

Update from Surrey County Council April 2020

It is anticipated at the moment that the surge is likely to peak at around mid April although it is impossible to rule out the postponement of that . At the moment 34% of all beds in the system are still empty.

It is estimated that the current difficulties are likely to cost Surrey in the region of £50m. So far we have received help from the government in the region of £25m. We are still heading for a balanced budget in the 19/20 year but obviously these difficulties are more likely to have a greater effect on the year 20/21 . There is the promise of yet further help from the government but we have to factor in the loss of some income and the effect upon projected savings. The whole business of the budget for the new year will need to be reconsidered and reprioritised.

The distribution of personal protection equipment is now getting underway the government having given us a delivery in the last few days of 15 pallets of equipment comprising 40% of our allocation. These are to be distributed to frontline staff.

Surrey has negotiated the use of the facilities at Chessington for the testing of staff and a new testing facility is also opening up at Gatwick Airport .

Headley Court is now up and running and about to admit patients . It will be a 300 bed unit stepping up and stepping down from intensive treatment .

Some scheduled meetings have had to be postponed but the council is adapting very rapidly to the use of technology and we have had a number of meetings online. At the last full council meeting in March emergency powers were granted to the leadership to enable decisions to be made that would otherwise have required full council meetings. There is a very considerable body of support for online meetings and an informal full council meeting is being planned . This is obviously sensible at the moment but I am wary that it could be taken too far. The biggest problem of online meetings is the need for them to be open to the public. Live streaming can make them available but I take the view that one can go too far because it seems to me that the Democratic process should not only be open to public scrutiny but visible and high profile. Even now not every citizen in Surrey can manage the necessary IT. In addition when an issue commands a great deal of public interest the presence of concerned members of the public at the meeting has an effect on the chemistry and provides a safety valve . There is a place for IT but we minimise the need for traditional meetings at our peril.

There are contingency plans in place to reopen the community refuse facilities and there has been an increase in fly tipping . The government is urging the reopening of sites and as a result there is likely to be movement on the issue in the next week or so. Obviously any opening of sites is likely to be temporarily more restricted.

Remember, Surrey maintains a list of vulnerable people needing help and support and if you feel you should be on that list you can enquire through the website.

Ken Gulati
SCC
9th April 2020