

SODC ward councillor's report

Shiplake – 19th April 2021

Covid-19

Covid cases continue at a low level – even slightly down on my last report for March.

At 14/4, Oxford City was at a weekly rate of 34 per 100k population. By comparison, Cherwell DC was 25, West Oxon DC at 15, SODC at **18** and Vale of WH DC at 18. Reading BC (to 14th April) was at 25.

On 12th April, non-essential retail, community centres, pubs (outdoors only) and gyms re-opened in England. It is clear that cases in hospital are reducing - although of course there remains pressure – including from waiting lists for a range of other conditions.

The vaccine programme continues apace.

The national programme got all of the first 4 priority groups first dose done by mid-February (– being over 70s, clinically highly vulnerable people and healthcare plus social care staff - *around 15m people*) and the first dose for the next 5 groups (down to age 50 - *around 17m people*) by mid-April. All adults are expected to have a first dose by end July. The programme will continue with 2nd doses with the aim of reaching all (of age 16+) before the end of September. As noted above there may then need to be booster vaccinations for new strains and to maintain antibody levels.

As yet it is believed that having had a vaccination is not a guarantee against being infected by the virus or indeed against passing the virus to others – though it is expected to improve matters.

Increased testing is intended - including a plan to roll-out home testing. Separately testing centres are being opened with a view to improve tracking of the virus and with support from local councils. One of these is in at “The Beacon” centre in Wantage in Vale of White Horse; the priority being for public-facing workers and volunteers who are not displaying symptoms. People in these roles who cannot work from home and do not have access to workplace testing will be able to book a weekly test at the centre. Tests take only 15 minutes with results available within an hour. There is another testing centre in Osney Mead, Oxford. Around 1 in 3 people with Covid-19 have no symptoms but can still pass it on and so regular testing of public-facing workers will help to stop the spread of the virus.

SODC continues to administer the £500 payments for qualifying individuals who need to self-isolate.

Government have announced a Transportation Grant scheme to help with the costs borne by groups offering to get people to medical appointments or to Covid jabs, delivering medical supplies to individuals as needed and helping people get to supermarkets for essential shopping. These grants are being administered by SODC; deadline is the 14th May - contact:

grants@southandvale.gov.uk .

Government has also announced business “Restart grants” which are also to be administered by SODC. Businesses should sign up for the South and Vale business newsletter to get further details as they arrive:- www.SVBS.co.uk

Joint Plan (SODC and Vale of White Horse)

At its council meeting on 25th March SODC agreed to proceed with a Joint Local Plan – together with Vale of White Horse.

The form of Joint Local Plan is to be under section 28 of the **Planning** and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 – this requires both councils to approve the plan at key stages and thus gives reassurance and protects the interests of each party.

This would save costs and help officers undertake certain standard activities such as Sustainability Analysis and research on Habitats that are required processes. It could also lead to a joint planning policy book. Each council would still need to approve the Plan. Although governance details have yet to be arranged in detail, it is likely that each district would focus on sites in their own area.

Leisure Centres

Leisure centres and their operators have been hard hit by the pandemic – both by lockdown closures required by law and from social distancing costs and reduced visits when open.

At its council meeting on 25th March SODC agreed to a financial support package to GLL its contracted leisure centre operator, subject to formal agreements being concluded.

SODC's leisure centres have been making a phased re-opening from 12th April and opening hours can be found on-line.

SODC policy

At its council meeting on 25th March SODC agreed to work with its two Clinical Commissioning Groups to ensure that primary health care is expanded to meet the pressure of new homes and increasing population pressures. In particular to ensure delivery of new or expanded health centres as required and that funding (e.g. CIL) is accessed and deployed as intended to meet residents' needs.

It also agreed to

- press for leisure facilities to meet appropriate needs in all areas of the district and to work with developers with a view to ensuring delivery of these.
- support community wealth-building projects with local communities
- seek to support the retention of local pubs
- to recognise the neutrally diverse needs of residents
- and to offer to run a pilot for Universal Basic Income should government seek a local partner for a pilot.

Local Lottery

The local lottery continues to raise money – now in its 3rd year. It has raised £70k for good causes and awarded £15k in prizes.

Keep safe!

Leigh Rawlins

District Councillor