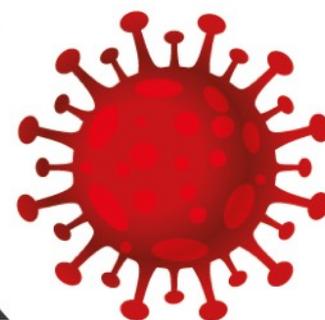


OUR RESPONSE TO CORONAVIRUS



Best Practice

Emergency Response Structure

Support Hubs

Mutual Aid

Supporting the Voluntary Sector

Supporting the Community

Communications



April 2020
buckinghamshire.gov.uk

Our Response to Coronavirus April 2020

1: Background

This paper outlines the approach taken by the new Buckinghamshire Council in responding to the Coronavirus emergency, including examples of best practice.

Whilst our approach isn't totally unique, given that Buckinghamshire Council only came into force on 1 April 2020, by which time Coronavirus had already been declared a major incident both locally and nationally, the achievements made by an organisation so new and in the middle of such a major crisis are significant.

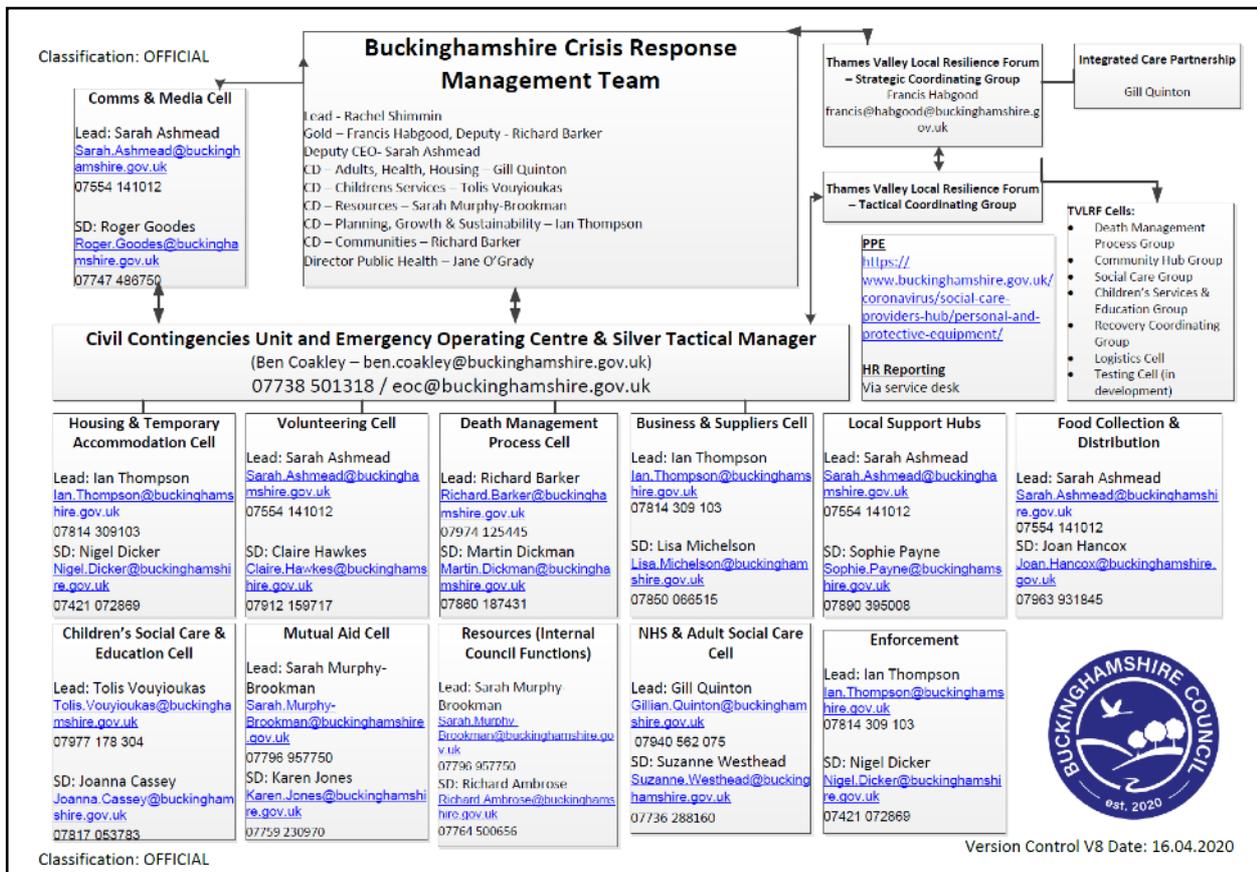
With three weeks to go until the new council went live, resources had to be diverted to responding to what was being described as a 'once in a generation' emergency. We were just coming to the end of a period of nearly a year when a significant number of staff, as well as many members, had been working flat out to deliver the new council. Many of these staff were now required to turn their attention to the emerging Coronavirus crisis, alongside the delivery of a number of urgent pieces of work required to ensure the new council came into force safely.

