

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Briefing for Breckland Council elected members (3 June 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

From Monday 1 June, there are a **limited number of things that individuals can now do** in England that they could not do before, including:

*Spending time outdoors or playing sport, including private gardens and other outdoor spaces, in groups of up to six people from different households - provided strict social distancing guidelines are followed

*Visiting car showrooms and outdoor markets

*Sending your child to school or nursery if they are in early years, reception or years 1 and 6 (subject to local opening arrangements)

The Cabinet Office's [Coronavirus outbreak FAQs: what you can and can't do](#) and [Staying alert and safe \(social distancing\) guidance](#) have been updated to reflect these latest lockdown easing measures.

Guidance for extremely vulnerable people who are shielding

The Government has also updated its [guidance](#) for people who are 'shielding', taking into account that COVID-19 disease levels are lower now than when shielding was first introduced.

People who are shielding remain vulnerable and should continue to take precautions but can now leave their home if they wish, as long as they are able to maintain strict social distancing.

If people who are shielding choose to spend time outdoors, this can be with members of their own household. If they live alone, they can spend time outdoors with one person from another household. Ideally, this should be the same person each time. If they do go out, they are advised to take extra care to minimise contact with others by keeping 2 metres apart. This guidance will be kept under regular review.

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

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

Other Government updates:

Retail – Outdoor markets selling flowers, books, crafts, and fashion (in addition to previously permitted food) [are able to trade again](#) as part of the Government's plan to gradually reopen the economy.

Social distancing – The Government has announced that groups of up to six people from different households will be able to [meet](#) or [exercise](#) outdoors in England from Monday 1 June, provided strict social distancing guidelines are followed.

Testing – Following the rapid expansion of coronavirus testing, the UK [reached the 200,000 capacity target](#) on Saturday 30 May, including capacity for 40,000 antibody tests a day.

Shielding advice – Extremely vulnerable people who have been 'shielding' in England are being advised that they can now safely [spend time outdoors with members of their household](#) (see above for more detail).

Sport – The Government has given green light to [resuming competitive sport](#) behind closed doors, providing strict conditions are met by participants and organisers.

Rough sleeping - Dame Louise Casey has [described the rough sleeping outreach efforts](#) as a ‘small but incredible silver lining in dark cloud of COVID-19’, with 15,000 rough sleepers being supported.

Health evidence – The [latest scientific evidence supporting the UK Government response](#) has been published, demonstrating how SAGE’s advice has adapted to a changing situation.

Employment – The Government’s [Self-Employment Income Support Scheme will be extended](#), to try and provide more security to individuals whose livelihoods continue to be adversely affected by coronavirus. Also, from 1 July 2020, businesses will be given the flexibility to bring furloughed employees back part time. This is a month earlier than previously announced to help support people back to work.

Education – Temporary legislation changes mean that [parents can be sure that they will not be prosecuted](#) or receive a criminal conviction by not sending their children to school in June.

Testing – Action is being taken to [halt sales of fingerprick coronavirus \(COVID-19\) antibody testing kits](#) until home collection of this sample type has been properly assessed and validated.

Mental health – Community projects supporting people with their mental health during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic will benefit from their share of [£5 million of additional funding](#).

Research – The UK will be the first country, outside the US, to join the [global COVID-19 High Performance Computing \(HPC\) consortium](#), allowing UK researchers access to some of the world’s fastest supercomputers in order to accelerate coronavirus research.

Environment – The Environment Agency is [using technology to work remotely and carry out its role](#) as a regulator where face-to-face visits are restricted due to government guidelines.

Planning – As lockdown is gradually eased, the Planning Inspectorate is continuing to [scale up its capacity](#) with more inquiries and hearings to take place virtually from this month.

Test and trace – As part of the [new Test and Trace service](#), new guidance means that those who have been in close contact with someone who tests positive must isolate for 14 days, even if they have no symptoms. Local authorities will be central to supporting the new service in England, with the Government providing a [new funding package of £300 million](#)

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.

2. Supporting businesses and employees

National support

A) **NEW: Statutory Sick Pay Rebate Scheme** - The UK Government’s Coronavirus Statutory Sick Pay Rebate Scheme went live on [GOV.UK](#) last week. Employers with fewer than 250 employees, can now claim for Coronavirus-related Statutory Sick Pay (SSP). Employers can also speak to their tax agent about making claims on their behalf.

