

Novel Coronavirus (COVID 19)

Briefing for Breckland Council elected members (28 May 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>.

Other Government updates:

PPE – The Government has [signed deals with more than 100 new suppliers](#) from around the world as well as ramping up domestic production to help meet demand for PPE.

Homelessness – Businesses, faith groups and local communities are being urged to [help government, councils and charities' efforts to help house rough sleepers](#) and turn their lives around during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Retail opening – Thousands of high street shops, department stores and shopping centres across England are [set to reopen next month](#) once they are COVID-19 secure and can show customers will be kept safe.

Schools – The Government has confirmed that [schools, colleges and nurseries are set to open to more children](#), starting from 1 June, praising teachers, childcare workers and support staff for their brilliant work throughout the pandemic.

Test and trace – Local authorities will be central to supporting the new test and trace service in England, with the government providing a [new funding package of £300 million](#).

Housing – [Plans to provide thousands of long-term, safe homes](#) for vulnerable rough sleepers taken off the streets during the pandemic have been unveiled, backed by £433m of government funding.

Retail funding – A [£50m Reopening High Streets Safely Fund](#) has been created to help councils in England introduce a range of safety measures in a move to get people back to work and customers back to the shops.

Citizens' Advice – Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland are to receive a [funding boost of up to £15 million](#) to help them deal with increased demand during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Transport – Further funding – amounting to £254m for buses and £29m for trams and light rail – [to protect and increase transport services](#), level up infrastructure and regenerate local economies after the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has been announced.

Green spaces – Guidance on using green spaces safely to protect yourself and others [has been updated to reflect the current rules on social distancing](#), following the easing of lockdown.

Travel – New measures at the UK border to guard against a second wave of coronavirus infections have been announced by the Government which include [14 day self-isolation for the vast majority of people entering the UK](#).

Charities – Mental health, ambulance, social care, learning disabilities, autism and dementia [charities are among those set to receive millions of pounds](#) in government funding, to ensure they can meet increased demand as a result of Coronavirus.

Antibody testing – Antibody tests will be available to NHS and care staff, eligible patients and care residents in England to see if they have had coronavirus as part of a [new national antibody testing programme](#).

Covid-19 testing – The [trial of a new rapid Coronavirus test](#) has begun in Hampshire. The new test, which has been proven effective in clinical settings, does not need to be sent to a laboratory to be processed and can return results within 20 minutes.

PPE – VAT collected on donated personal protective equipment (PPE) will be [given to charities supporting the NHS and care workers](#), including the Care Workers Charity and NHS Charities Together.

Business law – new measures have been announced to help relieve the burden on businesses during the Coronavirus outbreak. The Government's [Corporate Governance and Insolvency Bill](#) will put in place a series of measures to support businesses by amending insolvency and company law.

Bereavement scheme – A bereavement scheme which was initially set up to support the families and dependents of health workers in the NHS and independent care sector has been [extended to cover NHS support staff and social workers](#) who die as a result of Coronavirus.

Culture – Representatives from the arts, cultural and sporting worlds will join a [new taskforce](#) aimed at helping to get the country's recreation and leisure sector up and running again.

Charities funding – the Government has announced that £150 million from [dormant bank and building society accounts is to be unlocked](#) to help charities, social enterprises and vulnerable individuals during the coronavirus outbreak.

Scientific evidence – The Government has published [scientific evidence supporting the UK Government response](#) and how SAGE's advice has quickly adapted to new findings that reflect a changing situation.

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 26 May, we have paid out a total of £25.6 million through a total of 2,279 business grants (88% of those identified as potentially eligible businesses - see breakdown below):

***£10k small business grants:**

We have issued £17.8 million of funding in 1,781 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 / £10k sectoral business grants (Retail / Hospitality / Leisure):**

We have issued £7.9 million of funding in 498 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 787 businesses in the eligible sectors have been awarded a further £13.8 million in rate relief. Businesses **do not need to apply** for this support.

We continue to be able to pay eligible businesses within just a few days of their completion of the form (providing they have given us all the required details).

B) UPDATED: Additional Discretionary Funding being made available to support local Businesses
Earlier this month, the Business Secretary announced that Local Authorities would receive additional grant funding to support businesses that have suffered as a result of Covid-19 and who for a variety of reasons were deemed ineligible for the original grant.

The value of the additional fund will be set at 5% of the main grant fund, and for BDC this equates to just under £1.5 million. Following further guidance provided by MHCLG / BEIS we plan to launch the Discretionary Grant scheme for Breckland at the start of June, prioritising businesses and charities who were not eligible under the initial scheme. In particular we expect this to include market traders, B&Bs and those in shared spaces who are not ratepayers.

We will be publishing details of the scheme shortly, and encouraging businesses and charities to apply via an online form. In order to ensure the money is issued as soon as possible, and managed fairly, we will be opening a time-limited window for applications.

C) NEW: Stepping Up Business Engagement & Support

Linked to our new Discretionary Grant Scheme, we will shortly be ramping up our business support activity to ensure we are doing all we can help businesses adapt, survive and thrive as lockdown starts to ease but Covid-related trading conditions continue to threaten jobs and businesses.