What was clearly evident however was that the work to create a firm platform for the new council had already been completed. This included a senior management structure to Service Director (Tier 3) level, comprehensive engagement with staff so they knew where they sat within the organisation and to begin to create single teams, an understanding of the financial basis for the new council, an IT infrastructure to ensure we could communicate and work as one, and the policy infrastructure to allow decisions to be made to provide consistent and appropriate decision making for all. This all proved invaluable when the national 'lockdown' was introduced and the majority of our staff were required to work from home.

On the following pages we outline specific areas of our response. Of particular note is the creation of the online community support hub with a wealth of information put together from scratch literally overnight, the conversion of Olympic Lodge into a 240 bed special social care facility for vulnerable adults, the immediate refocus of the organisation both politically and operationally from the challenge of creating the unitary council to responding to the emergency and the new council being able to take a leadership role across several critical elements of the regional response through the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum.

2: Emergency Response Structure

An emergency programme structure was introduced as follows:



The organisation has had to move, literally overnight, from managing the change programme to create the new council, to working as one focused on the emerging crisis from the Coronavirus outbreak. When the situation was declared a major incident on 19th March we were still just under two weeks away from the launch of the new council; however by then we had already developed a robust emergency response as a single organisation. This was against a backdrop of the existing political structures still being in place, multiple IT systems still operational run by the legacy councils, a new website that hadn't been fully launched, and most business areas still developing their new operating models for the launch of the new council.

Thanks to a fantastic can do attitude both from members and staff which had been fostered through the work to create the new council, any difficulties faced were quickly overcome. As a result when it was required we were able to ensure we could host political meetings remotely, allow over 3,000 staff to work effectively from home, and in critical areas such as the processing of business grants, development of website information, developing robust communications and building a robust community engagement approach we were able to work as a single team across the multiple platforms that still existed.

Daily internal conference calls for the Crisis Response Management Team were instigated, held 7 days a week, with the external feeds informing these and the resulting decision making.

The external feeds include a daily call between the council and NHS which is chaired by the Chief Executive of the council and reflects the work undertaken previously to create a joined up health and social care system in the county, and a daily call chaired by the Corporate Director Children's Services with Headteachers from across the county.

We've also taken a regional leadership role in some critical areas across the Thames Valley including the planning for excess deaths, adult social care and communications.

3: Members

Politically this has also been a significant challenge as we have been running a shadow authority alongside the legacy councils in the run-up to the creation of the new unitary council. (The Shadow Authority consisted of all 202 members from across the County and four District Councils, with an Executive consisting of 17 members)

The Shadow Executive had been meeting weekly so was well established and with the announcement of the postponement of elections this May, this body has now taken on the Executive function (Cabinet) for the new council. At the same time the Shadow Authority has become the Council for the new authority.

This has meant as well as having to deal with the establishment of the new council and the closing down of existing councils complicated by the Coronavirus lock down, members of the Executive have also had to pick up the political reins of dealing with the emergency. Initially the political response was led by the Leader Cllr Martin Tett and the Portfolio Lead for Health and Culture Cllr Gareth Williams.

Cllr Tett has been involved in the daily conference calls with the Crisis Response Management Team together with the Director of Public Health. The Leader has also led the communications with residents through a daily VLOG and regular newsletters as well as ensuring all 202 members of the new council are kept updated. See communications below for more details.

Cllr Tett has also been actively engaged in the national conference calls with MHCLG and in ensuring local MPs are kept up to date with the situation.

