

# Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

## Briefing for Breckland Council elected members (10 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.**

### Contents

1. Recent Government advice/action.....	1
2. Supporting businesses and employees .....	3
3. Community Support .....	6
4. Breckland service updates .....	6

### 1. Recent Government advice/action

#### **NEW: NHS Test and Trace tests over 2.8 million in a week**

Recent [weekly figures](#) show NHS Test and Trace successfully reached 88.5% of cases and 93.3% of their contacts, while nearly a million rapid lateral flow tests were carried out in educational settings. The latest weekly statistics reveal the service has reached more than 181,666 people, and tested more than 2.8 million people for COVID-19, between 18 and 24 February.

#### **NEW: Weekly national flu and COVID-19 surveillance reports published**

The recent [national influenza and COVID-19 surveillance report](#) show that COVID-19 activity decreased nationally from the week 22 to 28 February. Case rates have decreased across all age groups, with the highest rate of 121.1 per 100,000 population seen in those aged between 30 to 39 years old. Case rates per 100,000 have fallen across all regions – they are highest in the East Midlands, with a rate of 120.8.

#### **NEW: Coronavirus (COVID-19): Supporting the reopening of outdoor hospitality**

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government Robert Jenrick has [written to local authorities](#) about government measures to support hospitality businesses to reopen safely, including the intention to extend pavement licences for a further 12 months, making it easier and cheaper for pubs, restaurants and cafes to continue to make al fresco dining a reality with outside seating, tables and street stalls to serve food and drinks.

#### **NEW: New Action Group to boost mental health education**

A new coalition of health and education experts has [met for the first time](#) to look at the impact of the pandemic on the mental health and wellbeing of children, young people and education staff across England. Education Secretary Gavin Williamson was joined by ministers from across Government, as well as Youth Mental Health Ambassador Dr Alex George, to discuss how best to respond to the mental health issues of greatest concern including the increase in eating disorders and self-harm among young people, and how to help education staff manage their mental wellbeing.

#### **NEW: £79 million to boost mental health support for children and young people**

More [mental health support](#) is to be made available to young people, who have been uniquely impacted by the pandemic and lockdown. NHS research suggests 1 in 6 may now have a mental

health problem, up from 1 in 9 in 2017. The number of mental health support teams in schools and colleges will grow from 59 to 400 by April 2023, supporting nearly 3 million children. Mental health support teams work in a variety of ways, including enabling children to text their local mental health support team, with a health professional responding within an hour during the school day offering them advice, or providing families with tips on how to spot that the children and young people are struggling with their mental health.

**NEW: Schools and colleges reopen as part of Step One of the roadmap**

The Prime Minister has hailed the collective efforts of the public to bring infection rates down so we can [start Step One of the roadmap](#), with pupils across England returning to school and colleges. Getting children back to face to face education has remained the national priority throughout lockdown.

**NEW: Free rapid tests for all businesses for regular workplace testing**

As part of the government's roadmap to cautiously lift restrictions, businesses of all sizes - including those with fewer than 50 employees - can now [register to order free lateral flow tests](#) for their employees. Around 1 in 3 people with coronavirus don't have symptoms, which means they could be spreading the virus in workplaces without knowing. Rapid testing detects cases quickly – in under 30 minutes – meaning positive cases can isolate immediately, breaking chains of transmission.

**NEW: Contact tracers successfully identify sixth case of P.1 Variant of Concern**

Public Health England (PHE) and NHS Test and Trace teams have successfully located the third individual in England [who tested positive for the P.1 Variant of Concern](#) that originated in Manaus, Brazil. Tracing teams narrowed their search to a small number of households in Croydon before matching the barcode from the individual's testing pack to the variant test result.

**NEW: Mandatory form for international travel launched to prevent illegal trips**

Passengers travelling internationally from 8 March 2021 will need to [carry a new form](#) that sets out their trip is permitted under the [stay at home restrictions](#). The [simple form](#) must be downloaded, signed before travel, and carried or downloaded onto a mobile phone.

**NEW: BEIS in the Budget 2021**

The government has [published a Budget](#) which will be supported by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) aiming to protect the jobs and livelihoods of the British people through the COVID-19 pandemic.

**NEW: Modified COVID-19 vaccines for variants to be fast-tracked, says MHRA and other regulators**

Authorised COVID-19 [vaccines that are modified](#) in response to new variants will not need a brand new approval or "lengthy" clinical studies before being made available to UK residents, according to [new guidance from the ACCESS Consortium](#) – a coalition of regulatory authorities from the UK, Australia, Canada, Singapore and Switzerland.

**NEW: New specialised support to help those living with obesity to lose weight**

Children, adults and families will be better supported to achieve and maintain a healthier weight through [£100 million of new government support](#). Over £70 million will be invested into weight management services – made available through the NHS and councils – enabling up to 700,000 adults to have access to support that can help them to lose weight, from access to digital apps, weight management groups or individual coaches, to specialist clinical support. The remaining £30 million will fund initiatives to help people maintain a healthy weight.

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](mailto: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.

