

Cllr A Fellows and Mr D Hinsley
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COUNCILLOR I COURTS
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Dear Councillor Fellows and David

We recognise that a lot of Solihull families are finding things difficult to manage this year. The Council works really closely with a range of organisations to offer support to all residents who are struggling financially. It is worth noting that free school meal entitlement is limited to those on Universal Credit and with an annual income of less than £7,000. We offer support to all families who need it and this could include those on more income but who are struggling to manage debts or those whose income has reduced due to Covid restrictions.

The Council offers support to residents and businesses in a number of ways including:

- Money advice - If someone has had a drop in income as a result of Covid-19 - including losing their job, losing contracts or a drop in household income because someone else in your household is self-isolating or in hospital, there is a lot of advice and support available. The money advice team can also support those people in debt or to manage rent payments.
- Self-isolating Payment Scheme and First Right of Appropriation of Funds - for those that have been told by the NHS to self-isolate on or after Monday 28 September 2020, either because they have tested positive for Covid-19 or have been in contact with someone who has tested positive, there may be entitlement to some financial support during a self-isolation period. Banks are not allowed to use the self-isolation payment - or any other benefit - to repay an overdraft. This is called - First Right of Appropriation of Funds.
- Support to access Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.
- Council Tax Reduction - For those people out of work, or on reduced pay or on a low income.
- Help to access other benefits including Housing Benefit, Universal Credit and Pension Credit and Council tax discounts and exemptions.
- We offer support to those in severe financial hardship or who are in crisis via the Council's Hardship Scheme.

- We provide support to anyone who is homeless or at risk of rough sleeping.
- We also provide support to Businesses, via our [Solihull for Success](#) Service; this includes help to claim for employees' wages through the [Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and](#) Bounce Back Loans Scheme for small businesses of up to £50,000.

More information about accessing this help and more is available online via <https://www.solihull.gov.uk/Resident/socialservicesandhealth/Coronavirus/Here2Help>

We work in partnership with a range of voluntary and community sector organisations across the whole of Solihull and have commissioned a Community Wellbeing Service which is run by Age UK and provides a range of support services to Carers, people with disabilities, those with addictions and more.

We are also a keen and active supporter and investor in the Borough's foodbank provision, having already provided £100,000 of funding for organisations like Helping Hands and setting aside a further £100,000 to ensure food supplies remain available for the rest of the financial year. This will be providing essential food throughout the school year, holiday periods and the coming lockdown to anyone who needs it, as soon as they need it.

In addition to this financial investment, we have assisted with the procurement of supplies to ensure that where needed food purchases can be made at scale, allowing more food to be purchased for more households than might otherwise have been possible if organisations were acting alone. This has been complemented by work also done by the Community Development Team to facilitate mutual aid – enabling and facilitating the sharing of resources and practices across groups and organisations providing food support to households, as well as promoting the profile of and donation opportunities to them.

Accessing the food which is available through the Borough's foodbanks, like Helping Hands, can be arranged directly through a referral from Solihull Connect. The staff has access to information about free school meals eligibility and can fast track callers to help and support with food. They can also introduce households to other help and support available in the Borough, which is being regularly identified and updated by the Community Development Team. More information about accessing this help is available online via <https://www.solihull.gov.uk/Resident/socialservicesandhealth/Coronavirus/Here2Help/Helpwithfood> and will also be included in a "Stay Warm, Stay Safe, Stay Well and Stay Connected" booklet which will be delivered in November to approximately 30,000 homes.

One of the Council's priorities is "taking action to improve life chances in our most disadvantaged communities" and whilst we've done a lot this year we are continuously looking for opportunities to expand on what we can do to meet this aspiration. This is why we have been working with organisations like the Kingshurst Rainbow Alliance to explore how buildings like The Space can be brought into use for the benefit of the local community. There are, however, important statutory and regulatory conditions we need to ensure are complied with as part of any decision to open the building, particularly the restrictions and guidance being implemented to reduce and prevent the spread of Covid-19.

Discussions have already taken place with Kingshurst Rainbow Alliance to undertake important risk assessments and to ensure that mandatory requirements like public liability insurance and operating policies and procedures are in place. The national lockdown being implemented from 5th November to 2nd December may place additional restrictions on what might be possible in the immediate future, but can be explored further once detailed guidance has been issued by the government, and Kingshurst Rainbow Alliance have provided us with the documents and assurance requested from them.

I have been keen to expand our capacity to work with more local organisations and communities on initiatives and projects to support those in need. Our new Head of Stronger Communities will be working on this. Something which we are now looking at and which we would welcome support and interest from potential partners in the Borough, is the scope to develop a local holiday activity and food programme which aligns with and connects to the government's national programme (of the same name). This would be starting with the upcoming Christmas holiday period and aimed at ensuring that disadvantaged children, young people and their parents are able to access positive activities, healthy meals and support during school holiday periods.

As you may recognise this is more important than ever to also help close the development gap for some children and young people created by the pandemic.

I hope this explains more clearly the amount of work that the Council is undertaking to respond to those in need.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Ian Courts
Leader of the Council