

CHICHESTER



CITY COUNCIL

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Mayor of Chichester: Councillor Richard Plowman

An open letter from the Mayor – April 2020

The message I received recently was a simple one. ‘How are you feeling?’

I think most of us in Chichester would answer: *strange*. We have never encountered a lockdown before. Did I really bet on a horse in the Virtual Grand National and cheer it all the way?

Also we are all *worried*, not only for ourselves but also for family and friends and how they are coping. We are *angry* at those who flaunt the social-distancing rule, but *thankful* to the NHS, particularly those in the front line and support services. In my other guise as Town Crier I went outside with my bell to join the two ‘Clap for Carers’ events: the demonstration of encouragement was wonderfully heartwarming. On both occasions it seemed that the whole of Chichester had taken to their doorsteps.

We do not have statistics on the incidence of coronavirus (COVID-19) in Chichester itself, but the number of reported cases in the region is low. This enemy, however, is invisible. We can take no risks and must follow the Government’s instructions.

There can be no doubt we are in for a long haul. The excellent speech from the Queen hit the mood of the country spot on, as she urged us to work together, be resolute and stay strong.

So how are we coping in Chichester? At the end of last year a BBC survey found that Chichester, alone in the south, is one of the five happiest places in the UK. That is due not merely to location, but also to our sense of community. We are lucky to have many fine organisations such as Residents Associations and Community Wardens to support us in the present crisis and make sure that no one is overlooked. In fact, it has been reported that the supply of volunteers is outstripping demand for their help. Our small businesses are also playing their part. Corner shops and convenience stores have been looking out for their regular customers and delivering when needed. Chichester is doing OK at the moment

The local authorities have been tireless in making sure the right support is available, with officers redeployed accordingly. Most important is the **WSCC HUB** (Telephone **033022 27980**). It has a triage system which takes your call, assesses it and directs the appropriate organisation towards you.

Twinned with Chartres, France and Ravenna, Italy



Those identified as most vulnerable, with underlying medical problems and at present in 12 weeks' self-confinement, have all been contacted and are in the system. The rough-sleepers and homeless are being cared for. There is, however, one group which worries me: those who were struggling before the lockdown and have young children. They need support, particularly through the Food Bank - but with the right sort of basic foods, which are now in short supply there.

With playgrounds shut down, exercise for the children is restricted to the immediate neighbourhood. As many residents are already doing, you can brighten the youngsters' walk by **putting in your window a Teddy Bear, Message or Picture.**

Some people will struggle with the psychological and mental issues of lockdown and social-distancing, so **MIND** have two dedicated lines to call:

Adults: 07495 077341. Young people: 07949 963757.

Otherwise, regular telephone conversation with family, friends or the vulnerable is invaluable. Cue that simple question: 'How are you feeling?' I have a list of about 20 contacts and it is working. You can contact me on 01243 787663.

The City Council is concentrating on the next phase of keeping up morale and long-term wellbeing during lockdown. It is also starting to consider how to say thank you to the community once it is safe to do so. When that will be is really down to all of us, but it will probably be when there is a cure or widely available vaccine. As with every pandemic, this one will pass.

So, we are all together in the same boat on an unknown journey. We don't know for how long, only that it will finish. We have a clear direction: SSW (stay **S**trong, stay **S**afe and stay **W**ell). We have a good ship and crew, the Chichester Community and, in the WSCC Hub (to repeat, at 033022 27980), a life-raft. Coronavirus will be beaten and our community in Chichester will emerge even stronger.

My best wishes to you all - and stay Strong, Safe and Well.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Richard Plowman
The Mayor of Chichester