

24 April 2020

Duncan Baker MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Dear Duncan

### **COVID19 – Fair funding for District Councils**

I am writing to you to ask for your support in lobbying the Government for a fairer share of the additional funding announced by the Secretary of State for the local government sector to be made available to District Councils in responding to the challenges of COVID19.

North Norfolk District Council, like district councils across the country, is working with strategic and local partners, and importantly local community volunteer networks, to support local communities and businesses through the COVID19 crisis.

Whilst the District Council has continued to keep critical and day-to-day services running – including household waste, recycling and garden waste collections; housing advice services, benefits advice and planning services; the response to COVID19 has resulted in the need for the Council to put in place different working arrangements and the redeployment of staff to support the needs of our communities and businesses at this unprecedented time.

This has seen the Council put in place the following arrangements:-

- a community support infrastructure to provide support to the most vulnerable in our communities at this time – ie people who are shielding and self-isolating in accordance with Government guidance through a network of 10 Local Co-ordination Centres across our extensive rural district to co-ordinate delivery of food parcels and prescriptions; outbound contacts with over 1900 Shielded People; and support for over 800 other Vulnerable People who are self-isolating in accordance with Government guidance;
- handling an average of 400 customer contacts a day for the past four weeks through the Council's dedicated COVID helpline number and email address;
- Administering £26million of Small Business Rate Reliefs during the weeks of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> March
- Since 30<sup>th</sup> March processed over 3300 small business grant applications and paid out over £36million of grant monies
- Seen a 20% increase across all (HB & CTS) cases being handled by the Council's Benefits Team, including administration of the Hardship Fund.

On 20<sup>th</sup> March, the Government announced an initial £1.6bn package of additional funding to support local authorities in responding to the COVID19 pandemic. However, whilst it was understood that this funding was intended to help local authorities address the pressures being faced across all local authority services, there was a very unbalanced distribution of the funding, with the majority of the funds being directed to authorities with social care

responsibilities. From the original 20<sup>th</sup> March funding package, North Norfolk District Council was allocated just £56,000 of funding.

However, to date, the District Council believes it has spent over £290,000 on its direct response to COVID19, including its community support arrangements, communication with residents, additional IT costs associated with the majority of staff providing frontline services from home and the costs of overtime, including working over the four day Easter Bank holiday weekend to ensure that small business grants are distributed quickly and efficiently as per our top quartile performance in the MHCLG return submitted on 20<sup>th</sup> April.

At the same time the Council has seen a significant reduction in its income – particularly car parking income over the Easter weekend and commercial property rents, which make a significant contribution to the District's finances. Again we are forecasting reductions of over £1.2m from these various income streams by the end of the month. As an area heavily reliant on tourism it is feared that the loss of income to the authority is likely to continue across much of this financial year.

North Norfolk District Council welcomes the announcement made by the Secretary of State on 18<sup>th</sup> April that the Government is making a further £1.6bn available to the local government sector in recognition of the cost they are incurring in supporting the national effort to protect vulnerable people, communities and businesses at this time.

The District Council would therefore ask that Government gives greater recognition to the critical frontline community role being played by District Councils in the national response and ensure that there is a more equitable distribution in the allocation of the additional funding announced on the 18<sup>th</sup> March compared to the first funding round.

As North Norfolk MP, I would welcome and appreciate your support in lobbying Government for this change.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Sarah Bütikofer  
**Leader, North Norfolk District Council**