

# Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

## Briefing for Breckland Council elected members (04 November 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

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

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

#### Get a coronavirus test

Anybody with coronavirus symptoms (a high temperature; a new, continuous cough; a loss of, or change to, sense of smell or taste) can [get a test](#) online. Options includes a postal home test, going to a static testing site, or making use of mobile testing units, where available.

#### Planned national lockdown

The Prime Minister has announced plans to hold a national lockdown from 5 November through until at least 2 December. Guidance on this is [available online](#).

In summary it means:

\*Stay at Home except for specific purposes:

\*Work when you cannot work from home

\*Exercise (with 1 person from another household)

\*Medical & safety reasons

\*Shopping for basic necessities

\*Visiting your support bubble

\*Supporting a vulnerable person

\*Non-essential businesses & venues will close – food shops, supermarkets, garden centres and other retailers providing essential service can remain open

\*Funerals can go ahead and be attended by 30 people with social distancing

\*Weddings/civil partnerships are not permitted

\*Individual prayer is allowed but no group worship

\*Schools, colleges and university remain open – university students cannot return home until the end of Christmas term

\*You should avoid travelling in and out of your local area, you should still travel for: -

\*Work if you cannot work from home

\*Travelling to education

- \*Attending medical appointments
- \*Visiting venues that are open
- \*Exercise you are allowed to travel short distances

Throughout the pandemic, Breckland Council and its partners have worked closely together to provide support to residents, particularly those who are vulnerable, and local businesses. In light of this new lockdown, the council is currently reviewing the support available and stands ready to help local people and businesses. Examples of this support are detailed in the [Supporting businesses & employees](#) and [Community support](#) sections, and anybody who requires support is encouraged to contact the council to discuss their circumstances.

The Council will also be reminding people of the new lockdown guidance, and how residents and businesses can stay Covid safe, via our online and social media channels. Members can help us get the message out in their communities by liking, sharing or re-tweeting our messaging.

### **Follow Hands. Face. Space.**

It is critical that everybody observes the following key behaviours:

- \*HANDS - Wash your hands regularly and for 20 seconds.
- \*FACE - Wear a face covering in indoor settings where social distancing may be difficult, and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet.
- \*SPACE - Stay 2 metres apart from people you do not live with where possible, or 1 metre with extra precautions in place (such as wearing face coverings or increasing ventilation indoors).

Find out more about [social distancing](#) rules.

### **Work and finances**

There is a range of support, information and funding to [support people who are working less or not working](#) at the moment, as well as guidance about how they can stay safe at work.

There are also resources for the [self-employed](#), along with information about how to keep their business and employees safe.

### **Travel advice**

Guidance for British people [travelling overseas](#) during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is under regular review.

### **Remembrance Sunday/Armistice Day**

The Government has said it has not cancelled Remembrance Day events, despite new coronavirus restrictions. There will be a National Service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph, planned to be broadcast live.

Local authorities may organise local services provided they are outside and that social distancing can be maintained. Organisers should be mindful of the risks posed, especially for veterans who are often elderly, and [follow national guidance](#). The same rules apply for Armistice Day.

### **New guidance classes all over-60s as 'clinically vulnerable'**

New Government guidance says that everyone over 60 is now classed as “clinically vulnerable” and will be told to be “especially careful” in following lockdown rules.

### **National Tutoring Programme**

Disadvantaged pupils (aged 5-16) in England can access focused tuition next week as booking opens for the new National Tutoring Programme. Organisers are expecting a big demand for tuition bookings from pupils of poorer families.

## 2. Supporting businesses and employees

### Financial support

The [Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme](#) – also known as the furlough scheme – will remain open until December, with employees receiving 80% of their current salary for hours not worked, up to a maximum of £2,500. Under the extended scheme, the cost for employers of retaining workers will be reduced compared to the current scheme, which ended yesterday.

Business premises forced to close in England are also to receive grants worth up to £3,000 per month under the Local Restrictions Support Grant. £1.1bn is being given to Local Authorities, distributed on the basis of £20 per head, for one-off payments to enable them to support businesses more broadly.

