Report to Parishes

March 2021

COVID Update

The case rate in Dorset continues to fall, though we remain above the average for the South West and at the time of writing there are still 147 people in hospital in Dorset with Covid. Dorset saw more deaths from Covid in the first five weeks of 2021 than in the whole of 2020 and during February we passed the sad landmark of 1,000 Covid deaths in Dorset. All of which confirms that we still have a way to go and a tough few week ahead.

The significant spike in our area of Dorset in recent weeks was mainly, but not entirely, due to an outbreak at HMP Guys Marsh. I have been assured that there is no evidence that this poses increased risk to the wider community.

As community leaders you are asked to remind everyone that Lockdown regulations are still in place and it is too soon to relax our vigilance.

On the upside, the vaccination programme is going well with over 98% of our over 70's offered a vaccine and a good start on the over 65's underway. Dorset has apparently achieved the 3rd highest vaccine rollout rate in the country.

To avoid the risk of car sharing to attend vaccination appointments help and advice is now available, including help with taxi fares for those eligible. Information is available online or from the Dorset Together Helpline on 01305 221000.

Six mass testing sites, providing rapid tests, are up and running and take-up is growing.

The Mortality Support Facility, which I mentioned in my last report, was stood down at the end of February.

For Dorset Council this is still a Major Incident with staff still redeployed onto Covid related work such as delivering business grants. Planning is in hand for the Government's Road Map, starting with support for schools opening on 8th March. Details of the schools testing programme are online and the Council is expecting a very high rate of return once schools reopen.

Visitor Management Plan

Dorset Council and Dorset Police are anticipating a very high number of visitors to Dorset during the Spring and Summer. A "season like no other" as Matt Prosser, DC Chief Executive, has described it. This is good news for many businesses who depend on the tourism industry but will have implications for residents and for Dorset Council. Lessons have been taken from the experience last year and all the organisations are putting in place a *Visitor Management Plan* to ensure the best outcome for all.

Draft Local Plan Consultation

So far there have been about 19,000 visits to the Plan online with about 3,500 listens to the webcasts. There are just two weeks to get your views in if you haven't done it yet.

St Mary's School

This consultation runs till the 18th March and the response so far has been high, with some interesting suggestions for the future of the site from the public and local businesses. There is overwhelming support for the Council's preferred option of providing a school for children with SEND needs. A Report will go the Cabinet on 29th April.

Census

Residents across Dorset have received a post card telling them about National Census Day on 21 March. All households will receive a letter with a code to enable them to complete the census online. If people prefer a paper copy, they can request one by phone; details will be in the letter. Support teams will be available to help residents complete the form and after 21st March a Census Field Team will follow up households which have not completer the questionnaire.

Keeping in Touch

As always, there is a mass if useful information on the Dorset Council website. Council meetings, now all virtual, are live streamed and recorded for the general public to view and agendas and the Cabinet Forward Plan are published in accordance with the regulations. And I am always available to offer any further help and advice, on cllremma.parker@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk