**From:** Communications
**Sent:** 08 January 2021 15:01
**To:** Communications
**Subject:** town and parish councils update

Dear Town and Parish Councillors,

Happy New Year and welcome to your first update of 2021. Needless to say, it’s a busy one with the new [national lockdown](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus) for England.

Most of our council services are currently still running, although our leisure centres remain closed and garden waste collections have also been suspended for the next two weeks – more details on that below. While our front-line services aren’t currently too badly affected, dedicating staff to the pandemic response and supporting our health partners will likely mean we have to ensure our resources are focused on our business-critical services first. We’ll keep you up to date on if this has any impact on our front-line services during what is once again a fast-changing situation.

**Rising Covid-19 rates in the Vale**

Covid-19 cases continue to rise in Oxfordshire with a total of 3,202 cases reported in the Vale up until 7 January, with 92 new daily cases yesterday.

The figures below taken from the Government’s [coronavirus dashboard](https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/cases) are the number of new cases per 100,000 people in the seven days up to and including 3 January, with the week before shown in brackets for comparison. The breakdown of the figures by local authority area is:

The breakdown of the figures by local authority area is:

* Oxford - 551.6 (up from 356.2)
* Cherwell - 947.5 (up from 512.9)
* Vale of White Horse - 444.8 (up from 298.5)
* South Oxfordshire - 563.2 (up from 352.7)
* West Oxfordshire - 459.1 (up from 258.5)

For comparison, the figure for England is **619.1** (up from 429.2).

Oxfordshire County Council has an [interactive dashboard](https://phdashboard.oxfordshire.gov.uk/) showing the latest covid-19 figures for the county and [the Vale](https://phdashboard.oxfordshire.gov.uk/?view=cases&location=Vale+of+White+Horse), and graphs like the one below showing the steep rise in cases, largely down to the new more transmissible strain of the virus.

We’re amplifying the government’s ‘stay at home’ message through our usual channels and sharing their more recent messaging around this being a different, more transmissible virus.

Do feel free to retweet/share our social media posts on this with the ‘stay at home - protect the NHS - save lives’ message. We appreciate your support in getting these vital messages out.

**Support for residents**

Thanks once again for all you’re doing to support our efforts to make sure the most vulnerable members of our communities get the support they need through lockdown. Our Community Hub continues to be available to help people access support and essentials during the lockdown if they have nobody else to turn to. With the shielding programme restarting, we’re expecting to see an increase in the amount of support the hub will need to provide.

The message we’re pushing is if anybody thinks they’ll be in need of support, not to wait until they’ve run out of supplies before getting in touch.

Please do continue to encourage people to contact the Hub if they need support.

Anyone who needs support can fill in an online form at: [whitehorsedc.gov.uk/communityhub](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/communityhub)

Or email communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk or call 01235 422600.

We opened the Hub between Christmas and New Year following the move to Tier 4 on Boxing Day. During that time, we received seven calls that needed referring and we delivered four food parcels. All the residents supported were very grateful that the hub was open and that the team were on hand to offer them immediate relief.

This week the pace has picked up following the lockdown announcement – we made 14 referrals on Monday and by which time 60 people had already requested help through the National Shielding Service system, mainly for supermarket slots which is managed by central government. We will be contacting all of those people to ensure their needs are met.

The Community Hub is not the only support we’re providing to residents – Housing Needs have also seen an increase in people needing their support during the pandemic if they’re at risk of being made homeless or sleeping rough – for more details visit [whitehorsedc.gov.uk/housing](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/housing).

We’re also making sure everyone is aware that support is available to residents who are experiencing financial difficulties – to find out more please visit [whitehorsedc.gov.uk/benefits](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/benefits).

**Business support**

We know that this is a particularly hard time for many businesses. Our Business Support team will continue to support businesses over the coming months that have been affected by the restrictions and will provide advice about new grant funding as soon as it comes available locally.

Each time the government announces a new grant it can take some time for them to provide us with the specific details we need before we can open the scheme for applications.  We are doing our best to open the applications as quickly as possible and appreciate people’s patience while we wait for this information to reach us.

We urge businesses to visit our business support website at [www.svbs.co.uk](https://www.svbs.co.uk/) to find out more about the various support and grants available, and [sign up to the mailing list](http://www.svbs.co.uk/), if they haven’t already done so, to receive notifications about the grant funding.

**South and Vale Covid-19 response councillor grant scheme - still open for applications**

Are you directly helping your local community with their Covid-19 response?

Every Councillor has up to £2,000 to make discretionary grants to community groups and other appropriate organisations delivering community initiatives aimed at stopping the spread of the virus, protecting residents and supporting people’s wellbeing, particularly working with vulnerable residents.

Please contact your district councillor directly or email grants@southandvale.gov.uk to check if they still have any budget remaining and whether your project is eligible under this scheme. You can find the information about your district councillor on our website [here](http://democratic.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?bcr=1). If you’ve already received a Covid-19 grant from your councillor, you may still be able to apply again with a different project or to extend the work that your original grant supported.

Examples of projects include:

* Supporting the delivery of food and/or medication
* Offering an online or telephone befriending service to the elderly / people in social isolation
* Measures to open-up community facilities such as village halls, day centres, local sporting clubs, and playgrounds in a Covid-19 safe way
* Initiatives combatting loneliness and isolation, including volunteer driving schemes

**Garden waste collections suspended**

Our garden waste service is usually suspended over Christmas and New Year to allow crews to concentrate on household waste collections. Unfortunately, low staffing levels at this time due to Covid-19 has meant the suspension of the garden waste service must continue until further notice. We are also not taking on new garden waste customers at this time.

We are sorry for any inconvenience this will cause, particularly for customers who wished to use the service to remove their Christmas trees. However, there are collection points available where all residents can drop off their real Christmas trees for recycling. The details are [on these pages](https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/recycling-rubbish-and-waste/christmaswaste/christmas-tree-collections/). The county council’s Household Waste Recycling Centres are open and also accept garden waste. [Details of opening times are on their website here](https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/environment-and-planning/waste-and-recycling/household-waste/household-waste-recycling-centres/visiting-recycling-centres).

We will update you when we have more information about the reinstatement of the service.

**Renewal applications for taxi drivers**

In view of the current situation with Covid-19, the licensing team are prioritising renewal applications for taxi drivers and will not be conducting new driver licence appointments and knowledge tests until further notice.  All drivers who had appointments have been contacted and their applications will be processed remotely where possible.

**Census 2021 needs your help**

Your help is needed with the Census 2021 - households across Oxfordshire will be asked by the Office of National Statistics to take part in the survey of England and Wales this spring. If you haven’t done so already, please [**complete this simple survey for town and parish councils in the Vale**](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfPVCpq9L1mXUXzWzzJCNBTTNIRTdTQERxqyRvW7xMkodckHQ/viewform)to inform the Census team about your local needs and resources.

The information from the survey willhelp the Census organisers understand your communities and key groups that may need support so alternative or adjusted arrangements can be made, as well as identifying any local resources that could be used to help.

This year the Census will be “digital first”. All households will receive a letter in early March with a unique access code, allowing them to complete the questionnaire on 21 March on their computers, phones or tablets. For some residents, this will make things easier, but we understand that for others it could be challenging and so there is a paper option for people unable to do it online.

The Insight and Policy team are the link for the councils so you can email the team at insightandpolicy@southandvale.gov.uk if you have any questions.

Communications

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils

01235 422400

[www.southoxon.gov.uk](https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/) | [@southoxon](http://twitter.com/southoxon)

[www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk](https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/) | [@whitehorsedc](http://twitter.com/whitehorsedc)