

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Briefing for Breckland Council elected members (28 April 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: COVID-19 Antivirals Taskforce to roll out home treatments this autumn

A new [Antivirals Taskforce has been launched](#) by the government to identify treatments for UK patients who have been exposed to COVID-19 to stop the infection spreading and speed up recovery time. The taskforce will search for the most promising novel antiviral medicines that can be taken at home and support their development through clinical trials to ensure they can be rapidly rolled out to patients as early as the autumn.

NEW: UK shares experiences to increase confidence in vaccines

The Government Communications Service International (GCSI) has delivered a [virtual seminar](#) to public officials in Latin America. UK Government communication strategies and experiences around vaccines were shared with delegates, with the aim of building public confidence about vaccines' efficacy and to fight misinformation.

NEW: UK sends life-saving medical equipment to India

More than 600 items of vital medical equipment will be [sent to India](#) to support the country in its fight against COVID-19. The assistance package, funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, includes ventilators and oxygen concentrators from surplus stocks. It will be used by the Government of India to provide vital medical treatment to those suffering from COVID-19 in India.

NEW: BRIT Awards to go ahead with live audience as latest event in Government research programme

The 2021 BRIT Awards [ceremony will go ahead](#) with a live audience as the latest addition to the government's Events Research Programme, which looks at how venues can restart large events and welcome crowds back safely this summer. The event will return to London's O2 arena on 11 May with an audience of 4,000 people.

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 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.

We have now issued almost £50m in financial support since the start of the pandemic and want to make sure every business in Breckland that needs help, gets help – so please do flag any known issues to us.

UPDATED: Restart Grants

We have been able to pay businesses who meet the national eligibility for “Restart” Grants and have issued almost £7m of grant monies, to around 1,000 businesses. As with recent grant schemes, we are making payments automatically based on previously held data wherever possible, so most companies do not need to ‘apply’.

The amount of money a business can receive is based on nationally set criteria, which looks at both the type of business they run, and the rateable value of their premises (only businesses in rateable premises are eligible under this scheme, although this does include those in receipt of 100% rate relief):

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

Businesses who have not previously received support will also be able to engage via our single web form, and we will match against eligibility via: <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/article/16267/Covid-19-Business-Grant>

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 are now over £2.5m, supporting over 1,250 businesses.

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

The Prime Minister has confirmed the national roadmap out of restrictions is on track, and our “Spring Back” Programme is fully operation to support this. This programme was designed around feedback from over 500 individual businesses, and we are actively reviewing plans and programmes all the time. Should Members identify any issues they think we could be supporting, please let us know at regeneration@breckland.gov.uk

Currently Breckland businesses now able to access a further £2m of support which includes:

- **Shop Front Improvement Scheme** – investing in the biggest ever “Spring Clean” across the District. Any businesses based in Breckland’s primary shopping areas, or any customer facing business, will be able to get financial support for improvements and enhancements to their shop frontage – from a lick of paint through to a replacement frontage.
- **Covid Safe and Adaptions Grants** – helping businesses shoulder the burden of trading in a Covid-safe way and meet the challenges of serving under restrictions. Grants of up to £5k will be available to invest in safety; or change business practices.
- **Covid Safe Scheme** – helping customers easily see the efforts businesses are making to ensure Covid safety, with a simple accreditation scheme delivered by Breckland Public Protection
- **Continued Investment in Shopper Safety** – with new and replacement hand sanitiser stations in all busy shopping areas, and friendly Covid Support Officers helping assure safety 6 days a week
- **Expanded Enjoy Discover Explore Campaign** – promoting and highlighting the local shopping and leisure offer across Breckland, with branding now bespoke to each Market Town
- **Digital Breckland** – building on the highly successful scheme – Breckland Digital High Streets – enabling any Breckland-based business to get support for their digital offer, with grants towards making key digital changes from a new payment system, through to search engine optimisation. Claims of £74,000 received to date.

- **Expanded enterprise and start-up scheme** – having already created 10 new businesses since Christmas, we are looking to grow the pipeline of new innovative businesses further. With finance and advice for new entrepreneurs looking to start-up locally. Claims of £39,000 received.
- **Support grants for businesses outside of national schemes** –As part of commitment that no business in need goes unsupported, Breckland’s discretionary scheme extends grants to any Breckland-based-business ineligible under national schemes – including self-employed, market traders and mobile traders.

We are pleased to have supported over 250 businesses through these programmes so far, and expect it to reach hundreds more as restrictions continue to lift.

Information and applications can be found at - <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/businesssupport>

UPDATED: Growth Programme

- **Town Delivery Plans – the ‘Future Breckland’ Project** - The Project is now live following appointment of a lead delivery partner. To help us communicate this with different audiences, the project will now be working under a new title ‘Future Breckland: Thriving People & Places. The next stage of activity is information gathering and planning, with the first major piece of work due to focus on Dereham. Further details will be made on the project [website](#). Any questions can be addressed to the Project Team on tdps@breckland.gov.uk
- **Snetterton Power & Masterplanning** – we have recently achieved planning consent for the new substation and presently await a firm price from UKPN for the construction cost.
- **Thetford HIF** – the design stage has now concluded, and we are starting to receive Balfour Beatty’s commercial offer and have commenced a detailed review.

3. Community Support

NEW: Breckland’s Covid Safe Scheme could be adopted elsewhere

Breckland’s [Covid Safe Scheme](#), which has seen the first wave of businesses inspected and issued accreditation for being ‘covid safe’, has gained interest from peers outside of the district.

