

## **Covid-19 Local Alert Level for Tunbridge Wells**

**- Thursday 26 November 2020**

After this year's second lockdown (England) from 5 November to 2 December 2020 Tunbridge Wells, Kent, will be placed into Tier 3.

### **Update from William Benson, Chief Executive, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council:**

You will have seen the news that Tunbridge Wells, along with the rest of Kent, has been placed into Tier 3 of the Government's new three-tier system. I have attached a national list of which authorities are in which tier (by region) and also a poster setting out what Tier 3 means.

We are clearly very disappointed that the government has not listened to the case we made for Kent to be sub-divided into different areas or for the tiers to be applied on a district basis. Both Councillor McDermott and I and Greg Clark MP lobbied hard for the government to take a more granular approach given the size of the county, our position on the border of East Sussex, our historic and current rates of infection and the sensible approach taken by our residents and businesses. We also emphasised the importance of the pre-Christmas period for local retail and hospitality businesses (whilst retail premises can open under Tier 3, they are anxious about shopper confidence and footfall given that many hospitality venues and leisure attractions will be closed).

My understanding from briefings we have attended with government ministers and Kent Council Leaders/the Director of Public Health today is that the entire county was placed in Tier 3 for a range of reasons including the pressure being felt by increased rates of hospital admissions (here and elsewhere) and the positivity rate (which is above 4 per cent across the whole of the county). I understand that the government will be providing further data on why individual areas have been placed into particular tiers which we await with interest.

### **Impact on Council Services**

The impact on Council services will be as follows:

The Town Hall will remain as it is (open for those staff who cannot work from home).

TN2 and the TIC will remain closed. The Camden Centre will be closed to hirers but open for the nursery and support services (such as Pickering Cancer Trust and blood donations).

Leisure centres will reopen but there will not be any group activities or classes. Swim schools will restart. We are seeking clarification on whether Outdoor Gyms can re-open – our first reading of the guidance is that they can but we need to check the regulations (when they are published) to confirm this.

The Gateway will be open and take payments.

The Theatre and Ice rink will be closed in accordance with Tier 3 guidelines

Other Council services will continue to operate as throughout the lockdown period but there will be significant additional pressure upon some teams including Revs and Bens and Finance (managing business grants) and the Environmental Health, Communications and Economic Development teams (to name a few).

## **Impact on Council Finances**

Our placement in Tier 3 will clearly continue have a significant impact on the Council's finances. The impact includes both a loss of income (e.g. through car parks) and a significant hit to Council Tax and Business Rate income as well as additional costs in areas such as business and community support, Environmental Health and enforcement.

## **Impact on businesses and residents and support available**

The local businesses I have spoken to have been both surprised and disappointed by the decision. It is important to note that a number of premises will be able to open including all retail (essential and non-essential), leisure centres and personal care. Others will not including indoor entertainment venues, accommodation provers and hospitality (with the exception of takeaways and delivery). A number of local businesses were interviewed today and have appeared on Radio 4's PM programme and will be on The World Tonight on Radio 4 at 10pm.

We are doing everything we can to provide advice and support to local businesses. We are continuing to fund the Kent Business Hub and our Finance, ED and Revs and Bens teams are working hard to get grants associated with the current national restrictions out. As of this morning, we had already paid 313 mandatory grants to businesses (with a value of more than half a million pounds) and are working through applicants for the discretionary scheme. Businesses who are required to close from next week will be eligible for further funding and we will do our best to publicise and disburse these further grants.

December is clearly a key time for local business so it would be great if you could continue to use and promote initiatives to promote local businesses including [www.twchristmas.shopping](http://www.twchristmas.shopping) and [www.twdelivery.co.uk](http://www.twdelivery.co.uk).

We will also be providing support to vulnerable, isolated and disadvantaged residents including through the Covid Winter Grants Scheme and Test and Trace support payments. Residents can continue to contact us via our local numbers/email address/website or through the #KentTogether number.

We are also seeking to get further details of the various support measures available to Tier 3 authorities which were set out in the Covid Winter Plan ([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/937529/COVID-19\\_Winter\\_Plan.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/937529/COVID-19_Winter_Plan.pdf)) including additional funding of £4 per head of population (which is paid to KCC) and scaled up testing.

## **Review**

The measures will be reviewed on 16 December and we will clearly be pressing for our Tier 3 categorisation to be reviewed and, if the evidence supports it, to be brought into Tier 2.

We will also need to take a decision on whether to proceed with the Ice Rink and Pantomime. I will be discussing this with Cabinet tomorrow and Group Leaders next week.

We have updated our website to reflect the latest state of play and to provide information on where and how residents and businesses can get information and support.

Many thanks

William Benson

Chief Executive

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