

ASH

Special Community Issue

FOR YOU



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL



WITH STRONGER FAITH

Welcome

Welcome to this special edition of *Ashford For You* magazine, published at a time of unprecedented challenge for the residents of our borough, local businesses based in the area and everybody associated with Ashford. This special edition of the magazine replaces the planned 24-page summer issue and has been produced to provide you with an update on what the council is doing to help protect our residents and businesses during the Coronavirus pandemic.

I want to start by offering my heartfelt condolences to all those who have lost loved ones to the COVID-19 virus. As we see from the nightly news bulletins, this virus is indiscriminate in who it takes from us. It is a cruel and heartless intruder which has carried many of our family and friends away before their time. I speak on behalf of everyone at Ashford Borough Council when I say we are deeply sorry for your loss.

As tragic as these deaths are, many more lives have undoubtedly been saved by the lockdown and social distancing measures that were introduced across the UK in March. I'd like to thank everyone who has followed government advice. It's been a tough time for all of us, restricted largely to our homes, unable to see family and friends, deprived of the daily freedoms we have come to take for granted, sometimes despairing of the future.

But with grit and fortitude, teamwork and determination we will endure and we will beat the Coronavirus. Here in Ashford borough, if this crisis has taught us anything, it is that the community heartbeat is strong, that so many individuals and organisations and companies have pulled



together to meet the challenge head on, to help each other, to 'find a way' no matter how difficult the circumstances.

I am hugely proud that council staff have shown tremendous resilience, flexibility and, yes, humanity, to continue delivering essential frontline services to our residents, including some of the most vulnerable members of our society. Elected members of this council and others have represented their constituents with passion and determination. Others in the public sector have stood shoulder to shoulder with us as we strive to do our best for the people of Kent, while I am full of admiration for the amazing work of charities and others in the voluntary sector.

In this edition you will read more about how Ashford Borough Council has responded to the pandemic, marvel at examples of how communities and individuals have stepped up to the mark to help others, and find out where you can get more help and information if you need it.

Supporting local businesses has been a key objective for us because we need the borough's economy to bounce back strongly after this pandemic. With that in mind we were all cheered by the recent news that the £250m plan to transform the derelict Newtown Railway Works into a global film and TV hub is going ahead. The development will create 2,000 jobs and promises to be one of the most important economic drivers for the borough in the next few years and demonstrates the confidence that investors continue to have in Ashford – a massive boost for the area during these challenging times.

Thank you for reading this special edition of *Ashford For You*, I trust you find it informative and uplifting in equal measure. I hope the next issue of the magazine is published at a time when a greater sense of 'normality' has been restored to our lives.

Tracey Kerly
Chief Executive
Ashford Borough Council

Contents

Welcome and key messages	2/3
How the council has responded	4/5
Communities coming together	6/7
Where to get more information	8



Message from Cllr Gerry Clarkson Leader of Ashford Borough Council

Across the world nations have been experiencing this unprecedented health crisis as we are, here in Ashford. Our thoughts and condolences go out to all who have sadly lost family and friends.

In the borough of Ashford, our residents and businesses have faced a huge challenge from the Coronavirus, but by working together and all strictly abiding by the advice and direction being given by the government we can get through this.

Thank you all for observing the government's instruction to self-isolate and observe social distancing. By doing so we are playing our part in slowing the spread of the virus and helping our NHS to cope. Anyone who is not abiding by these rules is putting other people's lives at risk.

This is impacting on all of us, especially the most vulnerable, our elderly, those with health issues, people who have lost their income and families that are having to cope in these worrying times.

At the start of the outbreak, Ashford's Critical Emergency Resilience committee (ACER), our equivalent of COBRA, met and immediately introduced emergency plans. They set up the Emergency Support Group, which includes the Ashford Volunteer Centre and together they have been providing support to our communities. Tenterden Town

Council, our Parish and Community Councils have been using their local knowledge and have many volunteers greatly assisting those in their areas.

The Ashford Response Depot was quickly set up and has acted as a food distribution centre, supported by partners in the voluntary sector and Kent Fire and Rescue Services.

Our biggest priority has been to support vulnerable users of our services, and to ensure that no-one is left isolated. In this crisis we needed to provide assistance to many of our residents and to hard hit businesses.

On behalf of all members and officers of Ashford Borough Council, we extend our heartfelt thanks to all those in the NHS, the military, the emergency services and to the voluntary sector who have responded to the Coronavirus crisis.

