

At the time of writing the implications are still being assessed of the government's decision to end the majority of restrictions on 19<sup>th</sup> July, and not all the details have been confirmed yet. I would encourage readers to check [www.sthelens.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.sthelens.gov.uk/coronavirus) for all the latest advice and support.

I know many will welcome the easing of restrictions, and I certainly can't wait to get back to a more 'normal' way of life – visiting friends and family without worrying about numbers, going to Saints, attending concerts and so on. After more than a year where the vast, overwhelming majority of St Helens residents have done the right thing, I know it will be a huge relief.

But I know for some people the potential lifting of restrictions has also caused concern, especially the decision to remove the guidance around masks on public transport or in crowded indoor spaces.

For the sake of those yet to be eligible for the vaccine or those who have had it but are vulnerable or immunosuppressed, I think the caring, considerate thing to do would be to still wear one in certain situations – at least while cases are continuing to increase so rapidly.

One aspect of the government's plans I'm keen to see the detail of is the approach to children and young people, who in recent months are one of the groups who have suffered most with growing numbers forced to isolate due to a positive test in their 'bubble'. As I know from personal experience with my own son, it's not just school they miss but a whole range of extra-curricular activities, and it can be frustrating for the child when they're testing negative and appear fit and healthy.

Colleagues and I have raised our concerns about this with local Public Health officers through the Outbreak Management Board that I chair. We need a system in place which acknowledges the difficult fact that Covid is always going to be present in the community, and which finds a way to manage that whilst keeping children in education as much as possible. We can't isolate whole classes forevermore.

While I therefore welcome the decision to get rid of bubbles in schools, I'll wait to see the detail – my worry with this government is that they'll just throw their hands up and let the virus spread rather than put in place a properly funded system to manage outbreaks and keep children and communities safe, as well as keeping healthy children in education.

There will never be a definitive end to Covid, but by getting vaccinated, following as much as possible the latest Public Health guidance, and continuing to think about others by doing simple things such as wearing a mask on public transport or washing our hands more regularly, we can perhaps start to enjoy all the things we've missed so much.

Whatever the coming weeks and months bring, the Council will continue to do everything we can to support residents, schools, nurseries, colleges, sports clubs, businesses and organisations in our communities, and we will continue to work together with the local NHS on the vaccine roll-out which has been a huge success in the borough.