

County Councillors Report April – June 2020

It has been a challenging few months for everyone and it has been a pleasure to support isolated residents with shopping, grass cutting and general problem solving. There was such a variety of issues. Bonfires were a very typical concern and grass cuttings / disposal of garden waste another. Thankfully there was very little fly tipping. How quickly many of us adapted to online chats and quizzes as well as house party, zoom, skype and teams meetings for work.

During the Covid crisis lockdown the Town was kept looking smart by WTC contractors, unlike other Towns that look very neglected. Eg. The sculptural fish in Carmarthen look dreadful. Extra bottle banks were requested at the outset since bottles cannot be put into kerbside waste collections and these six were well used at the North road car park. Minor incidents of fly tipping occurred but only at this location so they were very quickly cleared by CCC staff. Keeping the area cared for helped people who were isolated to see some positive activity and retain a small sense of normality despite the crisis. St David`s avenue CCC contractors were a bit slower coming out so I made a start there on the grass and they appeared two days afterwards thankfully!

Contact daily with CCC gold command was made easy for County Councillors if they needed to raise an urgent issue. I raised early on in April the need for care home residents hospital discharge forms to include covid testing since they did not, which was alarming , and I am grateful for the heads up via SOLACE on this. Densely populated England was ahead of us on the curve so there was time to prepare. Other matters raised were to utilise all these extra beds in sports halls for clearing a backlog of hips, knees and eyes perhaps.

The Whitland Wards has four community halls that have been without income throughout and I have checked up with committee members or applied for the grants along with checking on the Town sports clubs. New arrangements have been made for the schools and have assisted there to facilitate a one way system for the primary school and suggested the use of community halls to gold command but I am told this brings its own issues.

On a daily basis the WTC phone line was checked by for messages and there have been just a handful that were dealt with via support from the Clerk. The inside of the HD centre was kept clean and WTC also received a supply of dog and cat food for those in need. There are some boxes left. The cat sanctuary benefitted from some of the boxes as we were conscious their shop was closed for Covid and they may have extra cats.

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As services start to approach normal with the recycle centre on weekly visits now I urge that WTC Councillors think about how to support the businesses that have not been open and are unlikely to open immediately. This is, for example, pubs, cafes hairdressers that cannot arrange sufficient distancing due to internal size and if we have any ideas to help we need to put them forward. This could also include schools and a way forward for community halls. PUBLIC TOILETS will be essential to support footfall.

Whitland Town Council has been ambitious over past years and has the capacity to make a difference to immediate and long term sustainability of the Town. Many self-employed people have slipped through the net of support and have suffered greatly. On the other hand I know some businesses have done so very well throughout and declined to claim even the eligible grant of rates.

In the background work has not stopped on the Abbey ruins website, the WTC new website, the Trevaughan community garden fruit tree plans, the Cardi Bach feasibility study, the Ten Towns regeneration plan. Councillors can share and contribute to an active travel consultation at CCC, details and a link were sent by the Clerk. WAG Active travel criteria does not apply, at present, to Whitland despite my frustration at it being close to the levels needed. It applies to areas of higher commuting footfall and population density. This is something to challenge in the forthcoming weeks.

As for the Covid19 virus itself, at the start of April I shared the ZOE app for daily digital reporting so that local outbreaks can be spotted early. About 4 million do this across the UK. So far they have identified, using this app, that loss of smell is one of the very early symptoms for a significant percentage of people. It is very easy to use. It is important to utilise this whilst we wait for other tracking and tracing apps to be developed and as scientists learn more.

www.covid19.joinzoe.com

A special thank you to the Clerk who has responded to the Community Resilience Officer from CCC after she contacted WTC and other Councils to ask for voluntary support when carers isolated. There may be a while to go yet before we reach the new normal, whatever that looks like, so a huge heartfelt thanks to everybody for all the “pethau bychain”.

Cllr Sue Allen