

Friday 4th September 2020

COATS RESPONSE TO COVID 19 - UPDATE SEPTEMBER 2020

These are extremely challenging times for all of us and no less for COATS. The Trustees are working hard to successfully navigate a way through this crisis. We are very conscious that our Visitors still need the support we have always provided but we are severely constrained by Government guidelines, particularly in regard to social distancing, the desire to protect the elderly and with a much reduced income. With this in mind The Trustees have conducted a detailed examination to determine if and when it might be possible to reopen The COATS Centre. This has been a very thorough exercise but having explored all the options available the Trustees have reluctantly decided to postpone the re-opening of the Centre to Visitors until 1st February, at the earliest. We will now focus our efforts and those of our staff on how to build on the successful 'Keeping in Touch Programme'.

As you know, The COATS Centre is largely funded by the income from our shop. Our premises on the High St. are small and narrow and do not lend themselves to operation under social distancing measures. The small number of customers we could accommodate there would lead to much reduced sales and income. This is why we decided to open the COATS pop-up shop in the Centre as an interim measure. Thanks to the efforts of all those involved the pop-up shop has been very successful in providing income despite being open only 3 mornings each week. We are looking at the possibility of increasing the opening hours of our pop-up shop.

If we were to move our shop back to the High St., with current social distancing in place, we forecast that our shop income would barely cover the shop operating costs and the additional cost of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and other Covid-19 measures.

Turning to the Centre; if we were to open The Centre to Visitors the current social distancing rule of 2 metres means that we can take no more than 10 Visitors on each day. Further, we would have to operate cohorts or "bubbles" each with a fixed set of Visitors and care staff in order to minimise the number of people our Visitors come into contact with. In summary this means we could only accept a maximum of 20 visitors a week. Everybody would need to observe PPE guidelines so the atmosphere would inevitably be very subdued. Further, our minibus would be limited to carrying just two passengers at a time.

The outlook for the Autumn and Winter months remains uncertain with the return of schools, winter flu and colder weather having the potential to create problems and increased restrictions in the worst case. We feel it would be irresponsible to move our shop out of the Centre thereby cutting off much of our income to open the Centre for small numbers of Visitors.

Bernie and her staff are eager to get going again but understand the reasons for leaving the re-opening until well into the New Year. Our Keeping in Touch Programme has done much to maintain the relationships that has been a hallmark of COATS over the years and we will now work to extend it to benefit all our Visitors.

Very best wishes to you all,

John Barnes (Chairman).