

Novel Coronavirus (COVID 19)

Briefing for Breckland Council elected members (29 April 2020)

Purpose of the note: To ensure members are aware of the plans that are being put in place to ensure that Breckland is prepared, as far as possible, to respond to the impact of Coronavirus.

1. Recent Government advice/action

The latest government and Health information and advice can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>.

Council funding - Individual councils in England have [funding allocations confirmed](#) following Local Government Secretary's announcement of £1.6 billion in additional funding. (See section 4 of this briefing for more information.)

Death in service benefit – The families of health and care workers on the frontline in England will benefit from a [new life assurance scheme](#) during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Business rates – The Government has published the [Non-Domestic Rating \(Transitional Protection Payments and Rates Retention\) \(Coronavirus\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2020](#). These implement the Government's measures to ease councils' cash flow pressures by allowing local government to [defer payments due to the Government](#) in respect of the central share of business rates for three months, worth £2.6 billion in total.

Planning – The Planning Advisory Service has produced [a guide to revising protocols and procedures for a virtual planning committee](#). They recommend using it as a starting point, and then localise it to reflect how individual committees run.

Social housing – The Government has said that supporting vulnerable people move to new homes during the pandemic should continue to be a priority, publishing [new guidance for social landlords](#) this week.

Business loans – Small firms are to get access to 100% taxpayer-backed loans after they raised concerns about slow access to existing coronavirus rescue schemes. The scheme is set to start next week, offering firms loans up to £50,000 within days of applying.

Testing - Coronavirus [testing has been extended to all essential workers](#) in England who have symptoms, the government has announced. All [essential workers](#) in England, and members of their households who are showing symptoms of coronavirus will now be able to get tested.

Homelessness support - Councils have been [thanked by Government](#) for their work in supporting more than 5400 rough sleepers off the streets in the past month, helping to keep them safe during the pandemic.

Vaccine development – [A clinical vaccine trial by Oxford scientists](#) to help prevent Coronavirus is to start this week after being fast-tracked for approval by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

Green spaces – The Government has written to local authorities, [urging them to allow continued access to parks and public spaces](#) including burial grounds and cemeteries, in light of updated legislation and guidance.

Virus tracking – 20,000 households in England are being contacted to take part in the first wave of a major [new government study to track coronavirus](#) (COVID-19) in the general population.

2. Supporting businesses and employees

A) **UPDATED:** Business grants and rate relief

The Council is responsible for administering, at a local level, some of the Government's national business support schemes, such as the additional Business Rates relief for Retail / Hospitality / Leisure / Nursery small businesses and Business Grants. As of 29 April, we have paid out a total of £20.6 million through a total of 1,833 business grants (71% of eligible businesses - see breakdown below):

£10k small business grants:

As of 29 April we have issued £15m of funding in 1,499 grants to support small local businesses in line with the government's eligibility criteria. All small businesses **must submit their information [online](#)** to access this funding.

£25k sectoral business grants (Retail / Hospitality / Leisure):

As of 29 April, we have issued £5.6m of funding in 334 grants in the retail, hospitality and leisure sector. All businesses eligible for this grant **must submit their information [online](#)** to access this funding.

Small Business Rates Relief (Retail / Hospitality / Leisure / Nursery): A total of 640 businesses in the eligible sectors have been awarded a further £12.9m in rate relief. Businesses **do not need to apply** for this support.

B) **NEW:** Tracing hard-to-reach businesses

Over the last few weeks, the Regeneration Team – with additional capacity provided by officers redeployed from other services – has successfully contacted and engaged with 2,000 businesses in the district, as a result of which 1,833 have successfully claimed their small business or sectoral business grants.

This week, the team is redoubling its efforts to reach out to all remaining businesses who may be eligible but have not yet responded to our attempts to contact them – through our email, social media or telephone messages – by conducting door-to-door leafleting of any remaining businesses. This work is being carried out in line with social distancing rules and under the guidance of our Health and Safety adviser. This is to ensure that the Council has done everything possible before the end of April deadline set by Government, to distribute as much of its grant allocation to eligible businesses as possible.

We still have many businesses (and organisations such as village halls and charities) that are eligible for the Government's grant funding that we want to issue to them as soon as possible. If you believe you know businesses locally that may be eligible and that have not claimed their grant please ask them to upload their information to our [online portal](#).

C) **NEW:** the Big Small Business Check-In

The Council's leafleting also coincides with the launch of the New Anglia LEP (Local Enterprise Partnership) campaign, the '**Big Small Business Check-In**' – encouraging people to check in with their favourite businesses and suggesting they get in touch with the LEP or their local council, to see whether they're eligible for any grants or financial support. You can read more about this [here](#).

D) **NEW:** Business Resilience and Recovery boost

A new £3.5 million Business Resilience and Recovery Scheme has been launched by the New Anglia LEP to support Norfolk and Suffolk's businesses through the COVID-19 pandemic and into economic

recovery. The new funding scheme – which forms part of a wider £10 million package of measures – will provide grants to support short-term business resilience projects and longer-term recovery and diversification projects. You can read more about this [here](#).

E) NEW: Regional Employment Vacancies

The New Anglia LEP is coordinating job vacancies for several businesses in Norfolk and Suffolk and making this information available on their website at <https://newanglia.co.uk/employment-opportunities/>

3. Community support

A) UPDATED: Housing and homelessness support

The Housing Team have, to date, worked hard to successfully accommodate **all known (25) rough sleepers** in the district since lockdown began, with the team encouraging the public to report any sightings of people living in cars/vans or new sightings of people sleeping rough via the service and via street link. Temporary accommodation has also been secured for a further **80+ households** otherwise at risk of homelessness.