### Cranswick outbreak

Breckland Council's officers continue to work with our partners at Norfolk County Council Public Health, Public Health England, and with Cranswick management to fully understand the extent of the cases there and provide information and support to help people who test positive to self-isolate.

The vast majority of employees have now been tested and we await the results of further testing, in addition to earlier testing carried out in Watton recently. The mobile testing unit remains in Watton until this weekend and is for appointments-only. We continue to encourage residents in the area – and across the district – to follow the latest guidance on social distancing, hand washing etc.

### Support for High Streets

Since the pandemic started, we have secured over £400k of investment to support High Street resilience and recovery activity, directly supported over 500 High Street businesses, and provided over 5,000 hours of front-line High Street support and engagement.

Although the second lockdown will create significant challenges for our High Streets, we are continuing support for them now – in the following ways:

**\*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)

**\*Business expansion and PPE grants** – cash grants helping leisure and hospitality businesses meet the cost of Covid adaptations and expanding their business to reach more customers when lockdown lifts.

In preparation for High Streets re-opening, we are already getting ready to provide further support with:

**\*Reopening, Christmas and Shop Local campaigns** and e-directory of local businesses

**\*New #EnjoyDiscoverExplore programme**, with locally tailored branding and complementary infrastructure in each Market Town

**\*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

**\*Frontline Liaison Officers** - who continue to make regular tours of each Town centre, checking in with businesses and helping resolve any problems arising

**\*Supportive licencing** – with fast-track, low-cost licencing for businesses to get pavement licences, and an open offer to review any wider challenges presented by Covid-19 conditions

Having also re-established the MTI (Market Towns Initiative) Programme and Town Delivery Plans Programme, we are able to connect Covid-resilience investment to the longer-term future opportunities and vision for each of our Market Towns.

Other key projects like Thetford Place Branding have also been re-established, and as a result a major programme of resident and business engagement which will raise Thetford's profile, stimulate investment & the visitor economy and promote a clear focus and messaging for all stakeholders to support is now underway.

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](#).

### **Support for start-ups**

To help manage issues of Covid redundancy and to diversify the local economy, we are launching a new start-up support programme for potential Breckland entrepreneurs. This includes:

\*Start-up grants scheme, funding available of up to £10k. Particularly aimed at those who have lost their jobs or cannot access new employment due to the pandemic

\*Start-up advice, toolkits, and support

\*High Street Start-Out scheme, with funding and support available to help entrepreneurs start out in retail using empty units across Breckland

Details and applications can be [business support/start](#). We are grateful for any support Members can provide in getting interested people to apply.

### **Support for wider businesses**

The Government's first Covid grant schemes have all now all closed, and through these we've been able to reach around 2,750 businesses – awarding almost £30m of direct support. We are preparing for the likely next wave of financial support for the second lockdown and awaiting Government guidance. In the meantime, however, we are still actively helping Breckland businesses via:

\***Advice & Guidance** – via phone, email or from our pre-bookable consultations. We also offer an extensive signposting and advice service via our revised website.

\***Covid-Safe and Prevent Programmes** – jointly supported through Regeneration, Environmental Health, Public Protection, and other agencies. To date we have delivered advice and intervention to over 100 businesses.

\***Business Rate Relief** – which is applied by ARP, for more details see, and has provided almost £15m of relief since the pandemic started

\***Business Support Grants** – with specific support grants currently available to hospitality / leisure businesses, start-ups, and high street businesses.

Details and applications can be found at [business support & talent](#). We are grateful for any support Members can provide in getting interested people to apply.

### **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 53 individuals.

**\*Group Skills & Support Sessions** – to help adults and young people with tools they need to competitively access jobs market

**\*Start-up support and advice** – helping people find new opportunity through their own enterprise, with financial support and guidance available

Details and appointment bookings can be [Business/talent](#). We are grateful for any support Members can provide in getting interested people to apply.

