

**Sevenoaks District**  
**Seniors Action Forum**

***Working together in the interests of people aged 50 plus***

Email: [comms@sdsaf.org.uk](mailto:comms@sdsaf.org.uk)

**April 2020**

***Message from the Chair***

Where did Brexit go? And climate change? And our concerns about local transport? Our world has suddenly changed dramatically and we are now focusing on what's essential to avoid a global threat. When it's all over and we take stock, much will have been learned and our physical, mental and spiritual strength will have been truly tested.

Meanwhile, our task is to stay safe and to support each other in any way we can. Some of us will need more support than others and it's great to see how, as a nation, so many people are reaching out with love and kindness. Please keep an eye on your immediate neighbourhood in case anyone has fallen under the radar (Have they put their bins out? Are they getting the care they need? Has anyone spoken with them recently?). If so please ring your local volunteer or any source of support if anyone is in need.

**The 24 hour Kent Together Helpline number is 03000 41 92 92.**

*A huge, heartfelt vote of thanks goes to all those involved in providing essential services at this difficult time: the NHS and care staff, all the key workers, local Councils, charities and their dedicated volunteers who are doing their utmost to ensure our needs are met.*

Meanwhile, spring flowers are smiling, trees are budding, birds are singing and Nature is reclaiming its place at this uplifting time of year. Let's be grateful for the blessings within each day, try new things, keep our bodies moving and spread happiness to others in any way we can.

With my very best wishes,  
*Eileen Murray Giles*

**Weathering the Winter Storms**

The frequent storms over the past few months are now a long-forgotten memory and didn't affect Kent area as badly as other parts of the country, but it did focus the mind on what would have happened had the power lines gone down or there was an interruption to supply.

You may be interested to know that National Power have a Priority scheme where people can register for extra help in the event of an interruption to their power supply. If you are of pensionable age or rely on electricity for medical or mobility reasons the Priority Services Team are there to provide you with extra support, giving you peace of mind if you have a power cut.

To register yourself, friend, neighbour or relative on National Power's Priority Services Register or to update your details, please visit [www.ukpowernetworks.co.uk/priority](http://www.ukpowernetworks.co.uk/priority) or telephone 105.