However the political oversight was quickly expanded across the new council's Cabinet, with members aligned to the cells within the emergency response model, shown above. In total 9 members of the Cabinet were aligned across 8 emergency cells:

- Housing & Temporary Accommodation – Cllr Isobel Darby
- Resources – Cllr Katrina Wood
- Children’s Social Care & Education - Cllr Anita Cranmer and Cllr Warren Whyte
- Mutual Aid – Cllr Bill Chapple
- Local Support Hubs & Volunteering – Cllr Gareth Williams
- NHS & Adult Social Care – Cllr Angela MacPherson
- Death Management Process – Cllr Mark Shaw
- Business & Suppliers – Cllr Nick Naylor

Cabinet members have been actively involved in supporting the cells and ensuring these have political oversight. This has included:

- Joining daily conference calls to review the latest position and emerging issues.
- Helping to develop solutions.
- Helping identify key information to be shared more widely amongst the councils elected members and partners.
- Linking through to local groups and communities to help join up the response.
- Bringing forward good practice examples of community responses or council led localism engagement.

The Cabinet has also met weekly informally to receive a full briefing on the emergency. A large focus of the political input has been engaged in supporting the work of the community and volunteers through the Local Support Hubs. Cllr Gareth Williams as the lead in this area has been:

- Chairing weekly voluntary sector strategic discussion; gathering shared intelligence on emerging issues from those on the ground and consideration of the strategy required in planning recovery phases; recognition and promotion of a valued ‘team Bucks’ approach; encouraging chief officers in key charities to adopt lead roles in the response.
- Chairing weekly strategic discussion with BMKALC (the local association for Town and Parish Councils); gathering shared intelligence on town and parish council needs locally; sharing best practice; the consideration of merits and approach should we lobby as unitary and local councils in the recovery phase.
- Participating in a weekly cross organisational funding group (see below); exploring maximising funding coming into and being distributed around the county; encouraging key partners with funding to be strategic about its use e.g. Rothschild and Heart of Bucks
- Weekly dial in with Area Coordinators (see Community Support Hubs below); to give recognition of their unique role (given some are new / inexperienced); to understand where it may be helpful to strengthen member relationships given unitary still a new arrangement; to understand where there are gaps in community provision and mitigations required.

We have also released £250k of Public Health money to a fund aimed at supporting this excellent on the ground emergency work our local members and community groups have been doing in their areas.

Local members have been actively involved up and down the county in supporting their communities and residents in responding to the emergency. Using their local knowledge and contacts, local members have been able to help pull together many different schemes and initiatives all focused on providing appropriate support for their residents. There are numerous examples to showcase this work but to give a flavour of these initiatives a few examples have been listed below:

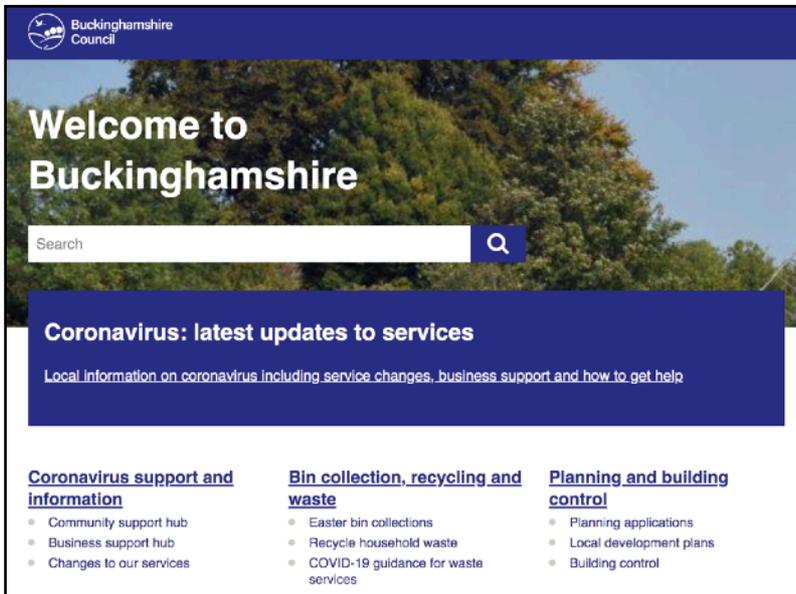
- Cllr Ashley Waite has been working with a number of local groups in the Aylesbury area to get food to people that are in need.
- Cllr Mark Winn helped put together a community group in Bedgrove, Aylesbury to help those who were self-isolating to do so safely. Already around 200 requests for help have been answered. Cllr Winn has also helped develop a scheme whereby volunteers can befriend individuals and regularly call them to provide a friendly voice and to ensure they don't need assistance.
- Cllr Paul Kelly partnering with Woodstocks Coffee House has helped deliver home-cooked, lunchtime meals to vulnerable, isolated and elderly residents in Burnham, as well as local NHS workers.
- Cllr Arif Hussain has been raising funds from friends and family through the Five Pillars Charity to bulk purchase food essentials for elderly residents in High Wycombe.
- Cllr Charlie Clare and Cllr Patrick Fealey have worked with Gawcott Fields Community Solar Farm to ensure that the farm's £8,000 donation to support the education of children at home went to local schools to bolster their remote teaching capabilities.
- Cllrs Raj Khan and Niknam Hussain organised a 'remote' curry night to pay tribute to the work by emergency services. Working with a local caterer, the councillors with other volunteers hand-delivered 130 hot curries to staff at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, and to Aylesbury police and fire stations.