Ashford has a strong heartbeat and this is the time for us all to work together in the face of these challenges. This has also been a time to think hard about our values and the way we operate, and I have little doubt that we will all learn from this experience.

We will come through this, we will reconnect with family and friends, we will enjoy our social interaction, we will rebuild our economy and yes, we will be a thriving community once again.

Message from Cllr Jenny Webb Mayor of Ashford

It was during Easter that I reflected on the fact that this Christian celebration contains a relevant message that can be embraced by all faiths during the current difficult times we all find ourselves living through.

It is a time of sadness and loss with the promise of hope and regeneration of life. It is truly a symbol of hope. The hope for a new tomorrow with a fresh approach to appreciation, kindness and consideration for those around us.

I want to say a huge thank you to those in the front line. From all the NHS staff, care workers, police, firefighters, refuse collectors, postal workers to the supermarket staff and drivers, the many volunteers, councillors and council officers who are all selflessly thinking of others before themselves during these unprecedented times. I am incredibly proud of you all and of the people across the Ashford borough.

I have heard of so many outstanding acts of kindness and compassion during recent weeks – it's most humbling. Individuals, families, groups, organisations and companies coming together for the good of our communities by giving

of their time, their supplies, their donations and most importantly their love.

During this distressing time, there is no diminishing the very real heartache and hardships being experienced by so many. With this, comes the difficulty in keeping positive therefore this enforced pause can offer each of us the chance to stop and reassess what really matters in our lives. Our family and friends, our safety, health, security and our home – all become the focus.

I know we have been mainly confined to our homes but let us look forward and enjoy the coming of summer days, the new growth and exciting colours that our flora and fauna will provide to lift our spirits and confirm that we will all come through this trying time together. Remember the rainbows!



Cllr Mrs Jenny Webb
Mayor of Ashford

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Get in touch! To comment on this magazine, to tell us what you'd like to see more of and maybe to submit an article of your own:

Email: media@ashford.gov.uk (subject line NEWS) or

Write to: Ashford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent, TN23 1PL

www.ashford.gov.uk/ashford-for-you/



How we have responded

The council started planning a response for Coronavirus before the official lockdown was announced, working with partners to ensure we were able to support our most vulnerable residents. Staff who were not needed to deliver business critical services were redeployed to help, and residents were keen to get involved, with community groups offering their support. Our response has included...

Harnessing the power of community groups

One of the first things we did to help residents was work with Ashford Volunteer Centre to match voluntary groups with people who needed support. Staff in the Customer Contact Centre took calls from anyone who needed help, and they were matched with groups working with AVC in their area. Forms were put online for community groups and individuals to sign up to say they could help, so we could collate a picture of which areas of the borough needed more support.

Supporting our businesses

When the government announced grants and support schemes to support businesses, our Revenues and Benefits team put in place a simple process for firms to apply for the grants. Our Economic Development team posted regular updates online and sent out weekly emails updating on ways the council could help.

The first payments were made on 3 April, with more than 1,000 applications in the first few days of the form going live. During April, weekly payments were made in response to valid applications, meaning small businesses got much-needed assistance to help them stay afloat.

We were given £30m from the government to pay out to our businesses, with an estimated 2,500 in the borough who could be eligible for payments. The team is also working on the government's discretionary grants fund. If you're a business owner and think you might be entitled to help visit www.ashford.gov.uk/coronavirus-advice-for-businesses.

Businesses were grateful for the speedy payments...

"The idea of closing our business before it even actually settled down worried us a lot. We have been waiting the whole year for spring to arrive, which would have been

our peak season. On 3 April we received our grant, as it was promised. Which gave us a relief to not worry about ongoing bills and rent for a couple of months. We are looking forward to serving when the restrictions are over. Thanks to the council for their immense work."

"Thanks for all the hard work you're doing to help keep us businesses going – appreciate that too."

Helping our hard-working charities

The many charity groups who have done a great job offering their help are themselves feeling the effects of reduced financial support. They needed extra funding to enable them to carry on their good work.

We announced a grant programme for these groups, and within weeks had given tens of thousands of pounds to dozens of not-for-profit organisations who were doing vital work, including Ashford Volunteer Centre, Tenterden Social Hub and Pilgrims Hospices.

