

Cllr Millard: Hello and welcome to talk Richmond, a podcast brought to you by Richmond Council and hosted by me Councillor Jim Millard. In this week's episode, I'll be talking about adapting to the new normal, as lockdown measures relax, but the threat of Coronavirus remains. Our guest this week is the director of public health at Richmond Council, Shannon Katiyo. Hello Shannon.

Shannon: Hi Jim.

Cllr Millard: Welcome, welcome, how are you?

Shannon: I'm very well thank you and thanks for inviting me to Talk Richmond.

Cllr Millard: It's a great pleasure. Shannon you were announced as the director of public health in Richmond in April and this generally speaking, means you're in charge of improving and protecting the health of residents. Now the first thing I wanted to ask is you had previously worked at Public Health England and in the Centre for Infectious Disease Surveillance and Control. What was that like?

Shannon: Uh, yes thank you. I trained to become a public health consultant in London and Surrey and I spent several years working across the national and regional public health system and my time with Public Health England was really interesting. I had the opportunity to lead on a wide range of Health Protection work, including preparation of the national cold weather plan for England. This is the plan that helps the country to put measures into place to prepare for the winter months and to protect vulnerable people during cold weather. I also did some work around uh tackling TB infection among people in detention settings. TB is still an issue, particularly for London, and I lead on a big piece of research to understand illness that's caused by salmonella. So, I had a really a good experience working in Public Health England.

Cllr Millard: Brilliant and presumably you know having this experience, who was to know when you when you first started at Richmond, that this was going to be such a vital part of what was to come?

Shannon: Yes, and I know I've heard some people say that this is maybe an unenviable time to be appointed in any public health role, never mind Director of Public Health, given the biggest Health Protection crisis that I think we faced in a generation.

And whilst I agree it's challenging as a public health professional, I think this is a huge task, but an opportunity to protect the residents of Richmond by doing absolutely everything we can to stop the spread of infection and to try and prevent more people from becoming unwell or sadly, even dying from COVID.

Cllr Millard: Yes. Now obviously the next stage is that lockdown measures are starting to relax and it feels like we're beginning to enter this phase, you know, the new normal. What does this look like for Richmond?

Shannon: So coronavirus is the one thing that has got everyone talking about public health, which in some in some ways is positive. But it's also changed our lives in many different ways. I think it's affected us, you know, at a personal level, professionally, in terms of how we work, how we live and travel. It is also improved our understanding of disease and how it can affect different groups of our population, potentially in different ways, so in terms of the new normal for Richmond, I think this will probably include more people cycling or walking for shorter journeys, and I think this will be a benefit to their health and to the environment. More people will be washing their hands, I'm pretty sure and maintaining good hand hygiene and this will have quite a positive impact for us in terms of the flu season if people continue to do that. Um, more of us are working from home now and I'm I think for some people this will have a positive impact on work life balance.

Shannon: Unfortunately the risk of new infections and pandemics is still with us and is ever present, so we need to continue to follow the advice and be prepared to make further adjustments to to our lives in terms of, you know, changing how we've been used to doing things before. And I know that some people who are particularly vulnerable to Covid or some of the people who were so-called shielding during this

time to protect themselves will continue to be concerned going forward about their risk of infection, not just from Covid, but you know from other diseases, so we will need to do a lot of work to support them to build their confidence and try to sort of re-integrate themselves into the wider society.

Cllr Millard: Yes, I was going to ask that. How is how has this crisis impacted the NHS and people with other health needs quite apart from those who've actually got the disease and had to struggle with that. But what will be some of the key challenges in overcoming that?

Shannon: Yes, so one of the things that have happened is you know the stay at home message has been really prominent and really successful and so a lot of people have adhered to that. The downside is we know that there are people who are potentially needed help from the NHS and other services who have stopped seeking that help that they need. You know we now have good measures in place to allow services to reopen in a safe way and potentially provide people with life saving treatment or urgent treatment that they need. I'm also particularly concerned about, uh, immunizations. Routine immunizations for the young babies, and also for other young adults that would really like to promote people to now go out there and get the vaccinations that they should be getting because of course there are other diseases about, in addition to Covid, and that's really important. And the last real challenge that might take some time to reveal itself, I think, is around mental health Uh, issues. A lot of people have been feeling isolated or lonely, there are people who've been feeling anxious, depressed, either as existing conditions or, you know, as a result of Covid and through the turn of time I think you know this will come to the fore and will need to ensure those people can access services.

Cllr Millard: Absolutely, absolutely. I mean, I've personally felt very lucky that we're in this borough. We do have quite a few open spaces, you know the Riverside and other places that we can sort of had to very easily to get some exercise and some fresh air, because for everyone, I think there's been a real challenge on that, just being cooped up inside is an unusual challenge for everyone's wellbeing.

Shannon: Well, it has really taught us to appreciate the simplest thing in life I would say.

Cllr Millard: Yeah, and it's good to look for those silver linings, I agree, definitely. So coming back to how this is all panning out from your point of view how we got this sort of looking ahead, we're looking at Test and trace. How is that working so far?

