

Message from Cllr John Lodge, Leader of Uttlesford District Council – 9 April

I wanted to start this message by thanking you for sticking to the government's advice to stay at home and around social distancing. We know we live in a beautiful area and with the Easter weekend upon us it is tempting to want to venture outside – please don't unless it is absolutely necessary. It's so important we all continue the same level of self-discipline that we've shown in the past few weeks. We all must do what we can to prevent the spread of this virus to keep all residents safe and well. Please – stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives.

As I write this message, we're approaching the end of week three of the national lockdown. It feels much longer as we adjust to this new way of living. Having been in self-isolation for almost three weeks myself, I know from experience that it's not easy to be apart from loved ones. Fortunately, modern day technology is great and I've been managing to stay in touch with family and friends, as well as with colleagues at the council. I don't think it has ever been more important to stay connected with each other.

We are continually inspired to see so many people stepping forward to volunteer to help others in their community, and we're delighted to support this wonderful effort. If you would like to find out how you can help, or if you or someone you know needs help rather than being able to give it at this time, please use the new Uttlesford Community Response helpline – 03333 408 218 or communityresponse@uttlesford.gov.uk. There is an expert team on hand to connect you with the most appropriate support services.

We also know that some residents may be facing financial challenges at this time. Please do not suffer in silence – whether you are a homeowner, a private tenant or a council tenant, there are a number of ways in which you can access help. You can visit the website to see what support is available, or get in touch by emailing uconnect@uttlesford.gov.uk or by calling 01799 510510.

By the end of this week the council will have given out about £9million of government grant money to around 800 small businesses. Many local businesses are in desperate need at this time which is why the council has been working hard on getting this money paid out as quickly as possible. There is more grant and relief

money to distribute and I'd encourage all those eligible businesses, if they haven't already done so, to register their details online at www.uttlesford.gov.uk/covid19-business-grants-fund for the funding to be processed.

Finally, I'd like to end this message with another word of thanks. This is to the hard-working and dedicated staff at the council, not just those that residents see on the frontline. It is taking a mighty effort, but I know they are going above and beyond to make sure essential services can continue to be provided for our communities at this difficult time. It makes me proud to be leading such a fantastic organisation.

Have a peaceful and happy Easter weekend.