## Transport

### Important information for Essential Travel : Revisions to GO Bus Services

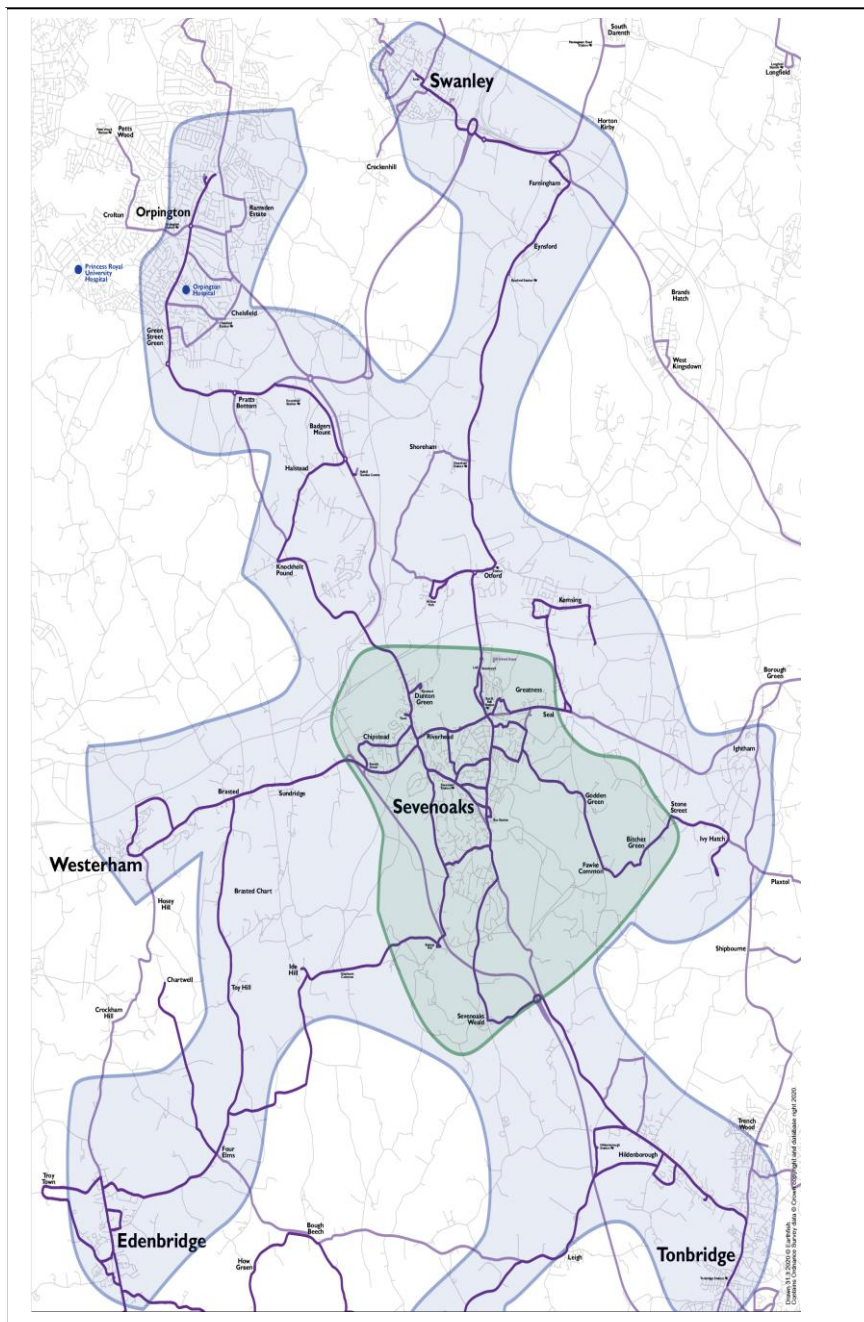
From Tuesday April 14th GO Coach suspended their current timetable and introduced a new bookable service called “**go2**”. This will cover most of the Sevenoaks District Council area and Tonbridge Town (as per map). It will also include the hospitals at Pembury, Orpington, Queen Mary’s Sidcup and the Princess Royal at Farnborough. A journey can be booked by telephone on 01732 463 964 or via the **go2 mobile app**. The service will be available Monday to Friday from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and on Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Payment will be by cash or by credit card if you are linked to the App. The current fare structure will apply, including concessionary fares, with a fixed cost of £5 per journey to the hospitals.

Pick up should take place within 30 minutes of your booking request at a point to be agreed with you as will the set down point for the return journey. Social Distancing and thorough cleaning of buses will be enforced. This service is for everyone who has to make essential journeys.

**For further information check [go-coach.co.uk](http://go-coach.co.uk) or call 01732 463 964 or [emailoffice@go2now.co.uk](mailto:emailoffice@go2now.co.uk)**

If you need to plan an essential journey going outside the district such as Darent Valley hospital you are best advised to use [www.traveline.info](http://www.traveline.info). Unfortunately they do not have a phone help line, but you could ask a friend or neighbour to do it for you. Or call GO as above or Arriva 0344 800 44 11 (M-F 08.00-17.00).



**Please pass this information on safely to anyone in your neighbourhood who may need to make an essential journey at this challenging time.**

**STAY AT  
HOME** 

**PROTECT  
THE NHS**

 **save  
lives**

## **THE COVID-19 VIRUS OUTBREAK**

As we have seen from the recent hospitalisation of the Prime Minister the Covid-19 virus can strike anyone, anywhere, no matter their age and status. We are all therefore being asked to help to reduce the spread of this illness by social distancing and other 'lockdown' measures. Anyone needing help is urged to make contact with any of the following, who will be more than happy to help:

### **KENT TOGETHER HELPLINE – 03000 41 92 92**

A 24 hour telephone helpline has been set up to support vulnerable people in Kent who need urgent help, supplies or medication. It provides a single, convenient point of contact for anyone in the County who is in need of help during the Covid-19 outbreak. KCC, central Government, District, Borough and local councils, the voluntary and community sector, the NHS and other partners are collaborating to ensure help is at hand for vulnerable people. It is also the place to report your concerns about the welfare of someone else. If you are vulnerable and have an urgent need that cannot be met through existing support networks, you can contact the Kent Together helpline at [www.kent.gov.uk/KentTogether](http://www.kent.gov.uk/KentTogether) or by calling on **03000 41 92 92** which is open day and night.