### **Growing back stronger**

We are making sure our key growth programmes are able to continue in spite of the challenges of Covid, and a further lockdown, in order that Breckland is well placed to grow. These include:

**\*Snetterton Growth Programme** – With major power investment due to start on site within the next few months, and a full programme of activity underway to start to realise the increase in power supply and create new jobs locally

**\*Thetford Growth Programme** – a programme similar to the above to increase the power supply available in Thetford

**\*Town Delivery Plans** – We are currently identifying commercial partners to help bring forward the Town Delivery Plans, with public consultation due to begin in the New Year on this landmark piece of evidence building and visioning

## **3. Community support**

### **Breckland Community Hub**

Our Community Hub team are gearing up to support residents, either by connecting them to a volunteer, a community group or by supporting them with advice and guidance. We expect this support to cover a range of issues, including:

\*Wellbeing (e.g. social connection, welfare calls)

\*Practical needs (e.g. dog walking, gardening)

\*Digital needs (e.g. online shopping delivery slots, registering on the National Shielding Support Service)

\*Advice & Guidance (e.g. Financial concerns)

We understand that many councillors will also want to play their part in supporting residents during this time and with this in mind, we have arranged access to **Befriending and Safeguarding training**. This training would be valuable in supporting residents through outbound welfare calls and will provide guidance on how to connect to the right ongoing support, if needed. Training can be booked by emailing [samantha.armitage@breckland.gov.uk](mailto:samantha.armitage@breckland.gov.uk) ASAP.

### **Self-Isolation Support**

Breckland Council launched its Self-Isolation Support Payments scheme – administered on behalf of the Government – on the 12 October 2020. The purpose of these payments is to support low paid workers who are told by NHS Test & Trace to self-isolate but can't work from home. Everyone is awarded £500 and they can claim the payment each time they self-isolate.

More details on eligibility and how to apply – including an online application process – can be found on the Breckland Council [website](#).

### **Clinically Extremely Vulnerable**

We are awaiting guidance on our role in supporting Clinically Extremely Vulnerable Residents (CEV), however the indication is that the criteria for who falls within this group may be different from before. All CEV residents will be eligible to receive priority access to home delivery slots from supermarkets.

### **The Silver Social**

The Council's [The Silver Social](#) arts project continues to offer opportunities for residents to engage with high quality events and workshops online or by telephone.

### **Housing and homelessness support**

We are continuing to support and provide accommodation for rough sleepers and the team are actively engaging with any new rough sleepers. Temporary accommodation has also been secured for a number of households during lockdown and we are currently supporting and accommodating households otherwise at risk of homelessness.

## **4. Breckland service updates**

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](#).

\*We are working with our Health and Safety advisor to produce **new guidance for visiting officers** ahead of the commencement of lockdown on Thursday. The safety of our staff remains a priority whilst we try as far as possible to continue to deliver our range of services

\*We will be **pausing pre-bookable F2F Customer appointments at Elizabeth House** during lockdown, but customers can continue to get the help and support they need from us by calling 01362 656870, or by visiting our website.

\*Following the Government's lockdown announcement, we have communicated to staff that our agreed approach to the **access to – and use of – Elizabeth House**, Dereham, is as follows:

\*The building remains closed to the public – but help and support is available for all customers by calling the Council on 01362 656870, or by visiting our website.

\*Staff onsite will be kept to a bare minimum to cover: post handling, essential ICT maintenance, cheque processing, land charges, and building security. A duty manager will also be onsite.

\*If Members experience any ICT issues during lockdown, they should raise a ticket by emailing [helpmeit@breckland.gov.uk](mailto:helpmeit@breckland.gov.uk) or by calling 01362 656277, Mon-Fri, 9-5pm. They should only need to access the building if they have a pre-booked appointment with the ICT Team to resolve any issues that can't be fixed remotely.

\***Committee meetings:** Breckland Council's [committee meetings](#) continue to be held virtually. Members participating in the meeting are sent joining instructions direct and asked to join 15 minutes before the meeting officially begins, while the public can [observe the meetings online](#).

Leader, Breckland Council

04.11.2020