Council customer service staff have put an enormous amount of work in over the last week to ensure we have the infrastructure in place to support people at this time, for which I am extremely grateful.

#BeKind, Stay at Home campaign
To encourage people to follow the social distancing guidelines we’ve launched our #BeKind, Stay at Home campaign. The recent announcement by the deputy chief medical officer, suggesting that the country may need to practice social distancing measures for the next 3-6 months, demonstrates why the campaign is really important

Community Hubs
I’m pleased to say our seven community support hubs are now up and running, aligned with our Service Delivery Footprints (SDF) and coordinated by the SDF managers. The hubs work with existing Voluntary, Community Sector organisations to identify opportunities to support residents with specific needs, and through support from their volunteers.

The Hub that serves Ashton, Golborne and Lowton is based in Ashton Library. In Golborne and Lowton West the councillors have contacted all the community groups and have compiled a list of vulnerable residents and volunteers. These names have been passed to the Hub and volunteers are now supporting vulnerable residents across both Golborne and Lowton wards. The councillors themselves continue to add to the list when contacted by residents. We also provide residents with regular news and updates and support vulnerable residents.

Vulnerable Residents
We now have a self-isolation welfare support service in place, with a dedicated helpline set up for vulnerable people who don’t have help from friends or family. For vulnerable residents in self-isolation, who do not have support from family members, friends, or other council services, a dedicated service has been set up to help them get what they need, whether that’s medical supplies or food.

We’re encouraging people to complete a self-referral form on our website – direct link here or it can be accessed through our Be Kind page: www.wigan.gov.uk/bekind

People can refer themselves or someone they know who may need our support. Those with no internet access can call 01942 489018 between the hours of 9am-5pm Monday to Friday.

Staff will be distributing a card with this number on to all properties who currently have an assisted bin collection this week as they will likely need our support. Additional cards have been ordered for members, please email: pr@wigan.gov.uk to request some.

Volunteer coordination
We are looking for: Emergency response volunteers’ who can support vulnerable people, are registered with the local authority or volunteer centre, DBS checked and have received training or instruction and ‘Good neighbours’ who might take a volunteering role which does not take them into direct physical contact with the most vulnerable (e.g. helping pack food at food banks or buying food for those who are self-isolating). Residents will be able to sign up using a form on our website – we will let you know when the sign-up form is ready. Guidance on how volunteers can stay safe by following public health guidelines while working in the community is available through this link.

Council tax support
There is lots of information, advice and FAQs at www.wigan.gov.uk/CVCouncilTax which we’d encourage residents to access. Although it is important residents continue to pay council tax during this period, support is available for those struggling. We have currently stopped all recovery of council tax for those in arrears, and information is being sent to those with missed payments offering advice and additional supportive measures.

**Business rates support**

Again, there is lots of up-to-date information and guidance on the council’s website at www.wigan.gov.uk/CVBusinessrates. We will be contacting affected businesses as soon as possible. We are encouraging any other businesses who are struggling to pay their business rates to contact us so we can look at any further measures we can take to support them.

**Support with rents**

Staff are working with tenants on an individual basis from a welfare point of view to ensure they are supported with their rents at this time. We have also suspended notices seeking possession and any further enforcement action including court and evictions for three months.

**Household waste recycling centres and bin collection services**

The borough’s three waste and recycling centres have closed today in line with the government’s restrictions around avoiding non-essential travel. Our bin collections team are doing a fantastic job and we’re one of a few local authorities to still be operating a full recycling service. This is reviewed on a daily basis and could of course change. But our workforce is on standby, ready to step in to cover essential services as and when needed.

**Redeployment update**

Our emergency response team is working to ensure staff are deployed to support our most essential services in order to maximise and strengthen our response effort. Some employees, including those who manage the borough’s parks, have already been redeployed to support key teams.

**Brighter Borough funds**

Our public relations team has issued a press release to the local media today with details of the relaxed Brighter Borough guidelines and advised residents to contact you directly if they would like to help an application. Please share your stories with the team by emailing pr@wigan.gov.uk. If members would also like to support local organisations and charities, such as foodbanks, they liaise directly with the SDF teams in their localities so we can ensure the effort is coordinated.

**Free parking for NHS staff**

Working with the government, we will be offering free parking to NHS workers and social care staff for the duration of the Covid-19 outbreak. Its vital staff are able to carry out their work at this crucial time without having parking concerns. The Galleries car park will also now be closed.

**Parks and greenspaces**

Last weekend GMP reported a number of people at Pennington Flash who were not following the social distancing guidelines. New signage has been designed and will be installed across our sites to ensure residents use our greenspaces safely.
Poster competition
Lots of our young residents have been leaving pictures on our bins thanking our crews. To return this small act of kindness we’ll be entering all these into a competition and will also be distributing crayons and paper to keep them busy over the next few weeks.

Key worker childcare provision
The advice on how to further limit the spread of Covid-19 from government states that if children can stay safely at home, they must, to limit the chance of the virus spreading. Our schools, and all childcare providers, are therefore being asked to continue to provide care for a limited number of children - children who are vulnerable, and children whose parents are critical to the Covid-19 response and cannot be safely cared for at home. We have asked all childcare providers to update their details on our Family Directory, with whether they are still open, and have spaces available for children of key workers. Families can visit https://clicktime.symantec.com/3GeSDXWfECDTQ3dLUh7Qi2c6H2?u=www.wigan.gov.uk%2FFamilyDirectory or email fsd@wigan.gov.uk if they need support to find a place.

Free school meal voucher scheme
Parents, guardians and carers of children usually eligible for free school meals can now access a national voucher scheme, which will allow their children to continue accessing free meals while at home. Schools are able to provide every eligible child with a weekly shopping voucher worth £15 to spend at supermarkets as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Government guidance says that schools should continue to provide meals for collection or delivery themselves. Where this is not possible, the new scheme will allow schools to provide vouchers to families electronically or as a gift card for those without internet access.

Mental health support
As a priority Public Health teams are reviewing what provision is currently in place to support people’s mental health during the outbreak. Working with health partners we’ll be sharing more resources for people to access support. In the meantime, we’ll be sharing the Greater Manchester Shine a Light on Suicide campaign to direct people to the Samaritans.

Culture at your fingertips
With us all spending more time at home, cultural organisations have been hard at work to find alternative ways for us to experience theatre, dance, museums and galleries. Arts Council England has invested £160m into a support package so you can access virtual tours and theatre from your sofa. Experience culture at your fingertips with the below links:

· The National Gallery virtual tour;  Sadler’s Wells Digital stage; National Theatre at home; Royal Opera House Programme;