

SODC ward councillor's report

Shiplake – 14th March 2022

Covid-19

Following the national pattern, Covid cases have fallen back.

At 06/03/2022, Oxford City was at a weekly rate of 490 per 100k population (it peaked at 1,504 on 6th Jan.). By comparison, Cherwell DC was 506 (peak was 18,826 on 3rd Jan.), West Oxon DC at 543 (peak was 1,565 on 3rd Jan.), **SODC at 540 (peak was 1,522 on 3rd Jan.)** and Vale of WH DC at 519 (peak was 1,565 on 3rd Jan.). Reading BC (to 6th March 2022) was at 434 (having peaked at 1,780 on 4th Jan.).

These levels are still higher than they were in November; by way of comparison at 4th November SODC was at 363 – now at 6th March at **540** weekly per 100k of population! That said, they are falling and incidences are mostly mild for those with boosted vaccinations and those with antibodies.

There are suggestions from WHO that the BA.2 variant of Omicron is some 30% more contagious than the main Omicron variant and is becoming more prevalent. More recently there have been suggestions of a “Deltacron” variant comprising elements of Delta and Omicron in France and the USA; however little is yet known about it. At national level there has been some suggestions of a modest uptick in cases after the ending of restrictions.

Boosters and vaccinations continue.

Whatever the rules may be, the advice must still be to proceed with caution and to protect the more vulnerable.

Car Parks

From 4th April SODC car parks will be chargeable from 8am – 6pm Monday-Saturday (10am – 5pm on Sunday) and car parking fees will increase to keep the overall car parking account at SODC in balance. (It has previously been in deficit and that deficit was forecast to grow without a correction.) Parking for up to one hour will remain free – thus continuing to support quick shopping trips and retailers.

Ukraine

SODC has expressed support for Ukraine and is preparing to support Government provision for refugees from that conflict. If residents would like to contribute to relief it is recommended that donations are made to the Disasters Emergency Committee online. The link is:-

https://www.dec.org.uk/?qclid=Cj0KCQjwz7uRBhDRARIsAFqjulkn5K11ryFs9xQQoLwvss231BEfxsmrv2t32MdCrEB83ZpefccWiYMaAjQAEALw_wcB

The Government (DLUHC) has suggested a scheme to contribute £350 per month to those who can accommodate refugees, but details are awaited.

Energy rebate

Council tax payers in bands A-D will receive a £150 energy rebate payment - funded by Government. For Direct Debit payers this will be paid to the relevant bank account. However for those paying by cheque or other means (less than 20% in SODC) there will need to be quite a lot of admin to determine how to pay the £150 concerned! Unfortunately the mechanics of the scheme have proven difficult after the initial idea and more guidance is being sought!

The scheme indicates that the £150 should be paid out and not simply deducted from Council Tax bills. Bill notifications will carry reference to the £150 rebate - as a note.

(There is also a discretionary rebate scheme for those in difficulty who have an E-H council tax band. Details are being gathered from Government. Finally energy providers will knock £200 off bills in 2022-23 and then add back £40 per annum for the succeeding 5 years. This scheme was designed in the hope that fuel prices would fall in the years ahead. However the Ukraine conflict now poses new challenges.)

Leigh Rawlins
District Councillor