Beth Peal, Chief Executive at AVC, said: *"This funding makes so much difference at this challenging time. We were thankful for the intervention by the council and are pleased it has taken steps to join forces with the voluntary sector. We are glad we can continue to provide support to those who need it most."*

Smaller grants were also given to other groups, including The Hygiene Bank, who provide basic hygiene products for vulnerable individuals and families.

The Hygiene Bank's Rachel Plumb said: *"Reaching the most vulnerable members of our community has never been more important. This grant enables us to ensure that those living in poverty have access to the basics and are able to have a dignified life, critical at these most troubling times."*

Community champions

Do you know someone who has done amazing things to help people during this challenging time?

In partnership with Loveashford, we are launching the Ashford Applause – a way of honouring local community champions on a weekly basis.

This is your opportunity to nominate someone going above and beyond currently, and win them a fantastic prize!

Read more about the campaign and make your nominations here: www.ashford.gov.uk/ashfordapplause



Ashford Response Depot



Ashford Borough Council set up a depot to deliver urgently needed parcels of food and other household essentials to vulnerable residents living in the borough.

The depot contained a range of essential food, cleaning items and toiletries that were either donated by supermarkets or bought with funds supplied by the council or donated to the VERA appeal.

It was run by council officers (doing things different to their day jobs) who talked to residents, found supplies, made up the boxes of household essentials, and delivered them to those who need it most. Kent Fire and Rescue assisted with deliveries and staff have been humbled to see what a difference the work made to people's lives.

Here are some of the lovely comments from residents who received these parcels of food and other essential supplies:

"Well done for the difference you have been making to so many!"

"I just wanted to say a quick but most grateful thank you as I received my food parcel, which put a tear in my eyes to know that humanity and community spirit still exist in times of need."

"Many thanks for making contact with me, it's very reassuring to know the council have set up provision to assist during this difficult time."

"Box arrived this afternoon, what a difference it makes, I can quite easily live on that for a week. I would like to thank the volunteers and people who make this possible for people like us but do not know where to write to can you tell me?"

"I received my food parcel this morning with everything in it that we spoke about only yesterday, I am deeply humbled by your response and like to say a big thank you to you and your team."

What do I do if I need help?

- Call: 01233 331111 and press 4
- Visit: www.ashford.gov.uk/coronavirus
- Email: help@ashford.gov.uk

VERA is there to help



At the beginning of the pandemic, it became clear that certain communities would be affected more than others. Our vulnerable residents and those on shielded lists who were and continue to self-isolate, became our priority. How could we help them when they needed it most?

Getting the food and supplies required by these people to survive is vital, and while many deliveries were being made free of charge, we realised that this wasn't sustainable in the long term. So we launched VERA – the council's Voluntary Emergency Response Appeal.

Ashford is a borough that prides itself on caring for its community, and this appeal will support those who need it most during this unprecedented and continually challenging time. Money raised will help to:

- Keep supplies coming into the Ashford Response Depot, from which we are busy distributing free food parcels to our most vulnerable residents, as identified by the NHS. A standard box going out is worth £15 and contains ambient foods as well as fresh fruit and veg, chilled products and household essentials as required.
- Give extra financial support to voluntary community groups, who are working hard to care for those who need it most.

Every penny raised will be spent locally to help people through this critical time. Giving whatever you can will make a big difference. Please go to:

www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/donate-to-vera

Website tailored to you...

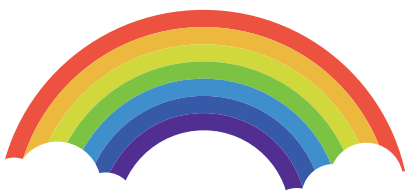
The council was quick to create a website presence in response to the pandemic - www.ashford.gov.uk/coronavirus. We signposted to the NHS, Public Health England and the gov.uk website to enable people to find the most up-to-date information in a fast-changing climate.

The homepage has a prominent update that provides visitors with key information and links to our Coronavirus section, organised so that residents, businesses and community groups can all find help and advice tailored to them.

We have a host of wellbeing advice and you'll find information on community groups and the work they are doing. Maps have been built so you can find help that is local to you and our service disruption page is updated to reflect the services that are still being carried out by the council.

We also have information about local businesses that are providing home deliveries of food and essential supplies as well as details about food banks in the area.





Stronger together

The response to the crisis from individuals and groups within our communities has been incredible. People have not only stepped forward to help their friends and neighbours but also complete strangers – we herald their community spirit! Here are just a few of the many inspirational stories...



