

Dear Colleagues,

New regional testing centre in Ashford

A drive-through coronavirus testing facility is opening at our car park in Victoria Road in Ashford, as part of the Government's UK-wide drive to increase testing. The site sits alongside the existing network of testing sites being set up around the UK. We fully support the Government's efforts to deliver a comprehensive national testing programme in the war against the Coronavirus. Ashford already hosts a mobile testing centre which operates from the Stour Centre car park and we are pleased to be playing our part by making the Victoria Road site available for this new regional testing centre.

ACER hears of transition 'back to normal service delivery'

Tuesday's ACER meeting heard that falling demand for the emergency support put in place by the council to help residents and businesses means that we can begin to 'draw down' on these arrangements and transition back into a more 'normal service delivery position. This is a summary of the key recommendations that were approved.

The Emergency Support Group structure is removed by its July meeting, allowing officer resource to be effectively redeployed in the following way:

Contact with the vulnerable will continue to be managed by Customer Contact Centre using a triage signposting system which directs need to appropriate services, whether internally or externally. A drop in contacts has removed the need for the pool of 50+ support staff to be on standby, enabling them to be deployed as normal. However, they may be called upon should we receive an unexpected large list or a decision to lockdown in the future.

As now, complex cases will be referred to the Welfare Intervention Officers. They have capacity to deal with complex cases. If there are capacity concerns, a report will be brought forward providing options and solutions.

Housing Options Team have capacity to manage caseload, but with the expected changes to current safety nets, workload will increase significantly. A paper will be presented to members if required from the Head of Housing to explain additional risks appearing.

Close the Ashford Response Depot operation with immediate effect, while retaining the depot storage so that this can be stood back up if needed. We will support the groups currently using Carlton Road to continue. For the rest of June staff across the borough will hold emergency food parcels at home to be delivered if an immediate need is required.

Continue liaising with the voluntary sector, community groups and food banks. Local councils are also key champions. We will continue to work closely with key delivery partners such as Ashford Volunteer Centre and the Ashford Borough Citizen Advice.

Mapping need and understanding the different sector support required (such as funding, supplies and PPE) will continue. Cross working with Housing and Customer Contact will continue to ensure information is shared and accurate referrals are provided.

The COVID-19 grant support scheme will be stopped and any remaining monies will be added to the VERA appeal. In future any more funding will be geared to tackle issues through Service Level Agreements, support and advice. An options paper will come forward to ACER in July.

Continued work is required by the Communications and Data Analysis Team to ensure timely messages are provided on all platforms and the return of accurate data is submitted to government requests. This sits, as it does now, under the Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications.

A report by our Economic Development team listed current priorities – processing applications to the Discretionary Grants Scheme, completing Small Business and Retail Business Grants payments, implementation of the Reopening High Streets Action Plan, a policy on our corporate property rent relief, and implementation of the Corporate Recovery Plan.

Applications to discretionary grants scheme nears 200

As stated above, small businesses who have not been able to apply for previous grant schemes are continuing to apply for the Ashford discretionary grants scheme. The scheme is for businesses within the borough and has a total of around £1.4m. So far, more than 170 applications have come in. To apply visit <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/discretionary-grants>.

Holly is an Ashford Applause winner

With the Ashford Applause campaign in full swing, we are pleased to continue receiving so many nominations which have brought to light the amazing contribution people are making to the community during the ongoing Covid-19 crisis. It was announced yesterday that our second Ashford Applause champion is **Holly Cripps**.

Holly has worked above and beyond the call of duty delivering food parcels and shopping for residents of Stanhope. She keeps in contact with vulnerable residents living in the area and supports them in whatever way she can.

One of Holly's nominators, Heather Hayward, said: "Holly has become the Angel of Stanhope. Nothing has been too much trouble for her and despite the stress of the situation she always has a smile on her face and a can-do attitude. The families helped by Holly are known by name, and treated with dignity and respect. She really is the Angel of Stanhope and is very deserving of this award."

There is plenty of time to nominate your community champion. The nominations are open to all. Start by visiting www.ashford.gov.uk/ashfordapplause .

For top tips on how to submit a great application, visit Loveashford's blog at www.loveashford.com. Applications are also accepted by letter, post nominations to Loveashford Team, Economic Development, Ashford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford TN231PL.

And finally...

The tremendous work of the Bethersden Volunteers in supporting their local community was featured on *BBC Radio Kent's* 'Making A Difference' slot this week. Listeners heard how a number of groups came together under the umbrella of Bethersden Volunteers to help people with their shopping, collecting prescriptions and befriending those in need. Food parcels were put together and delivered to homes, while a special VE day bag of goodies including cake and bunting was particularly well received. Well done to everyone involved!

Gerry Clarkson CBE, BA (Hons)
Leader – Ashford Borough Council

Tracey Kerly
Chief Executive – Ashford Borough Council

Distribution: All Elected Members of the Authority, KCC Divisional members, CEO, Directors & Heads of Service, Damian Green MP
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