

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Briefing for Breckland Council elected members (24 March 2021)

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: Legal footing for national unlocking set out ahead of vote

The government has [set out regulations](#) which will pave the way to the easing of all restrictions from 21 June, and plans proposals to maintain support for the most vulnerable, businesses and public services. Packages such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and Self-Employed Income Support Scheme have been supporting many families and businesses throughout the pandemic.

NEW: Ground-breaking new technology to detect known variants of concern

New technology to rapidly [detect new COVID mutations](#) indicating whether positive test samples contain known variants is being trialled by the government in NHS Test and Trace laboratories.

NEW: Extra £47.6 million for Vaccines Manufacturing and Innovation Centre

The Vaccines Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (VMIC) has been granted an additional £47.6 million to support the expansion and [acceleration of the programme](#). The VMIC will be the UK's first national vaccines manufacturing and innovation facility and will be able to respond to pandemics by producing millions of doses quickly.

NEW: Half of all adults in UK receive first dose of COVID-19 vaccine

Half of all adults in the UK have [received their first dose](#) of the (coronavirus) COVID-19 vaccine, the latest figures show. The UK health services vaccinated a total of 26.8 million people between 8 December and 19 March with first doses, while 2.1 million people have had their second dose so far.

NEW: Trials to find preventative COVID-19 treatments for most vulnerable to launch in UK

Hundreds of thousands of the UK's most vulnerable people could be set to benefit from [innovative treatments](#) that could stop them catching COVID-19, as 2 new government-funded clinical trials launch in the UK.

NEW: UK regulator confirms that people should continue to receive the COVID-19 vaccine

AstraZeneca

Following suspensions by some countries of the COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca over suspected blood clots, the [MHRA confirms that the benefits](#) of the vaccine in preventing COVID-19 far outweigh the risks. People should still go and get their COVID-19 vaccine when asked to do so.

NEW: PHE study shows three-quarters of over 70s have COVID-19 antibodies

New [findings from Public Health England](#) have shown that an estimated 75.8% of 70 to 84 year old blood donors had antibodies against COVID-19 by early March. However, only 5.6% were from natural infection, which shows that older adults are able to mount a very robust immune response to a single dose of coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine.

NEW: Shielding advice for the clinically extremely vulnerable to stop from April

More than 3.79 million clinically extremely vulnerable people in England will be informed they are [no longer advised to shield](#) from Thursday 1 April 2021. More than 9 in 10 clinically extremely vulnerable people have been vaccinated with a first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

NEW: Consultation on autumn series 2021

A 2-week consultation has started on how an [autumn exam series](#) for GCSEs, AS and A levels should run this year. Ofqual is seeking views on how an autumn exam series for GCSEs, AS and A levels should run this year, in a consultation published today (17 March).

NEW: UK and India ramp up joint efforts on climate action

The UK and India are working to expand [research and collaboration](#) links to tackle climate change. Science and technology partnerships between the UK and India are already playing a vital role to tackle the most pressing global challenges, including ending the COVID-19 pandemic through joint work to provide doses of the Oxford vaccine, manufactured in India, to developing countries.

NEW: Funding boost for construction skills bootcamps

Two regions will soon benefit from an extra half a million pounds to expand the delivery of the successful [construction skills bootcamps](#), helping more people to gain vital skills in demand from employers. The funding boost – which comes from the £43m announced last November to establish pioneering new skills bootcamps - will focus on developing test models that can be scaled to other areas. The free, flexible courses last up to 16 weeks covering areas including construction, digital and technical, offering fast-track interviews with a local employer at the end.

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

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

2. Supporting businesses and employees

REMINDER: Business support remains available

If you know a business that needs financial support please ask them to engage via our [website](#) or by emailing us: regeneration@breckland.gov.uk.

We use our single grant application form to match companies to every available national scheme, and our revised discretionary policy should mean that every legitimate Breckland-based business should be eligible for some direct financial support.

NEW: Covid Safe Accreditation scheme to launch

Breckland Council is launching a Covid Safe Accreditation Scheme which recognises Breckland businesses that have good covid-secure measures in place. Businesses which achieve the required standard will receive a sticker, for prominent display in their shop window.

The Scheme is open to all Breckland Businesses. It aims to recognise businesses that have good Covid Safe procedures in place and to provide assurance to local residents and visitors that Breckland businesses are covid secure. Details will be shared on the council’s website and social media in due course.