### **UPDATED: Restart Grants**

The Government has trailed additional support as part of the roadmap out of lockdown, and the imminent national budget. Under the press notices we expect shops will be eligible for up to £6,000 grant to reopen on April 12, with hospitality and leisure businesses eligible for grants of up to £18,000.

We are currently awaiting some further details and announcements from BEIS to support our deployment of these. However, we anticipate being able to operate a very similar process to LRS (Closed) and the recent one-off payment grants. We expect the majority of businesses will be automatically paid where we hold up-to-date records, and payments to be released as soon as possible.

### **UPDATED: Rolling grants for businesses under the current lockdown – LRS (Closed)**

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 just received a top up for 44 days' worth of grants, based on recent announcements.

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 almost 1,000 businesses with £5,130,058

### **UPDATED: One-off top up payments for Closed Businesses.**

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 £4.5m 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.

**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 are currently reviewing how far we can extend this support under the new national timetable for reopening.

Currently awards are grouped into four categories:

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

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

Current awards from Breckland now reach almost £1m, supporting almost 800 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 has 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)

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

**UPDATED: Support for High Streets**

We are currently revising our plans for support to the High Streets in response to the recently announced roadmap out of restrictions and will be bringing forward a new set of plans and proposals for supporting Market Towns in their recovery.

A suite of potential additional support elements have been identified, which include:

- Grants to any customer facing business, to meet specific costs of Covid-safe adaptations or changes to business to keep trading during the period.
- Shop front improvement scheme, to help meet the costs of external improvements to shops.
- Online support and guidance to any business needing help with Covid-safe practice, or business testing.
- Fast-track system for licencing changes for expansion of trade outdoors.
- Grants to support digitisation and improvements in digital offer for businesses.
- A scheme to help show customers where businesses are operating in a Covid-safe manner.

- Investments in new Covid-safe facilities like hand sanitisers in shopping areas, as well as a visible positive presence of Covid Support Officers on the streets.
- Further Comms campaigns to support benefit of supporting local business.

In the meantime, we continue to push for safe and vibrant numbers of shoppers via:

- **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) We have made 11 awards so far – more information and applications via <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/digital-high-street>
- **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
- **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>

#### Other National Support

- **Recovery Loan Scheme** - A new scheme will be launched to replace the existing government guaranteed schemes. The government guarantees 80% of the finance to the lender to ensure they continue to have the confidence to lend to businesses. Further details are [here](#)
- **The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme** - now extended to September.
- **The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS)** will continue with a fourth and a fifth grant. The Chancellor announced that more than 600,000 people, many of whom became self-employed in 2019-20, may now be able to claim direct cash grants under SEISS. Further details can be found [here](#)
- **Business rates holiday** - has been extended by an additional three months. This means that retail, hospitality and leisure properties will pay no business rates for three months from 1 April when combined with Small Business Rates Relief, with further relief available for the rest of the year.
- **Hospitality, holiday accommodation and attractions VAT reduction** - For selected VAT registered business, temporarily reduction the rate of VAT on supplies relating to hospitality, accommodation. Government will extend the temporary reduced rate of VAT of 5% until 30 September 2021 and prepare for a new rate of 12.5% from 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. Further details may be viewed [here](#)
- **The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme** - now extended until 30 September 2021.
- **Tourist Attractions VAT reduction on admission charges** - VAT on selected attractions are eligible for the temporary reduced rate of VAT from 15 July 2020. Further details can be found [here](#)
- **£20 million SME Brexit Support Fund** – this offers support to help small businesses adjust to new customs procedures, rules of origin, and VAT rules when trading with the EU. Eligibility businesses can get up to £2,000. Requirements are that business have no more than 500 employees, and no more than £100 million annual turnover. Further details may be found [here](#)
- **Bounce back loan borrowers** can delay repayments by extra six months. Businesses that took out government-backed Bounce Back Loans to get through Covid-19 will now have greater flexibility to repay their loans. Further details may be found [here](#)

### 3. Community Support

#### **NEW: District Asymptomatic Testing (DAT) Sites set to launch in Breckland**

Rapid, regular testing for people **without** symptoms of COVID-19 will be made available in parts of Breckland from next week. 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 will start from next week and move around to different locations in the district. This targeted testing is coordinated and led by the data from Public Health and Norfolk County Council, and will be focused on locations with the highest prevalence of the virus.

People in the immediate and surrounding areas will be encouraged to book a testing slot as a site near them goes live. They will also be able to scan a QR code and enter their details to book a test. Breckland council will be leading operationally by sourcing locations and ensuring logistics and the right infrastructure is in place.

Please look out for further messages on the council's social media pages and leaflets being distributed in the local area over the coming weeks, advertising the specific sites in the rolling programme and how to book a test.

#### **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](mailto: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](#).

Following the Government recently outlining its roadmap out of lockdown, Breckland Council has now assessed the impact this will have on its services and how it can best support the reopening of the district's high streets and services.

The council will continue to deliver services and operate within the relevant national covid guidance as the country progresses through each of the roadmap steps. Details on changes to our service delivery will be published on our website and via our social media channels and website.

