DORCHESTER PARISH COUNCIL 12TH MAY 2020.

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR’S REPORT robin.bennett@southoxon.gov.uk

**Covid-19 response:**

Many council service areas have been expanded or diverted to deal with the crisis response, in many cases under the control of the Local Resilience Forum (TVLRF).

My department, Development and Regeneration, includes the Business Support team which have been at the forefront of trying to deliver government funding schemes and other support. The Community Support team has been working closely with local groups on referrals. I have been joining regular update calls and feeding back local concerns that I am aware of.

A general community support contact line has been set up on 01235 422600 or by email, communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk.

**Business grants**

SODC has been processing small business support grants on behalf of the government. This is a national scheme and we have no discretion over whether we pay this money or not.  We can only pay grants to businesses that meet the criteria and complete the form correctly.

* We’ve paid all of the straightforward requests we’ve received.
* We’re putting all available resources into working through the remaining requests that require additional checks as a matter of urgency.

The grants scheme is being extended to include some small businesses that don’t currently pay business rates – for example, businesses operating from serviced offices – on a discretionary basis. We’re expecting the guidance to follow soon.

**Government business loans scheme**

The government has announced a business loans scheme. Here’s what we know so far:

* The scheme was live from Monday 4 May and cash will be released within days for eligible businesses.
* Businesses can borrow between £2,000 and £50,000.
* Loan terms will be up to six years. The government will guarantee the entire loan and there won’t be any fees or interest to pay for the first 12 months. The scheme will be delivered using the accredited lenders.

There’s more [information on the government website](https://bit.ly/BounceBackGuidance).

**Financial allocation from the government**

SODC has received a larger allocation from the government’s second fund of £1.6 billion for councils. By awarding district councils a larger share of the pot, the government has now recognised the significant contribution we are making to the country’s response to COVID-19.  The financial impact of the pandemic is likely to affect the council for many years.

**Update on fly-tips**

There has been a lot of coverage in the local and national media about fly-tipping in the lockdown, particularly while household recycling centres are closed.

 Here are our figures for February to April this year, and the same period last year for comparison. While the provisional figures for April are quite high, they were just as high in March, before the recycling centres were closed.

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| --- | --- | --- |
|   | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
| February | 59 | 68 |
| March | 82 | 92 |
| April | 74 | 90\* |

\*The figures for April this year are provisional, and may change following validation checks.

 **An update on our grounds maintenance work**

 Our contractor is continuing to work, but only on essential work. They are still maintaining our parks and gardens, the land around play areas, and other open spaces so nearby residents can exercise safely within them. In line with government guidance we closed all play areas and exercise equipment from 24 March.

 Crews are observing the social distancing measures while they cut grass, clear litter and weeds. The teams are also undertaking urgent tree work, regular site inspections, maintenance checks and essential repairs of play areas – they may be closed but people can still physically get to some of them, so we need to make sure they’re safe.

**Waste collections**
This week all our waste collection services will be back up and running – from today crews will be collecting batteries, textiles and small electrical items once again. These collections had to be paused at the outset of the pandemic as the centres we take these items for processing had closed but have now reopened.

**Inspiring Digital Enterprise Award (iDEA)**

South and Vale Business Support has launched the [Inspiring Digital Enterprise Award](https://ebtk.co.uk/click/UUJ3cEZ1SURMZlJ6WjJ1WFVTQWt6OVd6aFpjZ3VoSFhuNDFKWEwwS3FRPT0/Unh3cw),(iDEA) . With schools currently closed due to COVID-19, parents will be looking for ways to keep their children engaged and stimulated.  iDEA is about lifelong learning, for anyone who wants to develop their skills. Through a series of online challenges, users complete interactive modules known as ‘badges’, which can be accessed for free on any device connected to the internet. These vary in length and difficulty and there is a huge range to choose from.  Find out more here [www.svbs.co.uk/idea](https://www.svbs.co.uk/idea/) and do share with family and friends.

**Local plan –** Examination process has not been officially paused despite Covid-19, nor has the December deadline moved. I am considering what points to raise during the process.

**Online council meetings** will commence at the end of May, remotely via video conferencing. The first of our virtual meetings will be:

* South Planning Committee – Thursday 28 May – 4.30pm