

ABINGDON TOWN COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY 28 JULY 2021

ITEM 7: REPORT OF THE TOWN CLERK

Covid-19 Pandemic – our response

General context

1. On 19 July England went to Step 4 of the government of the [Covid-19 response](#). This has meant the removal of most legal requirements in relation to social distancing. However the County Council has [significant powers](#) to impose local restrictions if required, these powers in place until 27 September.
2. With rapidly increasing case numbers vigilance is as important as ever. Much of the previous legislation will now have the status of voluntary guidance and we are concerned with the “mixed messaging” coming forward from government, which will impede the ability of organisations to implement control measures when the public are being advised that everything is now a matter of “personal responsibility.”
3. Latest government document detailing this may be accessed [here](#).

Our response

4. Our priority is the protection of the public using our services and the members and staff involved in managing and delivering these services. We will continue to consult and communicate on Covid-related matters.
5. Covid-19 is primarily transmitted through the air and so the wearing of face-coverings will continue to be mandated in indoor settings where social distancing cannot be achieved at meetings, in the office and the Museum. However there are practical problems in enforcing a mask mandate not required in law and which is opposed by some for ideological or other reasons. Whilst we know that the primary reason for wearing a face-covering is to protect others we are also concerned for the health and safety of our staff who may be exposed as a result of people not wearing face-coverings in indoor settings. Therefore higher grade non-ventilated FFP2 masks are available to front facing staff operating indoors. We also have disposable masks available for members of the public who may not have a mask on them. Our signage has been changed from requesting to requiring the wearing of a face-covering. Managers are monitoring any issues which may arise in relation to our mandate.
6. Whilst aware of their limitations we will increase CO2 monitoring of indoor spaces using the two monitors we have acquired to try and identify where airflow is poor and then address matters as necessary.
7. We will be responsive to changes in the situation and act quickly.

8. Councillors and staff are encouraged to obtain and take regular lateral flow tests, available from [NHS Test and Trace](#). If you are already receiving the free test kits you may now wish to note that it is thought that the government will start charging for these in either August or September.
9. Staff have been reminded to be vigilant for symptoms of Covid-19 and not to attend work if feeling unwell even if symptoms are not classic [Covid ones](#) – recent news reports are that user-submitted research has found that a headache and a sore throat have become more common symptoms. If staff are poorly with any cold-like symptoms then they are asked to stay at home. If Covid symptoms are being experienced then staff are advised to take a [PCR](#) test. We also require that staff self-isolate if contacted by NHS Track and Trace or are “pinged” by the App.
10. Whilst taking sensible precautions, Council services are running normally. The main changes made at Step 4 are:
 - The Museum is open to the public and the second floor gallery re-opens on 24 July.
 - The office and information centre are open to the public, Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm.
11. Residents are asking about events due to take place later in the year and it is planned that the autumn Fairs and Remembrance Day commemorations take place.

Infection statistics

12. Case numbers are increasing rapidly and it is likely that they will continue to do so through August. Laboratory confirmed cases in the Vale for the seven days to 17 July stood at 388 (6 July - 250), which is comparable with the levels reached in early January 2021. The national average is 400 (6 July - 298) and figures for Abingdon are: Audlett Drive & Farm Road 417 (6 July – 250), Northcourt & Peachcroft 438 (6 July – 270), South 549 (6 July – 137) and Town & West 498 (30 June – 241). It should be noted too that these case numbers were prior to the Stage 4 removal of restrictions.
13. The latest ONS survey estimated that about one in 75 people in England in the week to 17 July (previous week – one in 95), meaning approximately 741,700 persons were infected. This suggests that most cases are not detected and that for every person actually testing positive through a laboratory PCR test, there are nationally another 2.33 persons who are actually positive. If this ratio is applied to Abingdon, which had 166 cases identified by a PCR test this would mean a real number infected of 553.
14. Whilst it appears that the link between infection and serious illness has been disrupted by vaccination, the justification being used to relax controls, there is concern that if numbers rise to a very high level then this will lead to unsustainable pressure on the NHS, which is already under great pressure. It is therefore possible that government advice will change again over the next few weeks and restrictions may be re-introduced.
15. Members should also be aware that with the very high levels of infection there may well be disruption to some of our services should members of staff be required to self-isolate.

Nigel Warner
Town Clerk
23 July 2021