

**COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT
TO
ALL PARISH COUNCILS
IN PETERSFIELD HANGERS**

1 DECEMBER 2020

1. Extra funding from Government to support vulnerable families with meals

I mentioned last month that Hampshire County Council had moved early to ensure that free school meals would be available to vulnerable families throughout the half term and holidays. On 9 November, the Government then announced a £170 million winter funding package. £2.89 million of this funding will come to Hampshire. The funding will provide further support to the most vulnerable children and families - including providing free meals to disadvantaged children during the Christmas holidays. The funding package comprises three schemes:

- The Covid Winter Grant Scheme funding will support children, families and the most vulnerable over the season.
- The Holiday Activities and Food programme will be extended to cover the Easter, summer and Christmas breaks in 2021.
- Healthy Start payments will increase from April 2021 to help expectant mothers and those with young children on low incomes and in receipt of benefits to buy fresh fruit and vegetables.

2. Training for Lengthsmen to work on the Highway

Both the County Council and Parish Councils greatly value the role of the Parish Lengthsmen. The scheme allows quick response to localised issues. HCC is keen to extend some of the work which Lengthsmen can do on the highway and are offering **Traffic Management Training** which will enable Lengthsmen to work under the appropriate safety requirements.

The training will allow the Lengthsman to erect basic traffic management signage and then work within the live carriageway on low speed roads. Currently the Lengthsman are not permitted to work within the live carriageway, only on footways and verges. The funding for all Lengthsmen for next year was confirmed on 19 November by Executive Member Cllr Rob Humby.

3. HCC Tree Strategy

Hampshire County Council has published a Tree Strategy. It is a very readable document and, for those interested in trees, I would say that it is worth a read. To accompany this new strategy, Hampshire County Council has made a commitment to plant 1 million trees by 2050. There is a commitment to working with partners and residents in the Strategy. Here is a link:

<https://documents.hants.gov.uk/environment/tree-strategy.pdf>

4. Verge cutting in 2021

I would like to clarify the HCC approach to verge-cutting. I have recently had a long conversation with the HCC Officer responsible for these matters.

There are two types of verge cut: the annual 1m cut and the biennial 3m deep cut (every other year).

Annual Cut

The Annual Cut is primarily aimed at maintaining pedestrian refuge points and visibility. Parish Councillors will recall that HCC undertook the annual verge cut early in 2020 as an experiment (around April). There was not universal approval for this, and I did pass on the feedback I received from Parishes. However the consensus seems to be that the early cut experiment was successful; Plantlife and County Botanist Nicky Court have been involved in the assessment process and they are apparently satisfied that the biodiversity of the verges did benefit from the early cut. A final decision on whether to undertake the cut early again next year will be taken in January but at this time it does seem that this is likely.

Biennial Deep Cut

The Deep Cut is aimed at preventing the formation of scrub which could negatively impact the Highway network, pedestrian safety and wildflower growth. The 3m Deep Cut used to take place every three years. In 2020 the frequency changed to every two years on the advice of Plantlife. The 3m Deep Cut will always take place at the end of the season, around October. **This means that every other year, all Parishes will get two cuts.**

I hope that is helpful clarification.

5. Hampshire chosen for innovative pilot offering regular testing to family members for safer care home visits

A number of care homes across the Hampshire County Council area will be taking part in an innovative new national scheme to support family visitors to have regular Covid-19 tests in order to visit loved ones more safely. Hampshire is one of only three areas in England chosen to take part in the pilot ahead of a wider roll-out nationally.

Regular testing will be offered to one family member or friend per resident, which – when combined with other infection-control measures such as PPE – will support more meaningful visits. The aim is to enable, where possible, indoor visits without a screen to take place while reducing the risk to care home residents, staff and visitors.

For more information visit: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pilot-for-family-members-to-get-regular-testing-for-safer-care-home-visits>

RUSSELL OPPENHEIMER
County Councillor for Petersfield Hangers