

Lighthorne Parish Council 13th October 2020 County Councillor's Report

The County Council has been extremely busy dealing with COVID-19 issues throughout Warwickshire. It appears that a second wave of Coronavirus is starting to rise. We must all follow the guidance given to us by the government.

Covid-19 Update

This has been a challenging week in terms of our Covid-19 response, not least because of the news last weekend of around 16,000 positive tests that had been missed from the statistics the previous week. An error in the national recording was found, with implications for every local authority, including Warwickshire. What we have seen this week is a day-on-day rapid escalation of our number of positive cases per 100,000 of population, taking account of our portion of the 16,000 cases.

Warwickshire's rate for the previous 7-day period is 72.67 positive cases, per 100,000 population. This number is changing all the time. The rates for our districts and boroughs vary, but there has been rapid escalation this week, with Rugby at its highest point of 89.04 cases at time of writing.

Compared to the wider West Midlands Region, we have a lower rate of positive cases, which is somewhat comforting. But this situation is very, very fluid and open to change in a matter of days.

We are taking this situation extremely seriously and have already begun to plan our response to this new phase of the Pandemic. We are expecting new national guidance on a 'traffic light' system to group local areas into three levels of restriction based upon a range of indicators including the numbers of 7-day positive tests. Our close neighbours in Solihull and Birmingham already have tighter restrictions, and Coventry may next week be in this position due to elevated case numbers. Inevitably this will lead to an increased duty on all of us to take extra care when moving around the Region. As is necessary, we are urging staff to take all possible safeguards against spreading the virus and to both limit their movements and avoid unnecessary journeys.

In terms of transmission within Warwickshire, our contact tracing work has found that household to household transmission is a key feature, where people are mixing with family and friends without adequate protective measures in place. Mixing in hospitality venues is also indicated, and young and working age people form the majority of positive cases.

Our communications messages continue to focus on doing the right thing for Warwickshire, reminding people about 'Hands–Space–Face' along with guidance on how to get a test – but with a stronger line on seeking a test **only** where people have symptoms.

Of course, we continue to work closely with our colleagues across the County, with District and Borough, Police and Health colleagues, to keep our residents as safe as we possibly can.

Working with the Universities is now an important aspect of our work, and we are working closely together to get across key messages to students to stick to the rules.

The Universities have been clear and forceful in their messaging and have stated very clearly, that flouting the rules will not be tolerated. In addition to the fines which can (and have been) issued by the Police, students risk the very real possibility of being excluded from their course of study. As parents and of course, corporate parents, we hope that those harsh consequences can be minimised.

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In many ways this feels like the toughest phase of the Pandemic. Not only are we continuing to battle the virus in response mode, we are also striving for recovery and running business as usual. Now, we are also trying to appeal to the social conscience at a time when we, and all residents are fatigued and frustrated. It is only through pulling together that we can carve a way to the light at the end of the tunnel.

Unitary Authority

I mentioned last month that Warwickshire County Council was to hold a full council meeting on 22nd September 2020 to debate the prospect of becoming a Unitary Authority. The meeting lasted a full day and the significant economic benefit was a feature of the debate.

The Options were:-

1. An enhanced two-tier model which would preserve the existing county council and five district and borough councils and optimise collaborations in areas of duplicated responsibility;
2. A single unitary council for Warwickshire which would see the creation of a new council, replacing the existing six, which would deliver all local government services; and
3. A two unitary model for Warwickshire which would see the creation of two new unitary councils (a North and a South) each taking responsibility for the delivery of all local authority services within their respective areas.

There was clear political support for Option 2. This decision has been forwarded to the Minister as the preferred Option for proceeding. When we receive confirmation from the Local Government Minister WCC will commence communication with interested parties. It is anticipated that this information will be provided by the government before Christmas.

Proposed Changes to Planning Policy

The current basic Planning Policy was established in 1947 and remained unchanged until a few years ago. The last changes reduced the number of regulations from 200 pages to 80 pages. Currently, the government wishes to increase new housing in the country. However, there are currently 100,000 new houses having planning permission that have yet to be built. The increase in housing will require revamping of most authorities Local Plans and greater emphasis on infrastructure so that extra appropriate housing can be built. Warwickshire consultation is currently taking place to be submitted to central government when completed.

Cllr Chris Williams
Member for Kineton and Red Horse Division
11.10.2020