UPDATED: Restart Grants

We will be able to support businesses through provision of new “Restart” Grants after 1 April. These grants work based on national criteria, and target businesses in rateable premises (although those in receipt of 100% rate relief are still eligible) based on:

Category	Eligible businesses include	Grants Available (based on RV)		
		<£15k	£15–51k	51k>
Non-essential retail	Retailers whose products are “not necessary to the health and well-being of the public” *	£2,667	£4,000	£6,000
Hospitality & leisure	Hospitality, accommodation, leisure, personal care and gym business	£8,000	£12,000	£18,000

** BEIS have supplied a long list of non-eligible businesses under non-essential retail, including: food retailers, supermarkets, convenience stores, off licences, breweries, pharmacies, animal rescue centres, building merchants, petrol stations, vehicle repair and MOT services, taxi and vehicle hire businesses, education providers, post offices, funeral directors, laundrettes, vets, storage and distribution facilities, wholesalers, employment agencies.*

We are currently working with the Government on the guidelines and local deployment. As per previous rounds we anticipate being able to make most payments automatically, based on data already held. Businesses who have not previously received support will also be able to engage via our single web form, and we will match against eligibility. We will be writing to all businesses as soon as we have all the criteria and required information defined.

UPDATED: LRS (Closed) and top-up payments for Closed Businesses

We are still able to provide business grants under the LRS (Closed) financial assistance scheme. Payments are now available for a period from 5 Jan to 31 March 2021. For the majority of Breckland businesses, this means they have received a top up for 44 days’ worth of grants

Eligibility is defined nationally, and effectively covers rate paying businesses (100% rate relief still eligible) that are legally required to close due to the lockdown. We are processing most payments automatically based on data previously acquired, but any business can apply via our website.

The Breckland implementation of this scheme went live on 23 December, and we have supported over 1,000 businesses with £5,2290,095.

In addition to the rolling payments outlined above, we are also able to make further one-off payments to all businesses required to close that are registered for business rates for the period 5 January – 15 February 2021 (100% rate relief is still applicable). The size of the one-off award is based on rateable value of the business premise:

- £15,000 or under = £4000
- £15,001 to £50,999 = £6000
- £51,000 or over = £9000

Under this scheme we have already issued over £4.6m additional support to over 1,000 businesses. As with the rolling payments, we are processing the majority via automatic pay runs using existing data. However, any business can apply, and we will match wherever we can to the national criteria. Application for this award close 31 March 2021

UPDATED: Additional Restrictions Grants – Breckland’s discretionary policy.

Based on the gaps left from the LRS (Closed) policy we continue our complimentary set of support using Breckland’s discretionary resource. Under this approach, any business can apply if they are ineligible for LRS (Closed) and struggling.

We have reviewed our available funding against current applications and have extended this support to provide additional monies to all recipients to cover businesses through to restrictions lifting in the current roadmap. Eligibility and awards are grouped into four categories for the period 5 January - 15 February (with newly applied top ups shown in brackets):

- Businesses with high fixed property costs, who are forced to close (i.e. B&Bs) - £1,334 (topped up with £2,664)
- Businesses with high fixed property costs, who can still open but are struggling (i.e. supply chain, manufacturers) £1,000 (topped up with £2,001)
- Businesses with low / no fixed property costs, who are forced to close (i.e. regular market traders, hairdressers renting space) - £1,000 (topped up with £2,001)
- Businesses with low / no fixed property costs, who can still open but are struggling – (i.e. self-employed, open market traders) £667 (topped up with £1,335)

Any business can apply via: <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/article/16267/Covid-19-Business-Grant>

Current awards from Breckland now over £2m, supporting over 850 businesses.

UPDATED: “Legacy” grant schemes

We are still supporting and paying any eligible business we can under the support schemes relevant to previous Tiers and Restrictions. These include:

- Winter Support Payments / Grants for Wet Led Pubs – A one-off payment of £1,000 for pubs which derive majority of their income through drinks sales – (£42,000 paid to date) The deadline for applications for the Christmas Support Payment had been extended to 28 February 2021.
- Tier 2 Restrictions Grants – Grants of up to £1,050 for every 14 days in Tier 2, for businesses which were significantly impacted by the specific Tier 2 restrictions (£374,918 paid to date)
- November National Restrictions – Grants of up to £3,000 for every for businesses which were significantly impacted by the specific November enhanced restrictions (£1,382,550 paid to date)

Applications for these also close 31st March 2021. Any business can apply via:

<https://www.breckland.gov.uk/article/16267/Covid-19-Business-Grant>

UPDATED: Support for High Streets & Business Support through the reopening period

Given the detail, please find attached to the covering email a separate briefing note to explain the full series of support being prepared for businesses.