### **SEVENOAKS DISTRICT COUNCIL: 01732 227000**

Our District Council has set up a Local Support System to ensure those individuals self-isolating at home and who are without a support network of friends and family will receive basic groceries. Community pharmacies will support those who need help getting their medicines delivered.

To request help from a volunteer in your community please register with Sevenoaks District Council. Volunteers may be available to help with your shopping and other small tasks if you are in self-isolation or need assistance. Once you have registered, the Council will pass your details to 'Care for our Community - Sevenoaks' or another local community group who will match you to a volunteer. You can go on line to complete the registration form or alternatively, you can register by calling on **01732 227000**.

Every volunteer has a 'Community Volunteer' badge issued by the Council and each badge has a unique identity number and the SDC logo. If you want to check that a volunteer is genuine, please call the Council on 01732 227000 and quote the unique badge number. **Please do not give your bank card and pin number to anybody and do not give cash to a volunteer.**

To Volunteer to help people in your community and you are not in a high risk group, you can register as a volunteer. Volunteers can help people in self-isolation with their shopping and other small tasks. Once you have registered, your details will be passed to 'Care for our Community - Sevenoaks', or another local community group, who will match you to someone who has asked for help.

### **PLEASE WASH YOUR HANDS**

At the start of the outbreak the importance of frequent and thorough handwashing was emphasised and this advice has not changed. So please remember to thoroughly clean your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds..



## Reducing the effects of Isolation

This is a challenging time for all, with everyone across the U.K. having to adjust to the new way of living. The important thing to remember is that we are all 'doing our bit' by abiding by the rules and keeping ourselves and other people safe from harm. Various organisations are giving people the opportunity to register so that they can speak to a befriender and share their thoughts with them. So if you would like the opportunity to talk to someone why not give them a call?

## Involve Kent Befriending Service for Self Isolating People

The current Government rules have prevented many people from socialising at Lunch Clubs, church and other gatherings, so if you feel that you would like to have a friendly chat with someone why not register for the service being offered by Involve Kent on 03000 810005 (Option 5). There will be a short assessment of your needs and if appropriate they will offer you daily or weekly calls, or signpost you to other available services.

**Sevenoaks District Council Check in and Chat:** Sevenoaks District Council are developing a Check in and Chat telephone befriending service, and we will let you have more details in the next Newsletter. Meanwhile please do consider signing up for this service when it is launched, if you would like to receive a call or volunteer to ring someone to cheer their day.

## The Silver Line : 0800 4 70 80 90

The Silver Line, which was founded by Esther Rantzen, is a free confidential helpline providing information, friendship and advice to older people, open 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

## Keeping up to date with Local News

An accessible way to keep abreast of local news is BBC Radio Kent or another local radio station, especially if you do not have the internet.

## Praise & Thanks

**To all the Health and Social care organisations and the many volunteers who are doing their utmost to keep our communities safe and well, and to everyone in the population for strictly following Government guidance.**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>Maidstone &amp; Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust TADS</u> who provide a Therapy after Discharge Service supporting patients who return to their homes and need ongoing therapy and equipment installations.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>Spec Savers in Sevenoaks</u> for making a prompt referral to Ophthalmology at Maidstone Hospital, who then saw the patient promptly and referred them on to Moorfields Hospital in London for urgent eye surgery.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>South East Coast Ambulance Service:</u> Call handlers and staff, who are providing services with empathy and skill at a time when there is exceptional demand on their services.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>Dartford Gravesham &amp; Swanley CCG</u> for responding to our comments about the POD repeat prescribing service which was introduced in New Ash Green before Christmas. <i>Please give us your feedback as to how this is now working!</i></li></ul>

## Businesses Offering Home Delivery/Safe Pick up of Goods in the Area

A lot of local businesses need our support to keep going until this crisis has subsided. Many of them are now offering home delivery services, too numerous to mention here, but we will be posting details on our website.