4: Best Practice

Below are examples of some of the initiatives taken by the council which reflect best practice in responding to the emergency.

Community Support Hub



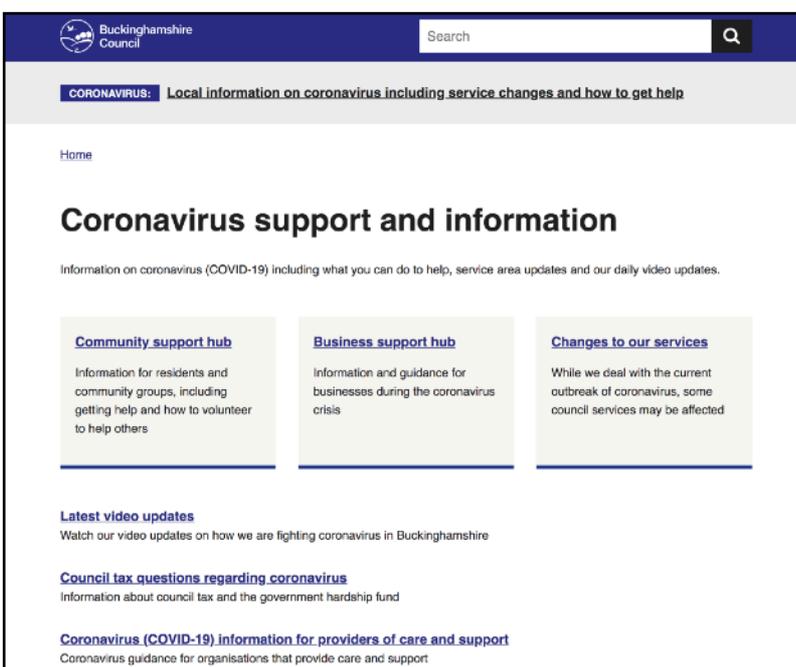
A comprehensive website was established immediately bring together all of the relevant information required to help residents, local communities and businesses.

The site can be accessed here: [Community Support Hub](#)

Within the site is information for residents, communities, partners and local businesses, a section for residents and businesses to offer help and

support, a register of local organisations and groups providing direct support searchable by area and information on service changes. A huge amount of work went into developing this and gathering all the information from the local community to help populate it, which was done alongside launching a new website for the new council and still maintaining the previous five council websites.

Local Support Hubs



In developing our response to the growing needs within local communities eight support hubs were established within days of the emergency being classed as a major incident.

These hubs have been established to help support the most vulnerable people in our communities. They are for people who do not have access to family, friends, or local networks who can help them. They are not 'drop in' centres or for the general public to use.

They are being used as coordination and distribution points for the Council's volunteer support network. In just under two weeks over 1,000 residents have volunteered to help their neighbours and local communities.

To help with this, a local charity Community Impact Bucks, has established a Volunteer Matching Service to link the volunteers with the charities, community groups, and other organisations in need of extra people power.

The volunteers as well as supporting residents already known to the council they have been supporting those referred to the council through the national 'shielded residents' scheme. Each has been contacted by one of the volunteers assigned to their local hub. Through the hub whatever the need is whether this be food, transport, the collection of a prescription or the walking of a dog, arrangements are put in place to provide the support required.

Hubs are staffed by staff who have volunteered to help, and include staff from all areas of the council.

Mutual Aid

We identified immediately the opportunities from a Mutual Aid perspective with businesses being able to help others in need. We quickly put a call out for help and almost immediately have had over 125 responses, offering everything from staff to PPE.

We have now set up a registration scheme on line and through our business partner Buckinghamshire Business First, we continue to work closely with the local business community to provide and support our local communities' needs.

