

COVID-19 UPDATE – Wednesday 25 March

Good afternoon

I am writing to provide you with the latest update regarding COVID-19.

Following Monday evening's statement by the Prime Minister about the delivery of mandated measures to keep people at home and away from others [available here](#), we are working at pace as a council to manage the impact on our services and in our comprehensive support of our communities.

We have assessed the impact of the Government's decision to close additional businesses, premises and public spaces ([available online via this link](#)) and the requirement to cancel public gatherings including weddings and limit other activities such as the registration of births and deaths and delivery of funerals.

As of this morning (Wednesday 25 March) the following council services have been suspended until further notice, or are operating a reduced service:

Face to face

Following Government guidance to help reduce the spread of COVID19, Wiltshire Council hubs are only offering the following essential face-to-face services in Trowbridge, Chippenham and Salisbury:

- Support for the homeless
- Adult social care
- Children's social care
- Support for vulnerable people

People needing assistance with Benefits can call 0300 456 0110 or email benefits@wiltshire.gov.uk. We will accept documents by email.

People can also visit our website www.wiltshire.gov.uk for more information or contact Customer Services on 0300 456 0100

All registration services except death registration appointments are currently suspended. Appointments can be made for our Chippenham, Timber Street, Salisbury, Bourne Hill and Trowbridge, County Hall offices only by calling 0300 003 4569.

Vulnerable people and those requesting housing assistance should call west 01225 718005, north 01249 706666, or south 01722 434233, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm; or email homeless@wiltshire.gov.uk; people needing assistance with benefits should call 0300 456 0110.

Markets

All indoor and outdoor markets have been cancelled until further notice. The only exception is food stalls, which are making their own decisions on whether to trade.

Parks/open spaces

All Wiltshire play areas and outdoor gyms are closed until further notice.

Open spaces, such as country parks, will remain open.

HRCs and waste

All household recycling centres are now closed until further notice.

This temporary suspension will remain under review and we will work to re-open these facilities as soon as it is reasonable to do so. Residents are reminded not to dump waste – fly-tipping is illegal. Neither should householders use an unlicensed waste carrier to collect and dispose of their waste during this period of service suspension. We are encouraging residents, where possible, to store the waste they wish to take to the household recycling centre until such time as the sites reopen.

For more information about licensed waste carriers, see: <https://environment.data.gov.uk/public-register/view/search-waste-carriers-brokers>

Our waste and recycling collections services are currently operating as normal.

These service updates join the many other council services that are affected by COVID-19. For more information on affected services, please visit our [COVID-19 Webpage](#).

Wiltshire Council teams are actively deploying their Business Continuity Plans to minimise disruption wherever possible. As I've mentioned before, the council's priority is to maintain the delivery of key services to protect the health and wellbeing of Wiltshire communities. To this end, we have published a six-point action plan which covers the main themes of:

1. Keeping our council services going
2. Providing support to our communities
3. Delivering our public health role
4. Targeting efforts on those who will be most at risk if they contract COVID-19
5. Targeting support of other vulnerable groups
6. Support for schools, businesses and other institutions

For further information about the action plan please [Click here](#).

With regards to other areas:

Council decision making

As you know the Cabinet meeting was held yesterday (Tuesday 25 March 2020) with the numbers attending kept to a minimum to ensure it was quorate and compliant with government guidance on social distancing. Those who could not attend were able to take part in the meeting via skype or watch the proceedings via webcast. However we were not entirely happy with the technology involved in yesterday's meeting and our teams are working to make improvements.

The Monitoring Officer sent out a [Briefing Note](#) yesterday to all members and town and parish councils about how decisions will be made under the current circumstances. Changing government guidance regarding isolation and social distancing means that the normal practical procedures for making decisions and facilitating engagement on them (such as through public meetings) have to be put on hold for the interim. The council is therefore considering and implementing practicable alternatives that will maintain robust and, as much as possible, open and transparent governance whilst allowing councillors and senior officers to make effective decisions quickly that support our communities and protect the vulnerable.

Councillors will be kept informed of developments and this guidance will be updated as necessary in consultation with Group Leaders and the Constitution Focus Group as appropriate. Should you have any queries or concerns regarding these matters please contact:

Libby Johnstone, Democratic Governance Manager,
libby.johnstone@wiltshire.gov.uk, (01225) 718214, or Henry Powell, Scrutiny Lead,
henry.powell@wiltshire.gov.uk, (01225) 718052.

Wiltshire communities

The communities of Wiltshire have risen to the challenge of COVID-19 to make sure people are supported through this very difficult time. The council has collated all the community group support identified to date and produced the following [directory](#) which will be published shortly alongside a community pack. The directory is not an endorsement of the groups listed but provides known offers of support at this time.

The council wants to ensure that everybody can access the support they need. We will be providing assistance if a group cannot help, or individuals do not get a response within the required timeframe.

Schools

We worked closely with our schools over the weekend to co-ordinate efforts to ensure our schools opened from Monday (23 March) for children of critical workers and our most vulnerable pupils.

A total of 225 schools opened for pupils on Monday and those schools which didn't open were able to place their pupils at different school sites. Thanks to our hardworking school teams and schools who made this possible, many headteachers worked through the weekend to ensure they were open to receive pupils. Our special schools will be aiming to open for some of their students later this week.

We are now providing a regular newsletter to schools and our early years settings providing the latest information and guidance so we can all keep updated with the latest news.

Rights of way & countryside volunteering

Wiltshire Council has cancelled all countryside/rights of way group and volunteer tasks until further notice. We have also postponed all training, meetings and events until further notice to protect the health and wellbeing of volunteers.

Volunteers are encouraged to keep in contact with Rights of Way & Countryside Team who will update them when the situation changes. The team looks forward to when things return to normal, and would like to thank Wiltshire's volunteer groups for their support and dedication to the county's countryside and rights of way network. Thank you for your continued understanding and support during this unprecedented time.

Regards

Cllr Philip Whitehead