*The repayment will cover up to two weeks of the applicable rate of SSP. For more information on eligibility and how to make a claim, employers should visit [GOV.UK](#)

*For more information about this Coronavirus support measure, employers can also sign-up to [HMRC’s Statutory Sick Pay Scheme Webinar](#).

B) NEW: Self-Employment Income Support Scheme - This scheme is being extended. Individuals will be able to make a claim for a second and final grant in August 2020. [Find out more about the extension to the scheme.](#)

Local support

C) 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 2 June, we have paid out a total of £26.5 million through a total of 2,310 business grants:

***£10k small business grants:**

We have issued £18 million of funding in 1,800 grants to support small local businesses in line with the Government's eligibility criteria.

***£25k / £10k sectoral business grants (Retail / Hospitality / Leisure):**

We have issued £8.5 million of funding in 510 grants in the retail, hospitality and leisure sector.

Small Business Rates Relief (Retail / Hospitality / Leisure / Nursery): A total of 830 businesses in the eligible sectors have been awarded a further £14 million in rate relief.

We are still accepting requests from any eligible business, and they can submit their application by [online form](#). To date we have awarded almost 90% of the monies allocated. Rate Relief continues to be applied automatically for eligible businesses.

D) UPDATED: Enhanced Business Engagement & Support

Over the last week we have written to every business in the district, updating them on the support available, including our new grant funding (see 2E below), and asking for their views and needs in terms of future support. This represents one of the biggest-ever business engagement exercises undertaken in the district, and will be key to informing how we shape support in the future. The more information we get, the better our solutions will be, so we would encourage all businesses to spare a few minutes to complete our [short online survey](#).

Linked to this, our Business Support website has been revamped and refreshed, to better tailor information to the current needs of 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-19.

E) UPDATED: Local Authority Discretionary Grants Fund

Breckland Council has secured additional funding of almost £1.5m from the Government, to help us address the needs of businesses which were not eligible under the original COVID-19 grant schemes. The original schemes are still in operation and cover businesses in receipt of Small Business Rate Relief and businesses eligible for Expanded Retail and Hospitality Relief (further details are available on our [website](#).)

We want to make sure every penny of this new discretionary fund is directed to businesses in greatest need, and as quickly as possible. However, we are aware the scale of demand may well outstrip the limited funds we have available. So our approach to awarding grants is to follow the Government's core advice on suggested priorities, whilst also making provision to support other key small businesses and charities who are not eligible for other COVID-19 related financial support.

We will consider making grant awards to individual businesses under two separate award categories:

***Category A: Government Priority-Listed Businesses**

Specifically Bed and Breakfasts; Regular Market Traders; and businesses in shared spaces / flexible work spaces. Awards are available of between £2,000 - £10,000 (depending upon the size of the business and the hardship experienced due to Covid-19-imposed trading conditions). These awards

will be made on a 'first-come-first-served' basis. We anticipate starting to make payments from around the 5 June, or as soon as we are able to start confirming eligibility from applicants.

***Category B: Small Businesses and Charities who have suffered significant hardship due to COVID-19 and are important to the local economy / local recovery**

We have deliberately kept the eligibility criteria low for this category, and based on Government guidelines. This includes: businesses must be 'small'; have business premises in Breckland; must have been trading on 11 March; and cannot be eligible for other COVID-19 financial support. We will use the information supplied in the application to make a relative assessment of the hardship experienced, and the impact on the Breckland economy. We will then make grant awards of up to £10,000 to as many of those in greatest need as possible, using whatever monies are left over after paying out the Government priority-listed awards (see category A).

In order to run the above programme, we are limiting the window for grant applications from the 1 June to 23 June (close of business). We will make our assessments using the above guidelines, and continually review as we progress. You can read more about the Discretionary Grants Fund [here](#).

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

We continue to work with colleagues from town councils, the county council, and neighbouring districts (South Norfolk and Broadland) to look at new ways we can support our high street businesses to thrive, as the Government gives approval for more shops and traders to reopen.