Chris Kimrance collecting food from Bookers to stock up the Ashford Vineyard foodbank.

Ashford Sings!

Around 90 households joined an online rehearsal of Ashford Sings! choir as a way of connecting with many families in lockdown and helping reduce isolation. Ashford Vineyard sponsors the choir.

Ashford Vineyard – which has been working in partnership with the Ashford Response Depot set up by the council to deliver food parcels to shielded people self-isolating in their own homes – has also been giving away hundreds of food parcels. In a single week it gave away over £600 worth of food.

The generosity of strangers...

At the beginning of the pandemic, borough councillor Heather Hayward, who represents the Roman ward in Ashford, appealed for volunteers to help and nearly 30 people quickly signed up and their details circulated to all 1,200 houses in the area. Each 'zone' has its own WhatsApp group and soon people who have lived a few doors from each other were talking to each other for the first time!

The response has been incredible. A 19-year-old decided to cut the grass of his four neighbouring houses. All four houses are self-isolating and he did the lawns for them, wanting nothing in return. The landlord of the Queen's Head pub in Kingsnorth (pictured) donated food to local families.

One volunteer, Arwen said: "The generosity of strangers has meant that two struggling families have benefitted from government food parcels that they didn't qualify for but were donated to them by somebody who felt they wanted someone else to benefit."



Helping in Tenterden

More than 230 volunteers are part of Helping in Tenterden (HIT), which is made up of different groups including the Town Council, St Mildred's Church, Tenterden Social Hub, Tenterden Community Hub, My Tenterden and Ivy Court Surgery.

HIT has a helpdesk manned 8am-2pm seven days a week. The main requests for help are for collecting prescriptions and shopping.

The HIT admin help desk team has a great range of skills which are being put to good use – IT, graphics, social media, transport and administration to name but a few.

HIT has been in regular contact with Parveen, the owner of Breton Court care home in St Michaels, and he asked for colouring in photos from children and these were delivered there. HIT also supplied Parveen with a link to a YouTube video – A walk through Tenterden in 1980, made by Sue Ferguson, to show residents. Guaranteed to stimulate conversations and make up for family not being able to visit. Sue is also working on a walk through Tenterden in Spring 2020.



Montage of rainbows designed for the Wye Facebook page by Jasper Bouverie

Our Place Wye

The response in Wye has been managed by the Our Place Wye management group and has centred around the Facebook group of the same name. Facebook was instrumental in the initial recruitment of 60 shopping and prescription volunteers and has also provided co-ordination for a number of lockdown-supportive activities. Resident Catherine Bradley has organised the sending of over 100 letters to residents at Brambles care home, and KCC community warden Richard Sinden has set daily brainteasers and weekly treasure hunts for children to do on their daily exercise. He's now aiming to challenge residents to build their own model boats out of waste materials or to grow the largest sunflower.



Hub of the community

Although the Jean Mealham Pop-in Centre, a meeting place for the over 50s in Woodchurch, closed its doors during the pandemic, every Wednesday Richard Carley has been cooking a hot meal for its regular visitors and delivering it to their door.

More than 50 registered volunteers have stepped forward and support for the community has been co-ordinated through the Woodchurch HUB. With around a third of villagers classed as 'at risk', an emergency support helpdesk was created.

Anyone receiving government food parcels but who doesn't need them is donating to their foodbank. Most of their volunteers have been involved in shopping and collecting prescriptions and acting as a trusted face on the doorstep.

Dog walking in Hamstreet

Hamstreet Community Comes Together and surrounding villages was created when the announcement for vulnerable people to isolate was made. Leaflets were delivered to every home offering their help to shop, collect prescriptions and chat.

People from different streets volunteered for their area. Food was donated for the local foodbank (neighbouring villages Ruckinge, Warehorne and Kenardington also make donations), volunteers collect prescriptions and shop for people who need help and there's even a dog walking facility.

School making PPE for the frontline

The Norton Knatchbull School has been making personal protective equipment (PPE) for those working on the front line. Design and Technology teachers in schools across the country have been making visors and the NKS has been involved.

The school has been working with an approved design and while it's not intended to be used in place of a surgical visor, it provides more protection than no visor at all, so offering comfort to those working on the front line.