Particularly help has included:

- Local firms provided oxygen supplies to local hospitals.
- A local gin distillery making hand sanitiser.
- Help with PPE including donations of equipment and a local university and local businesses printing personal protective equipment.
- A local pub turning itself into a community shop.
- Numerous offers of help with food from farms, local specialist shops, transport companies and even several celebrity chefs Jack (son of Heston) Blumenthal and Tom Kerridge producing, donating and delivering food to those in need and local hospitals.
- Volunteers from the Bucks and Oxon 4x4 Response Group (a team of volunteer drivers who are usually called on in bad weather!) who have been out every day making deliveries.
- Local car dealerships offering cars for volunteers to drive to make deliveries.

The Mutual Aid work has also looked at repurposing council staff and has established a process for recording needs and matching staff. Over 1200 staff have completed a skills survey and registered as a volunteer. So far we have used 201 staff to fill a variety of roles including 113 into Adult Social Care. Other roles range from working in our call centre to working in the local mortuary and crematorium.



Supporting Local Business

Through the Local Enterprise Partnership a Business Resilience Fund has been established. A total of £2m in Local Growth Fund money has been put towards a new resilience fund. The fund is to provide support to businesses which are not eligible for the Government business grants or business rates holidays. Response from businesses was overwhelming with the fund needing to be suspended within the first week of launch as over 500 applications were received. These applications are currently being processed, and it's likely that the £2m in funding will quickly be depleted.

Supporting the Voluntary Sector

Another critical area has been working to support the local voluntary sector. As we have seen previously one aspect of this has been matching volunteers to local organisations to improve their resilience.

A screenshot of the Buckinghamshire Council website. The header features the council's logo and name on the left, and a search bar on the right. Below the header is a banner with the text "CORONAVIRUS: Local information on coronavirus including service changes and how to get help". Underneath the banner is a breadcrumb trail: "Home / Coronavirus support and information / Community support hub / Helping others". The main content area displays the heading "Volunteer to help" in a large, bold font.

We also developed 'community hub web pages' that includes an online directory within the Community Support Hub that enabled a postcode search for people self-isolating to find organisations who could help with providing the specific support they needed.

We have also developed toolkits for helping community groups managing volunteers, being 'a good neighbour' videos and galvanising any budding volunteers.

The relationship with the voluntary sector has very much been two way and we have been able to utilise the relationship to gather really useful feedback on some of the challenges being faced locally, so we could develop our support accordingly.

A strategic group of charity leaders formed to help the council prepare a coordinated response. They deployed their staff and their impressive contacts to the strategic thinking and operational work that would be needed within the first three weeks. This included (as seen above), regular dial ins with Cabinet members for shared intelligence on emerging trends, issues within the crisis and consideration of both the sector and vulnerable residents in the recovery phases. We have also been able to untangle a number of thorny issues like debt, financial insecurity, mental health and support for the food banks. The group has considered how to maximise funding streams and the county's Community Foundation Heart of Bucks has launched an appeal to raise funds to support people and charities in Buckinghamshire who are most affected and vulnerable at this time of crisis

Olympic Lodge – a new social care facility



In the space of just three weeks, Buckinghamshire Council has transformed the Olympic Lodge, a hotel which is part of the Stoke Mandeville Stadium, Aylesbury (home of the Paralympics) into a 240 bed special social care facility for vulnerable adults during the coronavirus pandemic.

The centre will help free up hospital beds for people who need critical care plus helps keep these vulnerable adults out of hospital and at less risk of catching the infection.

To support the facility we have also developed an Operating Manual that was produced to support good practice and the on line training we set up on manual handling, medicines management and personal care for volunteers and staff volunteers. This has subsequently been picked up as best practice across the region and used by others to support work they are doing in their area.

The centre is caring for:

- Hospital patients who no longer require acute care but are not quite ready to go home.
- People living at home who, temporarily, are unable to remain there because they have no support.

The centre is staffed by a team of care workers, and supported by volunteers, all providing round the clock care and support to those staying there. To help the centre run smoothly existing stadium catering and hospitality staff are also supporting the new centre.

Social Care guidance



We have arranged a series of webinars for care homes to support them in responding to the emergency.

The first one is titled: **Providing safe care in care home settings** and provides information on how to provide safe care for residents and how to take steps to protect staff. It is aimed specifically at care home settings and is suitable for registered care home managers and deputies as well as managers/ deputy managers in supported living or home care settings, local authority representatives, CCGs, other community service providers and those working in hospital discharge settings.