Ramping up support in readiness for 15 June (the date from which non-essential retail will be able to reopen), our programme of support will include an [overarching campaign around confidence](#) to help the public and business owners feel assured about shopping locally. We will work with partners to achieve sensitive alterations to the townscapes, to make these spaces as useable as possible and give people the confidence to go about their day-to-day lives. This will 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

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 25) 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 58 households otherwise at risk of homelessness. This number will - and has - reduced over time as the team is actively working with Registered Social Landlords and Private Sector 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: Breckland Community Hub

In Breckland, we currently have **5706 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 **3186 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 **498 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 now delivering 60 food parcel deliveries each week (an additional 10 added this week) which equates to just over 8,000 'meals** as each parcel has 1 weeks' worth of food. We have now delivered more emergency food parcels to shielded residents than any other District in Norfolk.

C) NEW: Breckland Council awards £5k Community Grant to emergency service charity

Breckland Council has awarded a new grant of £5,000 to the Norfolk Accident Rescue Service (NARS), which will help continue their vital work in supporting the emergency services and saving lives in the community.

The Dereham-based charity, now celebrating its 50th year serving the community, is currently experiencing a dramatic increase in demand for its services, which is provided by a group of highly trained volunteer advanced clinicians. This year, alone, NARS has responded to over 500 emergency cases, which is a 100% increase on emergency call-outs over a similar period last year.

4. Breckland service updates

A) NEW: Virtual Cabinet meeting

Breckland Council held its first virtual committee meeting earlier this week, with members of the public being able to view the Cabinet meeting debate and discussion 'live' via the internet. More than 30 members attended the meeting, which was streamed live through the Council's Facebook page; we received over 1.7k views of the video post, with consistent viewing figures of between 50 -55 at any one time.

Later in the month, on June 22, the Council's Planning Committee will also meet via video conferencing and this will again be streamed via the internet for members of the public to observe the meeting. It is expected that further council meetings will be held in this way in due course, with details being published on Breckland's website.

B) Recovery planning: interim management arrangements

One of the key items on this week's Cabinet agenda was a [report](#) summarising the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. You'll be aware from previous updates that the Council's primary focus has been on the wellbeing of its residents and on supporting local businesses through an unprecedented period. For example, we have helped thousands of vulnerable residents by coordinating the delivery of food and medicine packages, while also distributing millions of pounds of grant funding to Breckland businesses.

Although we expect our response to the pandemic continue for some time, we have also begun work to consider how the organisation recovers from the pandemic and how it can best provide safe and effective services in the future. We anticipate that this process will last until at least early 2021 and that learnings from what has worked well during our pandemic response can be used to refine our service delivery - now and in the future.

A draft COVID-19 Operational Recovery Plan is being developed, together with a [high-level roadmap](#) which was shared with Cabinet on Monday. And from this month, we plan to put in place a [new interim management arrangement](#), agreed by Cabinet, to enable a focussed and more place-based approach to delivering the Council's recovery plan.

B) NEW: Council decisions

Decisions have been made this week relating to the Local Authority Discretionary Grant Scheme, the Local Plan update and direction, and the purchase of land for the Snetterton Power Project. Further information can be found at: <https://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/mgDelegatedDecisions.aspx>

C) UPDATED: 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](#).

More than 85% of staff continue to work successfully from home and we are currently analysing feedback from a recent staff survey to look at how we can support them to maintain and develop new and more agile ways of working, now and in the future.

5. County service updates

NEW: Care Homes Support Plan

Support to help keep care home residents and staff safe and manage any outbreak of COVID-19 has been unveiled by the county council and the NHS (read the full story [here](#)). A multi-agency team has been set up to help manage any outbreak of COVID-19 and help care providers access testing and personal protective equipment (PPE). The Government has required councils to draw up a Care Home Support Plan, as part of its £600 million support for the care sector. Norfolk's share is £12.38 million. So far, there have been 113 cases at Norfolk care homes, which represents around 32 per cent. The regional average is 42 per cent.

The range of support on offer includes:

- *Specialist support and guidance to manage any outbreak
- *Supporting care providers to access appropriate and timely testing for all residents and staff whether through the national online portal or the local testing service
- *Training and advice on infection control and use of PPE
- *Staging a multi-disciplinary review to establish the specialist advice and guidance they need

Testing at care homes is being prioritised for those with residents aged over 65, those with 50 or more beds and those that are near to areas with known outbreaks of coronavirus.

If a care home believes they may have an outbreak, they should call the health protection team at Public Health England (0300 3038537), who will log their notification and conduct an initial risk assessment. The case will then be passed on to the local incident room, which will arrange local testing and provide local testing and ongoing support.

Relatives of care home residents who have concerns should contact the home in the first instance.

Leader, Breckland Council

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