

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Briefing for Breckland Council elected members (09 December 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.

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1. Recent Government advice/action

NEW: UK authorises Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine

The Government has authorised the [Pfizer/BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine](#) for use, following months of rigorous clinical trials and a thorough analysis of the data by experts.

NEW: Care home residents to be reunited with families by Christmas

[Care home residents](#) in all tiers will be able to see their families again this Christmas period. A significant increase in testing capacity, paired with new testing technology, will allow friends and family to visit relatives in care homes if they receive a negative result prior to the visit. The move will enable care homes to safely maintain a balance between infection control and the vital benefits of visiting to the health and wellbeing of residents.

NEW: Prime Minister announces £1,000 Christmas grant for 'wet-led pubs'

The Prime Minister has announced an additional £1,000 [Christmas grant](#) for 'wet-led pubs' in tiers 2 and 3 who will miss out on much needed business during the busy Christmas period. Pubs that predominantly serve alcohol rather than provide food have been asked to make huge sacrifices over the festive season and will be eligible for a one-off £1000 to help make ends meet.

NEW: Festive travel tips for people considering overseas travel

People thinking about going abroad over the festive period should read the advice from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), to inform themselves of their local rules and the possible disruption they may face if they choose to go overseas. The FCDO has issued [five festive travel tips](#) that people should read before deciding to go abroad.

NEW: Forestry Commission operational update

The [Forestry Commission](#) has issued an update about its working practices during the coronavirus outbreak. This includes asking its staff to continue to work from home while also carrying out priority site-based work, where this can be done in line with government advice.

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

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

2. Supporting businesses and employees

UPDATED: National support schemes now available:

Details and application forms can be found at [Coronavirus Financial Information](#). Members are encouraged to encourage eligible local businesses to apply.

NEW: Grants for Businesses under Tier 2 Restrictions (from 2nd December onwards)

We were one of the first to make available a new set of support for businesses impacted by the Tier 2 restrictions:

- **For businesses still open, but significantly impacted by Tier 2:**

Our scheme for businesses significantly impacted by Tier 2, but still allowed to remain open, went live on 2nd December. This provides small cash grants to businesses which have been significantly impacted by the Tier 2 restrictions but are still open.

We will be doing an automatic pay run to those we know are eligible shortly, and all other businesses can apply directly via a short web-form: [Local Restrictions Support Grant - Tier 2](#)
This scheme provides funding (of between £467 and £1,500) on a 14-day basis and should Tier 2 be extended in Breckland on the 16th we will make new payments to all those who are eligible.

- **For businesses forced to closed under Tier 2, including additional support for “wet-led” pubs:**

We are awaiting updated guidance, funding confirmation, and requirements recently following Government announcements. Through this we expect to make larger awards to businesses that are not able to open at all.

UPDATED: Business Grants for businesses impacted by the National Restrictions (to 2nd Dec)

Although the national restrictions have ended, we will continue to provide grants under the previous scheme to any businesses who are eligible and have not yet come forward. So far, we have paid out almost £1.2m to c. 1000 businesses, reaching almost 80% of those identified as eligible.

We will continue to make awards to all eligible businesses, who can register at:

<https://www.breckland.gov.uk/local-restrictions-support-grant>

We are also continuing to make provision for those businesses ineligible under the Government’s criteria, as part of our “additional restrictions grant (ARG)” programme. Specific to Breckland, this scheme also supports home-based business, non-business rate-paying businesses, and businesses who are direct suppliers to those closed by the national restrictions.

To date we are supporting over 100 businesses via the scheme, and anyone interested can apply via:

<https://www.breckland.gov.uk/breckland-additional-restrictions-grant>

UPDATED: Support for High Streets

We welcomed back more shoppers and businesses to the High Streets last week, and continue to push for safe and vibrant numbers of shoppers via:

- **Reopening, Christmas, and Shop Local campaigns through #EnjoyDiscoverExplore programme**, which include video testimonials based in each town, and new banner arms and column wraps in all market towns
- **Liaison Officers** – who will provide visible presence on the High Street, working closely with the new Covid support officers and Environmental Health Team.

