



Mid-Test Matters

Issue 10

1st May 2020

A newsletter for Parish Councils from the Borough Councillors of the Mid-Test Ward

In this time of great uncertainty and concern Parish Councils have provided invaluable service particularly by creating support networks to cover every household in Mid Test and in many cases getting out and about the parishes distributing goods and making sure the most vulnerable have everything they need. These networks will prove invaluable going forward when Pandemics become part of all local Resilience Plans. The contact details of these networks have been fed into the Unity Borough wide data base. As you might have seen, the Borough Council has taken out adverts in the Andover and Romsey Advertisers to promote the contact details of the local Covid19 support groups, operating in the Borough. This is part of a campaign to ensure that the most vulnerable in our communities are aware of what local support is available. This group of people is least likely to find out information on social media. As a result, we are using a variety of “traditional” techniques such as newspaper adverts, leaflet drops, letters and radio adverts to promote the message of where they can find help. The full list of groups can be found on this link:

<http://www.unityonline.org.uk/coronavirus-support-groups/>

Unity are doing excellent work by operating a hot line backed up by volunteers to support anyone in the Borough not covered by the Parish Councils local groups.

A few Parish Councils like Stockbridge and Longstock are operating virtual meetings with Zoom which we have been able to attend – they are very successful and we would encourage as many as possible to adopt this approach. Many Parish Councils have also availed themselves of the TVBC Covid-19 Community Grant Scheme. Over £17,000 has been paid out already but there is still some funds left in the budget if anyone has a need. We have a full list of all the grants awarded so far if anyone would like a copy please contact us.

Lodden Test Grants

This EU based fund still has money left in its pot and was a fund we used to get £25,000 for the King's Somborne Community Hall & Preschool project and if anyone in Mid Test was interested in applying, we can certainly pass on our experience.

The Lodden Test & Test LEADER programme is still open to receive expressions of interest from businesses in central Test Valley **as long as the monies can be spent** by the end of the year. The fund pays 40% towards eligible capital projects e.g. construction, equipment etc. Once an expression of interest has been agreed a full application will need to be worked up supported by the programme manager. To date dozens of Test Valley businesses have received more than half a million pounds from this fund.

Main features include:

- Grants from £2,500
- £1.3 million to invest
- Supporting forestry, tourism, business, farming, cultural and heritage activity
- Leading advocate for community led local development
- Creating jobs for rural populations
- Supporting the rural economy

Please go to <https://www.ruralfunding.co.uk/> for more information.

Waste Collections

Test Valley Borough Council is one of a few councils in Hampshire still managing to maintain a full waste collection service with the cooperation of other staff to cover for coronavirus absence. The service includes back, brown and green bins, clinical waste and even bulk waste. The team are very grateful for the many messages and even gifts left by grateful residents. The Council has even put its own thank you in a video here: -

https://www.facebook.com/TestValleyBC/videos/1529797290519080/?_tn=-R

Household Waste Recycling Centres

The Local Government Secretary today asked county councils to plan for the organised reopening of their waste and recycling sites. Updated guidance will be published shortly to support them to open sites safely during the pandemic.

Business Support Grants

The job of distributing these Government Grants was given to the Borough Councils and TVBC is well ahead of the game in getting as many of these grants out as fast as possible. Feedback from businesses in Mid Test is that this working well and a key part in sustaining our businesses ready for the recovery when the virus is beaten.

As a result of the updated figures, TVBC has in fact moved up the table from 53rd to 42nd out of 314 Councils. The main reason for this is that some Councils were reporting cumulative figures in their weekly returns rather than weekly information. That meant that they were showing over-stated performance in the figures that were first published.

To date a total of 1,673 grants have already been paid out to a total value of £20.66M. This represents 76% of the £27.13M allocation determined by MHCLG as the amount they estimate may be payable to eligible businesses in Test Valley.

