

Good Morning

I hope everyone is well and staying at home as much as possible. We also hope that our projects and Twitter updates are providing some sense of structure and togetherness at such a difficult time for everyone. I am receiving an awful lot of information from central and local Government at the moment and I wanted to try and condense some of this in to an update for you all as some of this information may be pertinent or helpful.

Update 1

Free School Meals:

This applies to families who have an entitlement, not to all children in F2 to Y2 who receive a free meal in school daily.

National voucher scheme launched for schools providing free school meals

Children eligible for free school meals can benefit from a national voucher scheme whilst they stay at home. This delivers on the Government's commitment to provide ongoing support for the 1.3 million children that would receive benefits-related free school meals at their school.

Schools can now provide every eligible child with a weekly shopping voucher worth £15 to spend at supermarkets while schools are closed due to coronavirus.

Schools can continue to provide meals for collection or delivery themselves, but where this is not possible, the scheme will allow schools to provide vouchers to families electronically, or as a gift card for those without internet access.

Parents will receive the voucher through their child's school, which can then be redeemed online via a code, or sent to their house as a gift card and used at supermarkets across the country.

Today, schools will receive an email from the Department for Education's chosen supplier, Edenred, explaining how to access and administer the voucher scheme locally.

Full details of this scheme can be found here:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance>

Miss Chapman has set up the first batch of vouchers and this will now be a weekly arrangement. Where parents do not have email we will get a voucher sent in the post so it is has never been more important for us to have up-to-date contact information (address, telephone numbers and emails).

Please note that vouchers will not be catered for in the allotted school holidays.

Children who attend school will continue to receive a free meal (entitlement and age related) or they will be still be charged if these criteria do not apply to your circumstances. Payments can be made to the system by parents where applicable but this is not being monitored at the moment, nor is a priority for parents or school at this time. This can all be addressed at a later date! Please note: where children who receive free school meals by entitlement are attending on some days but not others, parents must inform school of their bookings in good time so that appropriately pro-rata meal allowances can be sent to parents.

Our first week of meal provision vouchers were worth more as we were predicting the amount that the Government would set and we felt the need to over-estimate to ensure that families were covered for the first week against the context of empty shelves and complications to food procurement. We will now following the Government scheme precisely.

Update 2

(From BMBC re: employment concerns)

We are writing out to let you know of a new service available for residents of Barnsley, please can you help us raise awareness of the support available.

During these difficult times, many residents are unfortunately facing uncertainty about their current and future employment. To address this and to support our residents, the employment and skills team have developed a simple, single point of contact to make it easier to speak to someone and access the free support available to residents who may have been:

- Furloughed
- Laid off/unemployed
- Are at risk of redundancy
- Looking to develop or grow skills

Barnsley Council's Employment and Skills service has joined forces with Enterprising Barnsley and other employment support providers to make it easier for residents to access employment and skills support. We have launched the Barnsley Employment Helpdesk providing a simple single point of contact for all residents who would like to speak to someone and access support. We aim to respond to enquiries on the same day with a referral to support within 24 hours.

- Support can be accessed through the website and its webchat function:

<https://www.enterprisingbarnsley.co.uk/support-for-employment/>

- Or, directly through our email address: employmentsupport@barnsley.gov.uk

We're on the end of a phone and can provide advice to determine eligibility for Universal Credit and how to start and prepare claims; job searching, getting a CV ready, support with applications and interviews and access to free training if residents want to develop your skills for a new role or promotion.

Please help us raise awareness of this support across your networks, we are ready to receive referrals. Just make sure people are happy for you to share their contact details and email them through or direct people to us on the details above.

We are working on getting a contact phone number and unfortunately in the meantime we are only able to receive enquiries through the email or webchat. However, if individuals are not able to access email or webchat, if they can ask a friend, neighbour or professional to email us their phone number we will phone them straight back.

Our partners include: Barnsley Council Adult and Community Learning, Enterprising Barnsley, The Growth Company & Wiseability, The Coalfields Regeneration Trust, The Citizen's Advice Service

For further information about Barnsley Council's response to Covid-19, visit:
[barnsley.gov.uk/services/health-and-wellbeing/covid-19-coronavirus-advice-and-guidance/](https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/health-and-wellbeing/covid-19-coronavirus-advice-and-guidance/)

Update 3

(From BMBC re: due to changing circumstances)

Guidance for families suffering financial hardship

The council website has full details regarding help available for individuals and families who may find themselves in hardship during this unprecedented time:

<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/health-and-wellbeing/covid-19-coronavirus-advice-and-guidance/>

Help for families who have had Changes to income:

If families have been working and their income has been reduced then they will need to contact the DWP to see if they are entitled to universal credit. The claim needs to be made on line with the DWP.

<https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/how-to-claim>

If their income has decreased but they are not entitled to universal credit then they may still be entitled to local council tax support or free school meals. The form can be found at the link below.

www.barnsley.gov.uk/benefit-claim-form

Council Tax, Local Council Tax Support and Free School Meals.

If families are struggling to pay their council tax they can contact the council on 01226 787787 and press opt 2. The lines are busy but we have put extra staff on the lines.

For anyone in receipt of local council tax support and free school meals and their income has changed they will need to complete a change in circumstances form as they may be entitled a further help with their council tax:

www.barnsley.gov.uk/benefit-change-in-circs-form

Entitlement to local council tax support and free school meals will be reassessed as soon as possible. If in the meantime they are struggling to pay their council tax then they need to contact us as highlighted above and a payment arrangement will be discussed.

Council Tax Hardship Scheme

The Government has announced that a council tax hardship scheme will be available to those who are considered 'financially vulnerable'. Details of the scheme will be published week commencing 30th March 2020 and details will be made available here:

<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/health-and-wellbeing/covid-19-coronavirus-advice-and-guidance/>

Other support / helpful links

For general advice on what help and support may be available please visit:

<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/advice-benefits-and-council-tax/benefits-help-and-support/>

The local welfare assistance scheme helps people who are in financial crisis due to an emergency or other unexpected circumstances:

<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/advice-benefits-and-council-tax/benefits-help-and-support/local-welfare-assistance-scheme/>

For assistance with food please visit:

<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/advice-benefits-and-council-tax/benefits-help-and-support/foodbanks-in-barnsley/>

Web chat is also available on all council tax, council tax support and housing benefit webpages. The phone lines are busy and we are asking people to go online where they can.

If people do not have access to the internet they need to phone 01226 787787 opt 3. We will then make an appt to phone people back and go through the form over the phone.

We hope that these updates are useful.

Stay safe everyone,

Best wishes,

LMc