

Funding for Frontline Charities

Last Wednesday the 8th April 2020, saw Chancellor Rishi Sunak announce that frontline charities across the UK will receive a £750 million package of direct cash grants. As part of a UK-wide package of support, £360 million will be allocated by government departments to charities providing key services and supporting vulnerable people during the crisis. The aim is for charities to receive money in the coming weeks.

As well as this, £370 million of funding will be made available to support smaller charities at the heart of local communities which are making a big difference during the COVID-19 outbreak, including those delivering food, essential medicines and providing financial advice. The application system for the National Lottery Community Fund grant pot is expected to be operational in the next couple of weeks.

At a Kent level we have already sought to support the voluntary and community sector and have contributed £200K to a new *Coronavirus Emergency Fund* set up by the Kent Community Foundation (KCF) to support charities in Kent and Medway. We have recently agreed with KCF for emergency bridging loans to be available as part of their social lending programme. Loans of up to £60,000 are available and, in exceptional cases, may be increased to £100,000. These loans will be funded from our original donation to the Big Society Fund, now the Kent Social Enterprise Fund.

I hope that charities in Kent will benefit from this funding and that the money will help support the work being delivered by District hubs helped by the Kent Together helpline. As at 5pm Thursday the 9th April 2020, the helpline had dealt with 1,279 people in its first week and processed 2,129 different requests for help. There was clearly a need and I am sure the need will grow as Covid-19 retains its grip on our lives.

I have been reflecting on how much has changed since mid March. There are now more than 1000 confirmed cases in Kent. Our working and personal lives have been thoroughly disrupted. We know more about PPE than we ever imagined we would need to and have read more government guidance than perhaps we would have wanted to. Some services have had to close and there have been real challenges for us all. But the spirit and determination shown by our KCC staff has been inspiring. We have never worked closer or more successfully with our partners and providers and I am pleased that our reasoned arguments have met with a measure of success in influencing colleagues in government to accede to our requests.

I hope you have a Happy Easter. We may be lucky enough to have some good weather over the break. It feels strange, as it did last weekend, to be sending a message to our residents to stay away from our parks and beaches and stay at home, but if we are going to beat this virus and reduce the massive workload of the NHS staff currently, by staying at home, not congregating in social groups then there is a high chance the virus can be prevented from spreading amongst us, overwhelming our hospitals and thus increasing the lock down duration. So stay safe.

Geoffrey Lymer
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