The webinar led by the Director of Public Health will cover:

- Standard Infection Control Precautions and Transmission based Infection Control Precautions relevant to COVID 19
- Managing resident and staff isolation
- Cohorting of patients and staff
- Appropriate use of PPE
- Safe discharge procedures from hospital and admission to care homes
- Discussions on end of life care (NHS guidance)
- Signposting to key guidance about coronavirus and explain the importance of online access.

Guidance on Care Act easement

Following on from the Government's introduction of the Coronavirus Act 2020 and relaxation or 'easement' of some local authority duties relating to the Care Act, we developed a short summary of the guidance and highlights the relevant points for social care workers to know.

Looking after our Vulnerable Residents

We have been very proactive in checking on our vulnerable residents already known to the council. Over 300 of our most vulnerable residents receive a daily call, whilst a further 600 residents are contacted twice weekly. These residents are in addition to those residents identified through the national NHS shielding scheme. There has been very little overlap so we have also been contacting the residents referred to us through this scheme to check they are ok and what help they need.

Creation of Minimum Standards for Virtual Social Work Visits

Senior managers in Children's Social Care immediately took action to create the expectations and processes for the service to visit children 'virtually'.

This was in the context of there being considerable professional anxiety in relation to protecting children from significant harm whilst not necessarily seeing them face to face. The service made changes to the electronic social care record system so that virtual visits can be explicitly recorded as such and so data could be accessed to allow scrutiny and quality assurance activity to take place.

All staff were issued with minimum standards in relation to conducting a virtual visit, including the requirement for video communication and interaction with each child. These standards were implemented through daily meetings of relevant line management groups and intense quality assurance activity. This demonstrated that the service quickly got to grips with a new way of working with compliance rates of 96% being reported in the first two weeks.

Integrated SEND Service – local guidance and tailored resources

The Integrated SEND Service have produced local advice and guidance for each of the SEND statutory processes to offer a flexible and supportive approach to families and settings to supporting children and young people, whilst ensuring that statutory duties are maintained, during this time. Specific resources for supporting children with SEND in the home have been produced and are available on our website, organised according to areas of need.

Fostering & Adoption

Buckinghamshire Children's Services has quickly embraced working virtually with parents, professionals and children and young people to continue holding child protection conferences and reviews for looked after children. This new approach has been positively received by parents who say they feel comfortable talking to and seeing the professionals supporting them via MS Teams. A similar approach was successfully introduced for the fostering panel last week and will be used by the adoption panel for the first time in early May.

Traineeship Programme for NEET

We have moved our traineeship programme into an online setting for those young people who are no longer in the education system but yet to join a workforce.

This went live on 20th April and we have over a dozen young people signed up already. We are offering a Certificate in Employment Skills Level 1, Careers Advice & Guidance, Functional Skills and Youth Work Support to the young people. The Units in the Employment Skills consists of: Developing Self, Preparing for work, Interview Skills, Applying for a Job, CV Writing, Enterprise Skills, Overcoming Barriers, Working Towards Goals, Exploring Job Opportunities, Working with the Community.

We are running online sessions in Google Meet and a Virtual Classroom where the team have set work for them to complete in line with the daily support session and resources related to that topic. They will also be meeting them in a group session and on regular one to one basis to address their individual needs.

School brokerage system

We have utilised the existing structures within our Admissions and Early Years teams to develop a structure for ensuring support for families of key workers and vulnerable children when the schools or early years settings they are using have to close. This structure also ensured that all children who needed care during the Easter break and across the Easter Bank Holidays were supported by those schools that remained open during what would ordinarily have been a usual period of closure.

Supporting school staff

We have put a lot of focus on supporting school staff and particularly the mental health and wellbeing of the staff. Collaborative work has taken place with a school to create a website for supporting the mental health and wellbeing of school staff, as well as a specific helpline for school leaders.

In addition as soon as the move to shut schools took place, we created a repository for knowledge for schools to access online using a FAQ structure which is updated on a daily basis. Schools have found this very useful and the website has received over 3500 unique visits from schools, averaging approximately 15 visits from each school.

Wellbeing pack for families

A 'wellbeing pack' has also been created for families to support them with supporting children at home during this time. Underpinning all of our work is a collaborative approach; regular calls with education settings, parent carer forum and health and social care colleagues to enable our response to be joined up and to provide the information and support that is needed, on a frequently changing basis.