At the close of business today there are 139 grant applications remaining to be processed. These broadly fall into two categories a) new applications that have arrived in the last couple of days (57) and b) more complicated cases that require further information from the applicant (82). Processing these outstanding grant claims remains the priority for the Revenues service.

Testing

The national testing programme is now being expanded to test frontline workers beyond the health and care services who are having to self-isolate due to having coronavirus-like symptoms or because a member of their household has symptoms. Our first offer will be to our highest priority services – Environmental, Housing, Revenues and IT. They or their family members will need to be “less than 5 days symptomatic” and the testing will be undertaken via a drive through facility established at Tipner. The test is a PCR test, to test whether the person has COVID-19. It is not an antibody test to identify if they have had or are immune to the virus.

Council smashes affordable housing target

Test Valley Borough Council has exceeded its affordable housing target for the sixth year in a row, providing a lifeline for residents looking for a home.

The authority delivered 273 homes in 2019/20 against a council target to achieve 200, smashing its initial goal by 37 per cent.

And over the past four financial years, the authority has delivered more than 1,000 affordable homes in total. Nationally, TVBC ranked 31st out of 326 local authorities for housing delivery in 2019. It has also exceeded its affordable housing delivery target by 20 per cent over the past six years

Covid-19 Information

Finally, our Mid Test Community Engagement Officer, Imogen Colley, has put together in a few sheets all the sources of useful Covid-19 information.

Financial Help and Support Resources

Government Financial Support

[Universal Credit](#) : Apply online for Universal Credit to get financial support if you've lost your job. You may also be able to:

- Apply for 'new style' [Employment and Support Allowance](#), if you have a disability or health condition that affects how much you can work.
- Apply online for 'new style' [Jobseeker's Allowance](#)

[Advance payments](#): If you do not have enough money to live on while you wait for your first Universal Credit payment you can ask for an advance payment.

Citizens Advice Test Valley

Website: <http://www.testvalleycab.org.uk/index.html>

Offices are currently closed to the general public however they are still providing services via telephone and email.

By telephone on: 01264 723641 or 01794 522137

When leaving a message please leave your name, telephone number and short message. Please be aware the call back will come up as a withheld number.

The main [Citizens Advice Information Service website](#) also provides a comprehensive source of information on your rights, plus Coronavirus related guides.

Foodbanks in Test Valley

Romsey: <https://romsey.foodbank.org.uk/> has 2 centres:

- Romsey is open on Tuesday & Wednesday mornings
- North Baddesley is open on a Friday morning

If you need help outside of these times your referrer can collect a box for you. Or in an emergency please phone 07761 405 870

For details of how to get help or give help please phone 07761 405 870 or 01794 450451

Andover: <https://andover.foodbank.org.uk/>

Contact number: 01264 362111

Citizens Advice, children's centres and health visitors are just some of those who can refer people to the foodbank by issuing them with a foodbank voucher.

Council Tax

Test Valley has agreed new measures to help families with Council Tax through Covid-19:

If you're struggling to pay your Council Tax then please contact Test Valley Borough Council at www.testvalley.gov.uk/ContactRevenues or call on 01264 368000 and we will work with you to agree payment options. If possible, please have your council tax number to hand.

Direct Debit – Non billable months

If you're on a 10-month direct debit then it is possible to opt for April/May as your non billable months instead of February/March 2021. If you're currently on a 12-month direct debit plan then we can condense your payments over 10 months, so you don't have to pay anything in April and May.

Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Working age residents who benefit from our current council tax reduction scheme will receive an additional £150 reduction to their bill in line with the Government's hardship fund criteria. Those households eligible for this reduction will automatically be re-billed.

Government Announcement

As part of its response to COVID-19, the government announced in the Budget on 11 March that it would provide local authorities in England with £500 million of new grant funding to support economically vulnerable people and households in their local area.

