

## **CIVIC PRIDE COLUMN – 1 APRIL 2020**

Regular readers of this column will know that “civic” is not just about our buildings and institutions: contributors often write about the different ways the community works to make Abingdon a good place to live.

These last few weeks have shown once again the strength of the community spirit in Abingdon. Existing support groups such as the caring charities, Food Bank and Community Fridge, and the churches etc have vital roles to play and have had to find new ways to deliver them. In many streets, neighbours are looking out for one another and providing help for those who need it.

But new initiatives have come rapidly in to place: most notably, a group put together just 2-3 weeks ago has recruited over 400 volunteers covering nearly all the streets in Abingdon and they have been delivering leaflets to every house, offering help with shopping, collecting prescriptions etc. They have already responded to dozens of people in need. Local businesses have helped too – the leaflets were printed free of charge.

Many businesses have had to rapidly change what they do, in the hope of ensuring their own survival, but at the same time providing new services to the locked-down community. Restaurants will deliver your meal to you at home, many independent food shops have set up delivery or safe collection services and several have donated surplus food to the charities helping those in need.

The Councils have set up helplines to provide information about support and services available across south Oxfordshire and volunteers have set up a website <https://abingdon.help/> with more local information.

The internet and social media have played an invaluable role in enabling people – or at least those who have access to it – to find out about what help is available; we can share useful information so much more easily than in the past. It also provides a good forum for light-hearted exchanges to keep our spirits up and technology means that, even if we can't visit them, we can keep in touch with friends and family much more effectively. Thankfully, people of all ages now use these media, but there are still many who don't, and for them, the help of caring neighbours and volunteer groups is even more important.

None of this would be possible however without the wonderful work of our health service and care workers, but also the councils, utility companies, delivery drivers etc who keep our essential services running, and the other emergency services who keep us safe. We clapped them last week and should do so again – but when this is all over we should find some way to celebrate our whole community effort and show how proud we are of it.