B) UPDATED: Support for 'Extremely Vulnerable' (Shielding) and 'Vulnerable' residents

This week, the Government has updated its [guidance and FAQs](#) on the system of support for the clinically vulnerable 'shielded' group and issued a [national shielding helpline council briefing](#) which includes details of its new national call centre.

National call centre

As part of the Government's efforts to reach out to those [extremely vulnerable](#) people who have not yet responded to them to say whether or not they need support, a national outbound call centre has been established.

Call agents are working through the list of those people who have been identified as extremely vulnerable but have not yet registered via the GOV.UK shielding website or automated telephone line. The aim is to help them complete the registration process offered through the [Gov.UK website](#) over the telephone. Norfolk County Council has also been helping to make outbound calls to those who have not yet registered.

So far, this combined effort has resulted in a **further 1,000 registrations** from Norfolk residents with 167 additional Breckland residents requesting support (since 27 April) which will either be responded to by Norfolk County Council Adult Social Care, or referred to Breckland's Community Support Hub, depending on the needs identified in each case.

Breckland Community Hub

In Breckland, we currently have **3647 residents who the NHS consider 'Extremely Vulnerable'** who have been advised to stay at home, in order to 'shield' themselves from the virus for a period of at least 12 weeks minimum.

Breckland's Community Support Hub has been **prioritising 2,631 of the Extremely Vulnerable 'shielding' residents** who have said that they do not have access to essential items, such as food and medicine, while also offering welfare checks to those who are 'managing for now' with the help of friends and family:

Medicines – Most pharmacies and dispensaries in Breckland have been quick to arrange their own pool of emergency medicine delivery volunteers. For those who haven't, we have enabled the delivery of **over 100 prescriptions** thanks to a group of volunteers at Attleborough Boxing Club. More deliveries have also been fulfilled through TripStart.

Food parcels - By the end of this week, we will have delivered **280 food parcels** throughout the District from our district hub at Dereham Leisure Centre to this priority group because they did not have their own access to food. In addition to this, we are using 120 food parcels donated to us by Norwich City FC to help either the most vulnerable people who have not yet received a Government food package 'Boris Box' or other vulnerable people who do not have access to food and in urgent need.

Customer data

In addition, Breckland Council is analysing its own customer data (Assisted Bin, Disabled Facility Grants and Electoral Register) to establish a wider vulnerable list who we can proactively contact. So far we have established that there are 7,252 over 70's living in a house with one other person and 2,274 living on their own. There are 287 matches with our Assisted Bin list. The next step is to overlay the data of 'shielding' residents and those who have already reached out for help to our hub to identify those we need to prioritise for proactive contact.

C) NEW: CRM system developed to manage customer contacts

Norfolk County Council, together with its district partners, is developing a new CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system which will help partners manage referrals and requests from its most vulnerable residents more efficiently.

The CRM system will enable all Norfolk councils responsible for coordinating Community Hubs for their district to quickly, easily and safely share customer data – building and maintaining an accurate and current picture of support being requested and provided. A full roll-out of the CRM is expected to take place mid-May once training is completed.

D) NEW: Volunteers and donations

The Community Hub has also been engaging with volunteers who signed up through the [Voluntary Norfolk portal](#). We now have 241 screened volunteers available to support us, of which 69 are fully DBS checked. Since Friday, we have deployed them to undertake **160 doorstep welfare checks** and are supporting 20 residents with ongoing needs.

Donations to the Norfolk Community Foundation (NCF) [Covid 19 Community Response Fund](#) is approaching £1 million, with 38 grants already paid out to parishes and community groups in the district.

4. Breckland funding/service impacts

A) Coronavirus emergency funding

Breckland Council has, this week, received its **£1.472 million allocation** of the [emergency funding pledged by Government](#) to help manage the additional costs associated with its response to Coronavirus. This funding will go some way towards covering the additional expenses associated with responding to this pandemic. Our focus is on supporting our residents and businesses through these difficult times and early estimates suggest that this new funding will cover expenses and lost fees and charges income for the coming few months only.

B) Service impacts

Critical services, such as **Housing, Waste, Customer Services** and **Public Protection**, all continue to operate, albeit in some cases, this is being managed in a more flexible way (see below for details). We continue to keep all services under review, in light of the latest Government guidance and our staff resource, with the latest updates available on our website [here](#).

In the meantime, the following decisions/actions have been implemented:

UPDATED: The Council's **Contact Centre is now successfully picking up customer calls remotely**, using a laptop and headset. From this week, it means the whole team is able to work from home, apart from one or two staff having to make ad-hoc visits to Elizabeth House to coordinate outbound post.

UPDATED: **Garden Waste renewal letters** are being sent out this week in smaller than usual batches to help manage and minimise demand on the Contact Centre, with around 100 payments being taken this week.

UPDATED: The number of **employees working from home** is around 84%, with 55 members of staff redeployed from non-critical services, the majority of which are supporting Breckland's Community Support Hub.

NEW: Public Protection officers are providing a range of **advice to existing food businesses who are diversifying** into providing takeaway and delivery services.

NEW: The Public Protection Team are preparing for potential requests to **support the proposed increase in national contact tracing** work pledged by the Government/PHE.

Leader, Breckland Council

29.04.2020