AVC "humbled" by response

Ashford Volunteer Centre (AVC), which has partnered with the council to co-ordinate the volunteer response to the pandemic, has not only dealt with 400 requests from people wanting to help, but they've been supporting the many informal neighbourhood volunteer groups that have been established.

"The response has been phenomenal," says CEO Beth Peal. "We've been humbled by the way the voluntary sector has come to together to support those most in need. This has brought out the very best in people and it's heart-warming to

Crafting skills in High Halden

The wonderful ladies of High Halden Craft Club gave packs of Easter craft materials out to children in the village from a table outside St.Marys Church. More than 40 packs were picked up as families took their daily exercise.



Lightbites hits the road

Staff at the Lightbites café, run by the Beaver Community Trust, have been providing dozens of takeaway meals to local residents, with a volunteer provided by the South Ashford Baptist Church delivering the meals to people that cannot get out to collect them. They are also giving out food boxes which are normally collected from the Willow Centre in Brookfield Road.

The café received a boost when staff at the Everest Inn restaurant gave up their time to prepare the meals for 65 people that were then distributed by the Lightbites café. Big thanks to Jeeb and his staff for doing this and helping to bring the community together and showing that Ashford cares.



Everest Inn manager Jeeb Pandey and his executive chef Shanker Pandey are pictured with Sharon May and Rose Horton at the café.

More than 1,000 visors have been made and all donated to local care homes, hospitals, The Pilgrims Hospice and doctors' surgeries. The school has had orders for many hundreds more. This fantastic number has been achieved thanks to the generous donations of materials from parents, Start Plastic in conjunction with Crown Plastics, Wye.

If you know of any organisation which could make good use of these visors, email **Sarah Neale** at sneale@nks.kent.sch.uk

know that across the borough we have 2,500 amazing 'helpers' including almost 400 first-time volunteers."

AVC's usual services have had to adapt. Volunteers who once visited elderly, isolated people in their homes are providing a friendly chat on the phone, or regular letters.

If you are interested in helping AVC email contact@ashfordvc.org.uk

Volunteer Centre
Ashford

Where To Get Help

Key information and contacts

For the latest information on Coronavirus and how our services are being delivered in different ways or if you need additional help or support then head to the dedicated section on our website.

Visit: www.ashford.gov.uk/coronavirus

You can also get in touch via email:

For the usual enquiries email: customer.care@ashford.gov.uk

For enquiries related to Coronavirus email: help@ashford.gov.uk

If you do not have access to a computer you can still call us on 01233 331111 and choose Option 4.

Disruptions to our services

The Coronavirus has impacted some of our core services but you can keep up to date with the latest changes to our services by visiting:

Visit: www.ashford.gov.uk/coronavirus-service-disruption

Are you a business?

In our business section you'll find:

- How to complete the online form to apply for a business rates grant
- Information and updates on business support schemes (including job retention scheme, small business grants, VAT deferral, bank support and more)
- Links to the latest government guidance for businesses
- Information and FAQs for common questions

Visit: www.ashford.gov.uk/coronavirus-advice-for-businesses

Are you a community group or volunteer who would like to get involved?

Community groups:

If you would like us to promote your work on our website then head to the link below to complete the relevant form to enable us to list you, your activities and contact details on our site.

Individual volunteers:

If you would like to volunteer then there is a form you can complete on our website. Ashford Volunteer Centre will then get in touch with you to provide potential volunteer groups you can contact and join in your area.

Visit: www.ashford.gov.uk/coronavirus-help-for-the-community

For the latest official advice on the Coronavirus pandemic visit:

The UK Government's website:
www.gov.uk/coronavirus

NHS:
www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/

Are you an individual or family in need of help and support?

We have a dedicated section on our website which has the following advice:

- Staying safe and avoiding scams
- Looking after your mental and physical health
- Advice for vulnerable residents
- Support for children
- Domestic abuse help
- Financial advice

Visit: www.ashford.gov.uk/coronavirus-looking-after-yourself

Food delivery

Many local businesses are now offering a home delivery service for your essential shopping, including groceries, prepared meals and pet food. To find a supplier or a food bank in your area visit: www.ashford.gov.uk/food-and-essential-supplies



And finally...

Ashford Borough Council has its very own Voluntary Emergency Response Appeal (VERA) to help communities hit by the Coronavirus outbreak. This fund aims to support local people during this time of crisis. Every penny raised will be spent locally to help our residents through this critical time.

Visit: www.ashford.gov.uk/donate

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