UPDATED: Town Delivery Plans

We have now completed the successful commissioning of a partner to bring forward the Town Delivery Plan Programme, following the Council's approval of the programme in November 2019.

Given the size and complexity of this work, a separate note will be circulated to key stakeholders to outline how we are taking this project forward together.

3. Community Support

NEW: Asymptomatic testing programme to move to new sites in Breckland

Asymptomatic testing of Breckland residents will continue over the coming weeks, with the programme moving to sites around the district. Around 1 in 3 people have coronavirus without displaying any symptoms so asymptomatic testing will help identify more positive cases and ensure those infected people isolate and stop spreading the virus.

The pop-up testing was initially offered in Watton, with the team offering appointments in the town through until this Sunday (27th).

The team will be in Attleborough from 29 March to 1 April, at the town hall. Symptom-free testing will then be offered in Thetford from 6 April, with appointments available until 10 April.

People can book an appointment at www.norfolk.gov.uk/rapidtesting

REMINDER: Support for vulnerable residents

The single point of contact for general information and enquiries, including financial support from **Norfolk Assistance Scheme is 0344 800 8020**.

NAS can help with food, supermarket online delivery slots, paying bills, and money for everyday essentials. The scheme can also help if people can't meet their everyday needs and are struggling for reasons other than coronavirus.

Residents are encouraged to access the Norfolk Assistance Scheme in the first instance so demand can be effectively triaged. However, for direct referrals to our Community Hub, please email communitysupport@breckland.gov.uk. Further information can be found [on our website](#).

4. Breckland service updates

UPDATED: Frontline services

The vast majority of the services that we provide continue where the service is essential, subject to risk assessments and latest guidance issued to staff. You can see an overview of our [service updates on our website](#).

New: New waste collection service launches

A new household waste and recycling collection contract is due to start in April in Breckland, bringing an enhanced service to our residents. It comes after Breckland joined up with Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk and North Norfolk to appoint a single provider, which has saved taxpayers' money on procurement costs and helped secure an improved service.

Working together means vehicles, staff and other assets can potentially be shared so the teams can work more effectively across multiple areas. During the first year of the contract, investment will also be made into shared IT systems, so real-time service information is available to residents and it is made easier for people to book additional services online, such as garden waste collections.

The contract will also see a brand-new fleet of bin collection trucks and other vehicles rolled out, which will operate across all three council areas. Serco, the selected provider, will also be undertaking street cleaning, removal of fly-tipped materials, litter and dog bin management, and grass cutting.

Residents can expect their collections to take place on their existing collection day as there are no proposed changes to collection rounds. However, as part of the contract, residents will be able to report any issues direct to the team, so they can be addressed as quickly as possible. A new single point of access phone number will go live from next week and be promoted on our website, social media and future bin collection calendars etc.

NEW: Covid officers provide reassurance on our high streets

Breckland Council's Covid Officers have been carrying out joint patrols alongside colleagues from the Police. Our close relationship with the local police makes it easier for us to respond promptly to any concerns brought to our attention or highlighted by the team.

NEW: New Animal welfare officer to start in post

Breckland Council's new animal welfare officer is set to start in April, as part of an investment in protecting animal wellbeing and licensing. Among their initial focus will be assessing three new dog breeders before a licence is issued. Once lockdown restrictions lifted it is anticipated that with social distancing measures the inspections will be able to take place in the majority of cases.

NEW: Upcoming email address changes for shared officers

Members may wish to be aware that a number of shared officers will be undergoing a change to their email addresses over the next fortnight. Their email addresses will be changing from a shared email address to a Breckland email address in the standard format of firstname.surname@breckland.gov.uk

This work will be happening between 29 March and 9 April 2021. If Members experience any delayed email responses from officers during this time, they can continue to contact the officer via phone, text or WhatsApp; mobile numbers will remain active throughout and will not be changing.

Breckland Council
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