Shannon: So Test & Trace is really important and it involves people who've got symptoms going on the NHS website, booking themselves a test. Obviously whilst they think they've got symptoms, they do need to stay at home for 7 days and anyone else in their household needs to stay at home for 14 days and once they've booked a test they will share details about contacts that they've had during the time that they might have been passing on the disease, and then these people will be contacted once a positive test results has come back for that individual. So if someone is a contact, you can expect that you might be alerted by the NHS Test and Trace service to say that you have been in contact with somebody and then they will talk you through what you need to do. You'll probably be asked to begin self isolation for up to 14 days, depending on when you last came into contact with the person who has tested positive and it may be the case that you go on to develop symptoms of coronavirus and other members of your household would then be asked to self isolated at home and you would need to book a coronavirus test as well.

So, I think the contact tracing in itself is nothing new. Uh, it's a public health approach that's commonly used for managing any outbreaks of infectious disease. And now we've got this really good national service which is trying to do that by providing remote support, allowing people to book themselves in through a website and to get a test kit sent out to them.

Millard: How do you think it's panning out? Is it being helpful to you?

Shannon: I think it's working really well. As a local public health team, we are linked into this wider system so it's really helpful for us to understand what's happening within Richmond and with our local residents and if needed then we would collaborate with Public Health England and other partners to all sort of wade into that

response and ensure that we protect residents and we stop any further spread of infection.

Shannon: What I would want to do is to reassure local residents that we've come on a long journey with coronavirus. We had instances where we were having at the peak up to 19 cases being notified within a day. We're nowhere near that - we continue to watch the situation really closely, monitoring our figures really closely on a daily basis, and we are genuinely down to really low numbers of cases which we might refer to as sporadic cases.

Cllr Millard: Thanks Shannon and really, you know, I think it's so important that we understand that we're not, we are going into a sort of a slightly more relaxed phase, but what do people need to do to stay healthy and to avoid a second peak?

Shannon: Yes absolutely, this is a really important question and I've got a few suggestions. I think the most obvious thing that we can all do is we need to continue to follow the latest guidance on social distancing. We're not out of the woods yet, and whilst there has been relaxation to some of the measures, we all need to continue to socially distance. Good hand hygiene - I think this is a permanent lifesaving skill that we've all learned. So, whether we've got Coronavirus or not, we need to keep washing those hands all the time.

There are other measures that have come into place, for example around wearing face coverings in public transport or in other confined spaces where social distancing is maybe not so easy to achieve. And again, you know this is a legal requirement, but also our personal and public duty to do so, we need to follow that.

Now, just moving on to thinking more about the changes that have happened to our lifestyles and how we live and work. I think it's important for people who are now working routinely from home to try and develop some healthy routines to enable them to keep physically healthy and mentally well. So the first thing is, you know, we all need to try and do some physical activity - I think it's important that you carve out some space just so you can have a bit of a stretch and a break because this would

be good for you. Now that we're spending more time at home, I think it's an excellent opportunity for us too to try out some cooking skills - try and cook some really good homemade food from scratch. Try to eat more balanced and healthy diet, because after all I think we've got a bit more time to do that. And I think the last thing I would say is just to remember that what's good for the body is good for the mind.

Cllr Millard: Great advice, thank you. What's your lockdown routine?

Shannon: So it's a really challenging time as you can expect for a director of public health, and I tend to have really long days. I wake up quite early in my day starts just after five in the morning, and I go for a four mile run. I tried to do that on at least four days a week and then give myself a little bit of a break and then I think that just helps to calm me and set me up for the day, lowers my blood pressure and I'm ready to face the challenges of today. During lockdown I have on some days taking my two young children out on a bicycle ride around the local neighbourhood. So on the weekends I tend to do a little bit of gardening. I've got some roses. A whole row of roses that I planted last year and this year they're coming up so I do quite a little pruning rose feeding, watering them, making sure that they look good and healthy so so that kind of gives me something to look forward to.

Cllr Millard: Any cooking tips for the lockdown?

Shannon: So cooking tips for the lockdown, I would say try to do a balanced plate. Lots of veg. Obviously we're getting into the hot season so I think it becomes easier to eat lots more salad and so I think the more colourful your plate is, the healthier it's likely to be.

Cllr Millard: Okay, good stuff!

Cllr Millard: That was a really interesting discussion with Shannon. His background and reaffirms my confidence that we are in very good hands. It's a confusing time and the amount of information out there, as well as the ever changing guidance, means it can all be quite overwhelming at times. I hope that this episode has been

helpful - that it has given you a better understanding of Test & Trace and some helpful tips on what you can do to remain healthy. I think it's worth reiterating the importance of continuing to social distance, to wash your hands, to wear a face covering and to stay at home if you have any symptoms.

For further information on the topics discussed check out the show notes below. If you have any questions email us on [talk@richmond.gov.uk](mailto:talk@richmond.gov.uk). Please like and subscribe – and do give us a review, we want to spread the word, this is a new way of getting information out and 5 stars would be very welcome! I'm Jim Millard – thanks for listening.