Details on how Breckland created and is administering the Covid Safe Scheme have now been shared with North Norfolk District Council and Norfolk County Council Public Health, as they are interested in rolling out similar schemes elsewhere.

NEW: Covid Support Officers supporting the safe easing of restrictions

Breckland’s Covid Support Officers have continued to work across the district to make sure people remain safe as covid restrictions ease. See examples below:

This includes **engaging with local supermarket** staff and shoppers, who have expressed their gratitude for the support. The team has been helping with marshalling shoppers and reminding them to keep a safe distance while shopping. Most recently, this has included a focus in Dereham, with officers visiting Aldi, Co-Op and Morrison’s in the town, and Sainsburys in Attleborough. The team will continue to engage with supermarkets across the district going forward.

Similarly, the team has attended **local markets** which have seen a growing number of stallholders and shoppers as restrictions have eased. However, no issues have been reported.

In light of an **auction** taking place at Swaffham marketplace last week, the Covid Support Officers have been speaking with the town council and police to ensure social distancing is being adhered to at future events.

The officers have also been in Swaffham to support the **Sustainable Swaffham** initiative, including helping with distributing 'Bags for life' to independent shops in Swaffham. This has been very well received by the independent shops in the town and members of the public.

In Dereham, the team have had some concerns about the number of **schoolchildren** gathering in the town centre after school, causing various issues for local businesses and members of the public in the process. The team has since highlighted this as an area of concern with the Police and engaged with local schools to ask them to speak with the children about this. While there has now been a noticeable reduction in children gathering in the area, the team will continue to monitor the situation.

In addition to the above activities, the team has also been carrying out **patrols** in each of our towns to provide advice to residents and businesses. They have also provided ongoing welfare support through **contact tracing** cases of covid and **delivering food parcels**.

UPDATED: Dereham symptom-free testing

The asymptomatic-testing programme is coming to Dereham in May. People without symptoms will be able to check they are covid-free by dropping into the pop-up testing centre, which will be at Dereham Baptist Church on Norwich Street (NR19 1BX) Monday to Friday on weeks commencing 3 and 10 May (except Bank Holiday Monday). Tests will be available 9am-5pm, though last admission will be 30 minutes before closing.

To make tests as accessible as possible, people will be able to walk-up without an appointment. Alternatively, people can choose to book an appointment slot at www.norfolk.gov.uk/rapidtesting

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.

NEW: Member testing

In line with latest national guidance, we're encouraging all members to access a covid test twice each week. Approximately 1 in 3 people with coronavirus do not display symptoms and as a result can be spreading the virus without knowing. It is therefore vital that we all regularly test ourselves, which will help protect each other, our loved ones, and our residents in the community.

Although coronavirus numbers are currently relatively low, with restrictions being eased it is likely will all be coming into contact with more people over the coming weeks and months and so it is more important than ever that we don't let our guard down.

There are various ways in which you can access symptom-free testing. Our preference as an organisation is 'observed testing' where possible as this ensures the test is carried out correctly and the result is reliable and logged with the NHS database. Observed testing is available at testing sites in all Norfolk districts on a rolling basis, including Breckland. You can see locations currently offering this testing at

<https://outlook.office365.com/owa/calendar/C19testing1@NorfolkCounty.onmicrosoft.com/bookings/>

If you would like to make use of a free home testing kit instead, they can be obtained from libraries and pharmacies and by ordering online. You can find out more at <https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests> or at <https://maps.test-and-trace.nhs.uk/>

REMINDER: Self isolation Support available

People required to self-isolate can access practical, social, or emotional support to do so from Breckland Council or its partners.

The new Self isolation Support operating model focuses on:

- Financial support for people on low incomes who are unable to work from home and will lose income through self-isolating.
- Practical, social, and emotional support for those who need it, organised by councils and community groups.
- Targeted enforcement of breaches of the legal requirement to self-isolate, as well as council enforcement against employers who pressure their employees to break self-isolation when they are required to do so.
- Communications to improve awareness of when people need to self-isolate, how long for, what this involves, its importance in stopping the spread of the virus, the support available and the consequences of breaking the rules.

Members can still make direct referrals for residents in need of support by emailing communitysupport@breckland.gov.uk

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: Thetford pool set to reopen

As previously reported, Breckland's leisure centres in Dereham and Thetford recently reopened to customers, in line with latest covid guidance. This includes lane swimming and some classes.

However, the Thetford centre unfortunately suffered a power cut last week meaning repairs are now necessary. As a result, the pool is temporarily closed while the power is restored, which is needed to refilter the water. However, the team is hopeful that the work will be complete and the water refiltered by Thursday (29 April), which would mean the pool could be reopened to users. Updates about this are being posted on our social media pages to keep people informed.

NEW: Food hygiene inspections continue

Breckland's officers are making good progress in carrying out food hygiene inspections across the district. Since the start of March 2021, more than 80 in-person food hygiene inspections have been conducted, and more are taking place to address any backlog caused by covid restrictions.

NEW: Animal Welfare officer joins Breckland

Breckland's Licensing Team has welcomed a new Animal Welfare officer to the team this week, who will be carrying out inspections in the district and ensuring breeders at puppy farms and other businesses are complying with legislation and offering good-quality care to animals.

NEW: First electric vehicle licensed

The first fully electric vehicle to be used for taxi purposes has now received a license from Breckland Council. This is a major milestone for the district, which now has numerous electric charging points across each of our towns to encourage electric vehicle use, going forward.

Breckland Council
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