## Finance

**State Pensions** increased by 3.9% this month - the biggest increase since 2012. This means that the old state pension (for those who reached state pension age by April 6 2016) will see the basic payment increase by £5.05 a week to £134.25. Those receiving the new state pension (who reached state pension age after this) will see an increase of £6.60 a week to £175.20. State pensions are still protected by the triple lock, meaning the amount paid is increased every year in line with inflation, average earnings or 2.5% - whichever is highest. Our Vice Chair was delighted to get a letter from HMRC advising him of a pension increase of 25p per week! - When he reaches his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. He's still pondering how to spend it....

### Overdraft Interest Rates Increased

Many of us don't bother to read the small print when the monthly bank statement appears either on line or in the post. However from April most of the banks will be increasing their interest rates on overdrafts- some as high as 39.9% - therefore you may wish to take action, if your finances allow, to reduce any outstanding overdrafts to avoid these increased charges. Some banks and financial institutions are temporarily changing their charges in response to the Covid-19 virus, therefore the planned overdraft rates may be subject to change.

### Royal Mail Postage Rate Increases

It's tempting to convert today's prices into 'old money' but nothing brings this more sharply into relief than the recently announced rises in the cost of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Class post. From Monday 25 March, the price of a first-class stamp for a standard letter rose to 70p, and the price of a second-class stamp for a standard letter increases to 61p. For those too young to remember in 1956 70p was equivalent to 14 shillings or 2 weeks' paper round money (or 7 pints of bitter) which costs about £28 today!

### Television Licences

It is still proposed to increase the T.V. licence this year for people over 75 who do not qualify for Pension Credit. Despite a petition by Age UK for the BBC to reconsider this it is still planned to go ahead. Owing to the Covid-19 epidemic the BBC have announced that they will defer the introduction of this measure until August 2020 (*correct at the time of going to print*) when the over 75s will be receiving a demand for £157.50. If you are on a low income it may be worthwhile investigating whether you are eligible to receive Pension Credit and Age UK are happy to help you to make an application. It goes without saying that scammers are sending emails about TV Licence renewals, to try and trick people into revealing their bank details so please ignore them!

### Getting access to money and paying for shopping

If you need advice on getting access to money and how to pay if someone else is doing your shopping, contact Age UK Tel:01732 454108 Email: [bob@ageuksevenoaksandtonbridge.org.uk](mailto:bob@ageuksevenoaksandtonbridge.org.uk)

## Scams & Pitfalls of Internet Searches – An A, B, C Guide

The telephone and internet seem to be a haven for those who would do us out of money unnecessarily or fraudulently, so please always follow the advice below:



- A- ***Never*** assume a caller, email or text is genuine.
- B- ***Never*** believe a caller, email or text is genuine.
- C- ***Always*** confirm by contacting a trusted number, family member, friend, your bank's fraud department or the police to check if it's genuine.

## Comments on KCC's Draft 5 Year Plan

Members of the Committee have been industrious on your behalf over the past months. We've attended the People's Panel at County Hall, looking at plans for Adult Social Care, corresponded with the Minister for Housing about the planning formula, and commented on Kent County Council's draft 5 Year Plan. We made various observations, and the following are a few of the areas we suggested KCC give priority to:

- better public transport
- planned infrastructure to support any new housing developments
- the need to provide more accessible/affordable/right-size homes
- for a Civil Society, the provision of public lavatories

In view of the plans for more housing across the county we pointed out the need for KCC to look at the bigger picture of electricity generation and additional water supplies. We look forward to reading the finalised 5 Year Plan when it is published to see how KCC have taken on board feedback from all those who submitted their views during the consultation.

