

Brendon Bernard
District Councillor For Ditchingham and Earsham Ward.

Good afternoon Councillors

On 22nd Feb, the government published its roadmap out of the current lockdown in England.

The roadmap outlines four steps for easing restrictions. Before proceeding to the next step, the Government will examine the data to assess the impact of previous steps.

This assessment will be based on four tests:

- The vaccine deployment programme continues successfully.
- Evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths in those vaccinated.
- Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations which would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS.
- The assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new Variants of Concern.

There will be a minimum of five weeks between each step: four weeks for the data to reflect changes in restrictions; followed by seven days' notice of the restrictions to be eased.

You can find more information by visiting: gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021/covid-19-response-spring-2021

Supporting residents

For the last week our Covid Support Advisors have been heavily involved in work to support the surge testing in Diss and Roydon, identifying the South African variant. The operation has been a great success with thousands of people living or working in the two parishes coming forward to be tested.

Out of a targeted population of 9,350, more than 5,000 residents were tested on the first day and only five days into a two-week programme we have already tested 7,376 people and had more than 6,000 results returned.

The CSAs have also been working alongside the DATS (District Asymptomatic Testing System) teams speaking to businesses in Hellesdon, Costessey and Wymondham, encouraging their workforces to get tested.

CSAs have also been deployed in key areas across both districts including Aylsham, Wymondham, Sprowston and Costessey continuing their good work on the ground, speaking to members of the public and maintaining the strong presence and messaging around social distancing and lockdown restrictions.

The demand for contact tracing continues to diminish. It is anticipated that there may be an increase in demand when schools return on 8th March.

Surge Testing

The recent emergence of the South African variant of the virus in Diss and Roydon has seen the Covid Response Team deployed over a seven- day week to administer, log and transport lateral flow tests. In total, 7,376 tests have been completed. The adult population of Diss and Roydon is 9,350. Tests were administered therefore to 83% of the target group.

Update on all Business Support Grants

Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) Addendum

The main development this week came on the back of the Government's Four Step Plan to coming out of Lockdown, with the announcement of further Local Restriction Support Grant payments. The allocations will allow us to make payments to those rated premises that are still required to remain closed under the current restrictions.

The 44 day allocation (covering the period 16th Feb – 31st March) totalling £5.1m was communicated to us on Monday evening. Eligibility checks were performed by the team(s) on Tuesday allowing £4.6m to be transmitted via BACS on Wednesday meaning that almost 2,000 recipients have their grant payment in their bank accounts today (Friday 26th February).

Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG)

We're still receiving applications to this scheme with officers continuing to assess and make awards where appropriate with ARG payments still being made on a daily basis.

The current activity levels within the ARG indicate that we will have hit our target to distribute 80% of our allocation before the end of March 2021.

Summary of the current position (main schemes) – Business Support Grants

Grant Scheme	No. Recipients	Awards Paid
Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) Addendum (all variants) 05/11/2020 – 01/12/2020 26/12/2020 – 04/01/2021 05/01/2020 – 31/03/2021	2,012	£12.9m
Closed Business Lockdown Payments	2,005	£8.9m
Additional Restrictions Grant	1,094	£4.4m

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