We will be writing to every Business in the district, to keep them updated on the support available, and to ask them to share their issues and concerns. We will use this information to help develop new support, and target future resources. If members could encourage any businesses they know to provide us with feedback, it would really help us be as helpful as we can.

We are also launching our updated Business Support website, to better tailor information to the current needs of the business. We are also extending our business support offer to include an 'unlocked' service, specifically designed to try and help businesses navigate Government guidance on Covid.

D) UPDATED: 'Confidence' campaign: ensuring local High Streets are safe and vibrant

We have been working with colleagues in town councils, the county council and neighbouring districts to look at new ways we can support our high street businesses to thrive, as government gives approval for more shops and traders to reopen.

Our programme of work will include an overarching campaign around confidence, to help the public and businesses owners feel confident about shopping locally. This includes possible alterations to the townscapes to make these spaces as useable as possible and give people the confidence to go about their business. This may also give us an opportunity to make changes which will draw people back to town centres as a destination of choice to undertake shopping, leisure and business activities.

So far we have identified over £125,000 to help fund this work, and are looking to make more available as required. If you have any questions or suggestions about your local area, you can get in touch with the liaison team via regeneration@breckland.gov.uk

You'll see more about this in the local media and online over the coming weeks and 'Confidence' branding appearing in your local Breckland town.

3. Community support

A) **UPDATED:** Housing and homelessness support

The Housing Team have, to date, worked hard to successfully accommodate all known rough sleepers in the district (currently 27) since lockdown began. The team is 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 64 households otherwise at risk of homelessness. The team is actively working with Registered Social Landlords to find long term accommodation solutions for this group, to allow them to move out of temporary accommodation as soon as possible.

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

UPDATED: Breckland Community Hub

In Breckland, we currently have **5412 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. All of these residents have now been contacted and of those who have not responded, 'door step' welfare checks have been undertaken.

Breckland's Community Support Hub continues to prioritise **2,814 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.

Food parcels - By the end of this week, we will have delivered **438 food parcels** through our district hub at Dereham Leisure Centre to this priority group because they did not have their own access to food. **We are averaging 50 food parcel deliveries each week which equates to just over 8,000 'meals** as each parcel has 1 weeks' worth of food.

NEW: Changes to the 'Shielding' list

We have now been made aware that a review of the Shielding List is being undertaken that has resulted in some residents being advised that they will no longer receive deliveries of essential supplies automatically. To help Members who may face questions regarding this, the guidance is copied below:

'People are only being removed from the Shielded Patient list by their GP or hospital clinician, who should advise the individual of their decision. The Government will additionally send an SMS text (or email / letter if mobile numbers are not held) to those recently removed and soon to be removed from the list who have requested help with essential supplies.

'Individuals who are advised they do not need to shield are being informed that their records are being updated to show that they no longer need support from the National Shielding Service. As such, deliveries of essential supplies from the National Shielding Service will be stopped and individuals will no longer be able to access paid for delivery medicines from pharmacies.

'This will not affect their eligibility for a supermarket priority delivery slot or any slots already in place. If individuals are struggling to access food or essentials, they can visit www.gov.uk/find-

coronavirus-support to get information on the range of support options available. If they need urgent help and have no other support, they may contact their local council.'

4. Breckland service impacts

A) Breckland to take part in national 'Test and Trace' pilot

Norfolk has been named as one of 11 pilot areas which will play a key role in the Government's efforts to use testing and tracing to prevent the spread of coronavirus. Breckland Council, alongside other local councils and Health partners, will develop tailored outbreak control plans, focused on identifying and containing potential outbreaks in places such as workplaces, housing complexes, care homes and schools.

Norfolk, which is one of 11 national pilots, will receive its share of a £300m Government fund to support the scheme, which will help people in the county to return to their day-to-day lives by preventing the spread of the disease. You can read more about the Government scheme [here](#).

B) Other 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, some of the latest service information includes:

*We continue to support remote working with **over 85% of staff working from home**, including our contact centre. We are assessing the viability of how we recover and support staff in the new ways of working and members too.

*Public Protection has offered three members of staff to **provide infection control training to local care homes**. The Team are also awaiting further news on the co-ordination of **Test-Track and Trace** programme for Norfolk and what support is likely to be needed from it officers.

*The agenda for next week's virtual **Cabinet Meeting** has been published, a reminder email will go out to all Members later in the week together with a **virtual Cabinet Meeting protocol**.

*A virtual meeting of the **Planning Committee** will take place on 22 June, and will be followed by virtual Council and Overview and Scrutiny Commission meetings in July, with more details to follow nearer the time.

5. County service impacts

Norfolk libraries providing community lifeline

Thousands of residents have been turning to Norfolk's libraries during the lockdown - with a surge in online membership, borrowing and people using new digital library activities. Tens of thousands more eBooks were downloaded this April than last year - up 63%, while the number of people using the eBook service jumped by 80%.

As well as books, many of Norfolk libraries' popular events have gone digital to help keep people connected. Films of activities run by libraries for babies, children and young people have already been viewed over 172,000 times. You can read more about this [here](#).

28.05.2020