Communications

The council has taken a proactive approach to communications realising the important part this will play in responding to the emergency.

The centre for our communications is the Community Support Hub, set up on the new council's website. Available through this site is all of the critical messaging issued both locally by the council and Public Health but also the national messaging from central government. All of this is supplemented by a comprehensive social media programme across all of the main channels. The council have launched a *#ProudofBucks* campaign highlighting the numerous local initiatives and activities being established to support the residents of the county and the work of council staff to galvanise the community spirit across Buckinghamshire.

Each day the Leader of the Council Cllr Martin Tett does a video blog for our residents usually accompanied by a guest speaker from within the council or from an outside community group or partner organisation. These have covered a range of topics from mental health, business support, advice on keeping fit whilst staying at home and information on how the council's main services have been affected. These are available here [daily video update](#).



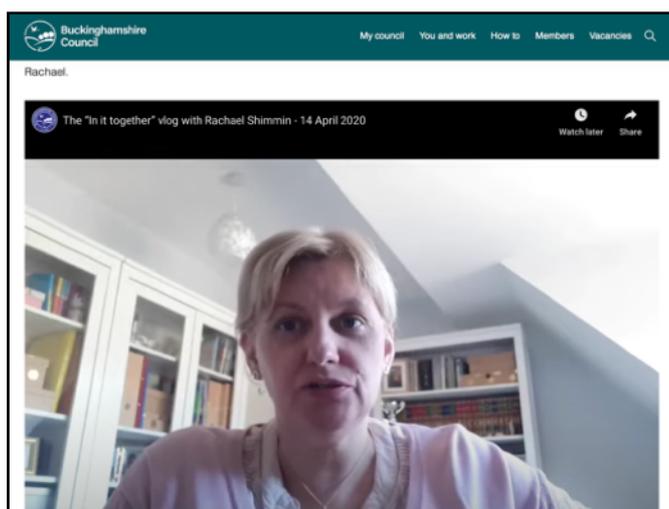
The Leader also issues an e-newsletter to over 200,000 residents twice a week which is read by over 135,000 residents, a phenomenal response rate. This has been extremely well received with numerous compliments following each edition.

Each day an email update is produced and issued to the new council's 202 members ensuring they are kept informed of all the latest developments. In addition, this is used to highlight local initiatives and best practice to encourage others to do the same.

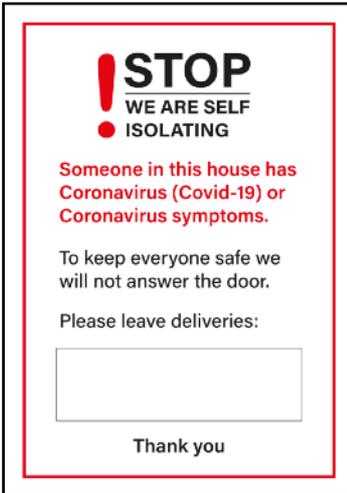
Internally the Chief Executive Rachael Shimmin issues a daily video blog for staff, which is viewed by over 500 staff each day. We have also added the following to staff desktops recognising the fantastic work being undertaken, in very difficult circumstances.

Other regular communications activity includes, weekly updates to Town and Parish Councils, as well as twice weekly telephone conferences with local councils, and regular updates to our strategic partners. We have produced an electronic community pack for local councils which contains a wealth of information to help them respond locally.

We have also sought to improve communication with some specific groups of young people as a result of virtual video visiting. Generally speaking the older children seem to prefer this method of communication once they can be persuaded to use it. Social workers have reported having more detailed and helpful interactions as a result.



In particular, children and young people who are on the autistic spectrum have really responded well to talking with their social workers using video and a whole range of modern technology. It has also been the case that participation in formal meetings has improved for older young people. These outcomes are likely to result in some of this practice being retained after the emergency is over.



We are also working closely with our local foodbanks coordinating activity and encouraging donations through our wider communications and local marketing materials.

We have created a poster that can be used by anyone self-isolating, either with symptoms or because they are in the high risk category, to display in their front window or door.

It will let anyone visiting know why they may not be able to come to the door. These have been distributed through our local councils and other organisations.

<p>For more information</p>	<p>Roger Goodes, Service Director Policy and Communications Roger.goodes@buckinghamshire.gov.uk 07747 486750</p>
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