeover Scam**

Email account takeover occurs when a fraudster gains access to a legitimate user's email account. They may do so by obtaining passwords and usernames from the dark web or via phishing scams. When this happens, fraudsters can send emails (posing as the legitimate user) to the users' friends

*and family in their email address book. These emails can appear very genuine because the fraudster can word them in the same way as the legitimate user would do.*

*This is a typical case: a person receives an email they believe is genuine (but has in fact been sent by a fraudster) asking them to purchase some gift cards on behalf of the email sender, as gifts for a relative. The email's recipient does so and is then asked to send the card numbers to the email sender (the fraudster). Fraudsters don't need to the physical cards to use them, only the card numbers.*

*Your email account is arguably the most vital online account you possess. Cyber criminals can use your email to access many of your personal accounts, leaving you vulnerable to identity theft.*

*Keep it safe and secure. Visit: <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/collection/top-tips-for-staying-secure-online/use-a-strong-and-separate-password-for-email>*

## **Bogus Sky Callers**

*Warwickshire residents are again receiving bogus calls from people falsely claiming to be Sky TV and stating that they must take out compulsory breakdown cover for their Sky box. Put the phone down. More on Sky related scams: <https://www.sky.com/help/articles/sky-scams>*

My advice is always – put the phone down – get an old bill out and use the contact details on this to get clarification.

**Online** - During lockdown if you are sitting at home with nothing to do :

**Site Allocation Plan** – This has started its 7 week public consultation on the preferred options version of the Site Allocation Plan. Should you wish to make comments on this please go online to the SDC website ([www.stratford.gov.uk/sappo](http://www.stratford.gov.uk/sappo))

Or

**Visit Venture House's website** – [www.venturehousestratford.co.uk](http://www.venturehousestratford.co.uk) - there are lots of free business seminars available !

**Online branding masterclass - how to get your message across** - Chamber of Commerce - 17 Nov

**Webinar - Productivity via time management** - Business Ready - 17 Nov

**Webinar - Coventry and Warwickshire redundancy support service** - 19 Nov

**Tech start up webinar - SEO for the novice** - CUE - 19 Nov

**Webinar - Developing great networking and negotiating skills** - CUE - 20 Nov

**Webinar - Creating your marketing strategy** - Business Ready - 24 Nov

**Start up workshop - Getting started with finances** - Chamber of Commerce - 25 Nov

**Webinar - Coventry and Warwickshire redundancy support service** - 26 Nov

**Tech start up webinar - How to survive a start up** - CUE 26 Nov

**Webinar - Winning and retaining customers** - Business Ready - 30 Nov