## Housing

**Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) Local Plan:** There seems to be no resolution to the Planning Inspector's unexpected halt to the Local Plan (17 October 2019). An exchange of correspondence between SDC and the Inspectorate can be seen on the Council's web site, along with letters on this subject including one from the Forum's Committee. At this moment in time it seems that SDC are continuing to implement the delivery of 9,410 new dwellings between 2019-35, a shortfall of 1,902 on the Government's target of 11,312.

Since our first submission in February 2019 we have maintained that this target is too high as it was set using a flawed methodology. We have written to the Ministry of Housing and received a long-winded reiteration of the development of the formula with a final statement that "The information contained in these documents are the definitive Government position on local housing need and we are unable to expand this further". We have also made contributions to KCC's Select Committee on Affordable Housing and KCC's 5 Year Plan consultation. Throughout all our submissions we have consistently maintained that the Local Plan should be amended to provide at least 50% Affordable Housing, with more emphasis on rented and to include "social rented" and an increase in the amount of housing for older people. These views are based on Shelter's report of January 2019 and the Council's own Strategic Housing Market Assessment on which the Local Plan was supposed to be based. We will continue to campaign to ensure that we get the right number of houses in the right place to meet the needs of the local population.

## Health

**GP Appointments :** To protect both GP Practice staff and patients alike some consultations are taking place over the phone and where it is necessary for patients to attend surgeries these are being done on a pre-booked appointment basis. Ring your GP Practice to find out more detail of how to make an appointment. **Please do not turn up at your GP Practice for the time being as you will not be seen. If you have an urgent medical query telephone 111 or in an emergency dial 999.**

## Maintaining your health

Since the outbreak of the Covid virus there has been an unexplained drop across the country in A&E attendances for illnesses such as heart attack and stroke. Although this might be seen as good news it is causing concern amongst the medical profession that some conditions which need treatment are being 'missed' because people are wary of speaking up or do not want to put pressure on the system. It is therefore recommended that if you feel unwell you discuss your symptoms with a medical professional so that you can receive the appropriate treatment.

**World Health Organisation FAKE WEBSITES:** Please ensure that you access only genuine websites if you are seeking information about the Corona virus. Many scammers have taken the opportunity to capitalise on people's fears and set up imitation sites to gain access to your IT system. Also be very wary of websites offering Personal Protective Equipment, as some of these have been found to be fake and take your money but not deliver the goods.

**Hospital Appointments:** To cope with increased pressure in hospitals and to keep staff and patients safe some appointments are being carried out by telephone. Some patients whose appointments are not urgent have been sent letters advising them of a postponement of their consultation. If you have received a letter telling you of a postponement it would be wise to retain the correspondence and follow it up within a month or two.

**Car Parking at Pembury & Maidstone Hospitals:** The Trust are in the process of increasing the number of parking spaces at both sites which is good news. This should also benefit volunteer drivers around the district who give up their time to kindly transport patients and have in the past found it almost impossible to park. **However, at the present time there are likely to be restrictions on visits to all hospital sites, therefore it would be wise to check with your care provider before you travel with regard to access to the sites.**

### **Forward Plan & Be Patient and Understanding**

One of the consequences of the virus is that all services are experiencing staff shortages because their workforce either has the virus or someone in their household has it, making self-isolation necessary. So do make sure you order essential items in good time:

**Medicines:** The pharmaceutical 'supply chain' involves many people, starting with your request for a prescription, the authorisation of the medicine, the pharmacist ordering it, the medicine being delivered to the chemist before you can receive it. So please don't leave it to the last minute to make your request.

**Food:** We're all accustomed to a certain brand or type of food, but if someone is kind enough to get groceries for you and has had to substitute one of the items for another brand, please bear with them. There are still shortages in the shops of some items, mostly brought about by panic buying, but the retailers are doing their utmost to maintain supplies.

**Post & Deliveries:** The postmen and postwomen and delivery drivers are also experiencing both higher demand for home deliveries and also increased rates of illness, so things you send may take more time to get there and vice versa for things which you order by phone or on line.

