

200420 Cranborne & Alderholt Ward Dorset Councillor Report for Alderholt Parish Council

The current Coronavirus pandemic has cut through almost all of the normal business of Dorset Council, and my first thoughts go to those who have lost family and loved friends to this terrible illness.

It has cut a swathe through the Council's normal business, changing the way we have been able to work, changing priorities, and making the Council find new ways of trying to support all of our residents.

One of the most important of our new priorities is to help distribute much needed PPE kit to our own frontline workers as well the Police, the Fire Service, and Prisons, as well as Care Homes and Children's Centres. We have been working closely with BCP Council to enable a coherent County wide response. As part of this a Dorset wide PPE Cell has been established, led by the MOD to ensure that this kit is shared with those in most need.

One of the biggest changes to the way we can work is that we now have 2,500 staff working from home – a massive effort in terms of deploying technology and learning new ways of communicating. The Council has been developing its use of Microsoft Teams, and Councillors have also been involved in making this work – I have been working as part of the Council's IT Mentors Group assisting colleagues on the Council to make best use of the technology available. The

The Council is continuing work on the "Blueprint for Change" within Children's Services, following the problems highlighted in previous Ofsted inspections, including around SEND, child exploitation and wider children's services. All highlighted the need for improvement. We are a new council with new leadership and must transform the way we work, so we can improve for our families and manage our resources better. Even under lockdown staff working from home are co-ordinating efforts with Unions and Schools.

The Council is also taking a lead in providing half-way accommodation for people discharged from hospital but who are not fully able to look after themselves at home – freeing up much needed hospital beds that would otherwise be unavailable. Currently 31 beds are available in an hotel in Weymouth and more beds will be coming on stream soon. There is an option available to use an hotel in the east of the County should it be required, and the Council is keeping that under constant review.

As of 2pm on Wednesday 8th April a total of 525 grants and £6m has been paid to businesses – the mathematically minded will equate this to around £11,400 each - across Dorset – However there are another 4,000 registrants to be processed, and the Council hopes to get the majority of these worked through and paid out this week.

Work is also in progress to look at recovery post-pandemic. A recovery Cell has been created and is being led jointly by Dorset Council and BCP. It will consider how we can make the best recovery for our local economy, the welfare of all of our residents and employees, and what lessons can be taken for the future – to take advantage the relationships that have been forged in this crisis.