- **Officers** carried out joint visits with our police colleagues in the market towns and some outlying villages at the weekend in order to assess compliance since the end of restrictions and being placed into Tier 2. Some non-compliances were noted. We will continue with these visits over the festive period in order to monitor compliance and offer support.
- **E-directory of local businesses** - which is being supported via social media, and will continue to grow: <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/shopping-in-breckland>
- **Digital High Streets Programme** – a Breckland Council initiative enabling High Street businesses to gain access to free training and workshops on making the most of digital, as well as grants to help invest in new digital capabilities (e.g. a brand new website, or social media marketing)
- **Continuing to provide confidence to shoppers and businesses** – with hand sanitiser stations and social distancing signage; and businesses able to access free training and support packs including posters and floor stickers

We are constantly reviewing opportunities and needs of businesses to shape the current solutions. Should Members have any suggestion or comments please contact the [Regeneration Team](#)

UPDATED: Support for start-ups

To help manage issues of Covid redundancy and to diversify the local economy, Breckland Council is running a new start-up support programme for potential Breckland entrepreneurs. This includes a start-up grants scheme, with funding available of up to £10k. This is particularly aimed at those who have lost their jobs or cannot access new employment due to the pandemic. The team have engaged with 21 businesses with support so far on this scheme.

Details and applications are [available online](#). We are grateful for any support Members can provide in encouraging interested people to apply.

UPDATED: Economic support for individuals

To support the Council's vulnerability agenda, and help mitigate the economic impacts of Covid for individuals, we have established a significant Covid-talent programme which includes:

- **1:1 advice and guidance** – to help individuals navigate the jobs market, find opportunity, and cope with the shock of redundancy. Since October this has supported 139 individuals.
- **Group Skills & Support Sessions** – to help adults and young people with tools they need to competitively access jobs market

Members are asked to support the initiative by encouraging residents to access details and [details and appointment bookings](#).

3. Community support

NEW: Self Isolation Payments

If residents have been told by the NHS to self-isolate, either because they have tested positive for coronavirus COVID-19 or have been in contact with someone who has tested positive, they may be entitled to some financial support during their self-isolation period.

People who are eligible will receive:

- A fixed amount of £500
- Payment is subject to income tax but not National Insurance. Local Authorities are required to notify HMRC.

Who is eligible?

People who live in the Breckland district who have received a notification from NHS Test and Trace to self-isolate will be entitled to a Self-Isolation Payment providing they satisfy all of the following requirements:

- They have been asked to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace either because they've tested positive for coronavirus or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive;
- They comply with the notification from NHS Test and Trace to self-isolate;
- are employed or self-employed;
- They are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result; and are in receipt of one of the following benefits:
 - Universal Credit
 - Working Tax Credit
 - Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
 - Housing Benefit
 - Income Support
 - Income based Job Seeker's Allowance
 - Pension Credit

People can claim for more than one test, should they test positive/be told to self-isolate again in the future. Find out more [on our website](#).

NEW: Breckland Council Match Funding

The Council has now allocated all its grant funding budget for 2020/21 and as such this scheme is now closed. All applications that have been received prior to the scheme closing will be assessed and those successful will be notified. There may be other grant funding available at [Norfolk Community Foundation](#).

4. Breckland service updates

UPDATED: Covid officer posts

Breckland's Covid Support Officers have this week received training from the council and begun working in our market towns. Over the coming weeks and months they will be engaging with residents and businesses to provide guidance and reassurance. They will be a flexible resource that will move between the work on the high street and contact tracing dependant on the priority at the time.

Frontline services

The vast majority of the services that we provide will continue where the service is essential, subject to risk assessments and latest guidance issued to staff.

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. You can see the latest [service updates on our website](#).

Leader, Breckland Council
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