**Blue Badge Renewals:** If you have a Blue Badge it might be worthwhile checking its expiry date. With few, if any, opportunities to make journeys it might be timely to request a renewal of your badge to give the authorities plenty of time to process it.

### **Health & Safety for DIY and Gardening**

Many of us now have time on our hands and are getting stuck into long-postponed household and gardening jobs. Enthusiasm sometimes overtakes our need for caution, but in the current climate everything we can do to reduce the need to either go to Minor Injuries, A&E or the need to call an ambulance would be welcomed.

Eye injuries can easily be sustained from carrying out DIY projects without the appropriate eye protection, resulting in damage to their vision. So please think about protecting your eyes if you are carrying out any projects or even painting to reduce the risk of injury.

Gardeners are also advised to ensure that they wear protective gloves to prevent scratches and infection and ensure that any canes in the garden have safeguards on the tips to prevent eye injuries.

## **The Joy of Capturing and Sharing Happy Memories**

Have you ever thought about writing your memoir? You have led a full life and have much to talk about. Things that those who will follow you would certainly not recognise. Why not try? Once you start you will find you cannot stop writing.

Some time ago I realised that, although I knew my grandparents very well, I had no knowledge of their day-to-day lives. So, I decided to write so that future generations would know what life was like for a member of the family at the present time.

How should I plan it? Well, I thought to structure the story around places where I had lived, feeling that this would logically cover the whole of my lifespan. Of course, there will be activities that cover several different places, e.g. family, career. But these passages can easily be sliced in.

We are told that as we get older, we should not look back. But I have found that on a wet winter's day, I am uplifted when adding a piece to my story. Often, I am writing about a period of my life when I was happy, e.g., when the children were tiny.

Another thing I found fascinating was the logistics of producing the text. When I retired, I did not even know how to type. I scrounged an old PC from my son and started to get to grips with Microsoft Word. At first, I found it very frustrating, but so rewarding when a result was achieved. So important for keeping our grey matter in order in retirement. So, why not have a go? You will not regret it!

*Our thanks go to Reg Glennon for this contribution*

## **Getting money from the Post Office, banks or building societies**

**Anyone who cannot leave home can ask a family member, trusted friend or volunteer to withdraw cash at any Post Office using a single-use voucher.** This scheme (called Payout Now) is being extended and also offered to all banks and building societies. If they agree to allow it, someone can ask for a one-time barcode voucher sent via text, email or post for a stipulated amount. A trusted friend or volunteer can exchange this voucher for the cash requested. Previously, only a named individual, such as a carer, could collect cash in this way on someone's behalf. Now any trusted neighbour or volunteer can do so.

The idea is to allow people who are shielded or self-isolating, mainly elderly, to maintain access to cash without having to hand over a debit card and PIN to somebody else. There have been reports of fraudsters offering to shop for people who cannot leave the home, but who steal any money they are given, or take money from accounts after a PIN is handed over.

You tell the Post Office, bank or building society exactly how much you want to withdraw from your account, up to a limit which they set, and allow a family member, trusted friend or volunteer to collect it on their behalf in exchange for the voucher. You should only use friends and volunteers who are completely trusted, you should only withdraw cash you really need, and you should not be put under any pressure to do so.

There is also a service that allows you to contact your bank and arrange to cash a cheque at a Post Office branch. Under the Fast PACE system, you should contact your bank and check you can use the service. You would then write a cheque to "The Post Office", print the name on the back of the cheque of the person collecting it for them and sign that side too. That individual can then collect the cash from a Post Office branch after their ID is verified. At its fastest, the whole process from the initial call to the cash being collected could take a day.

**To contact the Forum Committee email Eileen Murray Giles at : [chair@sdsaf.org.uk](mailto:chair@sdsaf.org.uk)  
or write to us "Sevenoaks District Seniors Action Forum", 22 Lambarde Road, TN13 3HT**

**SDSAF Website: [www.sdsaf.org.uk](http://www.sdsaf.org.uk)**