For more information please visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/council-tax-covid-19-hardship-fund-2020-to-2021-guidance>

Other Useful Websites

[Money Saving Expert](#): This website is regularly updating its advice guides, examples of these include:

- [Coronavirus Employees Help](#)
- [Coronavirus Universal Credit and Benefits](#)
- [Coronavirus Self-Employed and Small Limited Companies Help](#)
- [Coronavirus Finance and Bills Help](#)

[Money Advice Service](#) has produced a guide on how best to manage money during this crisis and what help is available. From what to do if you are worried about debt or ways to avoid scams, this website has lots of useful information.

Supporting Vulnerable People in our Communities

[Age Concern Hampshire](#): are offering phone support and wellbeing check ins as well as door step service for things such as shopping drop offs and meal deliveries. If you are interested in volunteering to support vulnerable people in your community then more information can be found on their website on how this can be done.

[Age UK](#): has information on staying safe and well at home. As well as ways we can support older relatives, friends and neighbours, whether this is practical things like shopping, or keeping their spirits up at a time thing feel challenging.

[Red Cross](#): has information on ways we can volunteer our time to help in our local areas, as well as practical information on first aid.

[Reengage](#): is committed to fighting loneliness. In the wake of Coronavirus, they are looking for volunteers to make regular calls to older people who are isolated. Their newsletter provides information on their response and all volunteer opportunities.

[Independent Age](#): is encouraging everybody to do what they can to support isolated older people during the Covid-19 crisis. Their website has information on ways to reconnect with some of the loneliest people in the UK, how to keep our community safe and other useful resources.

[The Silver Line](#): offers, amongst other things, a 24-hour help line and befriending services to combat loneliness. They also provide information on the Coronavirus for older people.

[National Citizens Advice Service](#): are regularly updating their website with the latest government updates and information on what this could mean for you. This includes information on identifying scams, advice on support you may be eligible for and tips on staying home.

Corona Virus and our Wellbeing

1 [Mind](#) have lots of information on their how to take care of our mental health and wellbeing during this time. It includes advice on how to still connect with people during social isolation, keeping active, and ways to keep your mind stimulated.

2 [The Mental Health Foundation](#) also have a list of tips on staying at home and ways to find a balance when following news and information on the outbreak in the media.

Keeping Active while at Home

1 The NHS Website has good information on seated exercises to try at home, follow the link [here](#) to view the website.

2 The NHS One You website also has home work out videos. Ranging from 10 minutes of cardio to strength and balance exercises, videos can be found [here](#).

3 [This Girl Can](#) has information on exercises to try at home and how we can utilise everyday items we have at home.

Useful Contacts

Age Concern Hampshire: www.ageconcernhampshire.org.uk

Telephone: 01962 868545/ Email: enquiries@ageconcernhampshire.org.uk

Age UK: www.ageuk.org.uk

Telephone: 0800 678 1602/ Email: contact@ageuk.org.uk

Red Cross: www.redcross.org.uk

Telephone: 0344 871 11 11/ Email: contactus@redcross.org.uk

Re-Engage: www.reengage.org.uk

Telephone: 0800 716543/ Email: info@reengage.org.uk

Independent Age: www.independentage.org

Telephone: 0800 319 6789/ Email: charity@independentage.org

Silver Line: www.thesilverline.org.uk

Telephone: 0800 470 80 90/ Email: info@thesilverline.org.uk

Mind: www.mind.org.uk

Telephone: 01264 332297/ Email: mind@andovermind.org.uk

Test Valley Borough Council: www.testvalley.gov.uk

Telephone: 01264 368000/ Email: info@testvalley.gov.uk

Hampshire County Council: www.hants.gov.uk

Connect to Support: www.connecttosupporthampshire.org.uk/home

Citizens Advice Test Valley: www.testvalleycab.org.uk 01264 723641 or 01794 52213

Our Contact Details

Councillor Ian Jeffrey	cllrieffrey@testvalley.gov.uk	01794 388872
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