

Impact of Covid has left Ipswich Borough Council with £6m gap

David Ellesmere



Last week we published Ipswich Borough Council's budget for the coming year. The dominating factor in the council's finances is, of course, the effect of coronavirus. Like all councils this has involved us in extra spending to support people through the pandemic.

Since March we have delivered over 1,000 food parcels and taken over 2,000 calls from people seeking our support via the Home, But Not Alone service. We have paid out more than £31m of business grants to support over 2,000 local businesses.

Keeping vital services going like collecting bins, the HEARS community alarm service and our fabulous parks has involved greater spending to make them "Covid-secure".

On top of this we have seen a huge drop in income from the Regent and Corn Exchange, our car parks, sports centres and swimming pools.

We are now predicting Covid will cost the borough council a net £16 million.

At the start of the pandemic councils were told by the Government that they should do the right thing, spend what was necessary and they would be fully compensated.

Across the country, councils stood up and did what was asked of them. Sadly, the promise to fully compensate them has not been honoured.

We have received just under £10 million from the Government leaving a gap of £6 million.

We saw this threat coming and took the tough but necessary decisions to plug the gap early with two emergency budgets in July and November. As a result, there is currently no need for any further cuts.

This means that services such as free brown bins, the young persons' free Summer iCard, the Council's out-of-hours noise nuisance service, support for bus routes, building new council houses and installing solar PV on council houses are all protected.

We will always try to keep council tax bills as low as possible.

Ipswich Borough Council's increase in council tax of just 1p a week for most residents forms only a small part of the increase Ipswich people will see in their bills this year.

In contrast, Conservative-run Suffolk County Council are increasing their share of the average Ipswich bill by 80p a week and Suffolk's Conservative Police and Crime Commissioner by 22p a week.

opinion

Believe it or not, posing with a drink in Dubai isn't essential work

Danielle Lett



As we get deeper into February, we're fast approaching the one-year anniversary of when the country first went into lockdown back in March. And what a year it's been. Nothing could've predicted how, well, unpredictable, the last 11 months would turn out to be.

Pandemic or not, there's always one thing you can always rely on, though – the entitlement of influencers. We're well into the nation's third lockdown, with the government saying over and over again 'Do not travel unless it's essential'.

And while I'm not fan of how the government has handled this entire pandemic, they're not wrong here. While we're meant to be locked down to help prevent the further spread of coronavirus, there's very little reason why people would need to be travelling internationally right now. We're not even allowed to travel nationally, as we've been told to stay in our homes and stay local.

Yet across social media and mainstream news, we're being flooded with images of influencers on their jollies under the guise of it being 'essential work', usually somewhere like Dubai – which until recently had allowed Brits to travel there as it fell outside of the UK's quarantine bubble up until January 12.

But is flying to Dubai, or anywhere right now, essential? Of course it isn't.

Posting a photo of yourself riding a camel or sipping cocktails by the pool as part of a brand deal is not essential. It is essentially killing people, though.

We're still in the midst of this pandemic, and with multiple variants and strains now being documented, as safe as you think you're being, there's no guarantee you won't have brought the virus back with you.

Since the start of the pandemic, around 110,000 people have died from Covid in the UK.

"It's my life, I'm not hurting anybody," said Sheridan



At the start of the year, Dubai became a travel hot spot, with influencers travelling in the midst of a pandemic for what they deemed was 'essential work'
Picture: GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Mordew, an influencer who brazenly went on This Morning last week to defend her choice to go to Dubai during the pandemic for her 'essential' work. It's that sort of attitude that's led us to still be in lockdown this far into the pandemic.

Influencers continually preach 'be kind' when they're met with backlash – but surely the kindest thing to do during a pandemic would be to stay home and help save lives. The NHS is under an enormous strain right now, and flying abroad to take selfies isn't helping in the slightest.

Seeing such a flagrant disregard for human life is a huge slap in the face to those of us who have followed the rules, stayed at home, adapted to working from home, forgone any travel plans we had, and in many instances have been personally affected by the virus.

Maybe these former Love Island alumni and other reality stars should perhaps take a look at Joe Wicks, and see how you can really make effective and influential content from the comfort of your own home – without breaking any rules or restrictions.

For anyone who's unfamiliar, Joe Wicks is a fitness coach who has spent lockdown livestreaming a range of family-friendly exercise routines that can be done from the safety of your living room.

His efforts have certainly paid off too, as he's not only become an even bigger household name than he was before, but he's managed to break the Guinness World Record for 'most viewers for a fitness workout live stream on YouTube' after amassing an impressive 950,000 viewers. That's how you create content during a pandemic.

Or better yet, maybe take a

long, hard look at Dr Alex George to see what a real essential worker looks like.

The series four Love Island contestant has been working tirelessly on the frontline throughout the entire pandemic as a doctor, looking after those in need and putting in the hours to help get the country back on its feet.

And of course, he's not the only one.

Think of all of the other doctors and nurses, supermarket workers, care home staff, teachers, delivery drivers and everyone else who have not only followed the rules, but are keeping the country ticking over, day by day.

Now that's essential work. Not selling teeth whitening strips and fast fashion clothing brands from a poolside cabana.

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