



Kirton-in-Lindsey Town Council

REPORT TO: Full Council 21st March 2020

SUBJECT: Covid-19 epidemic Preparations and Response

PURPOSE: To prepare the Council's response to the Covid-19 epidemic and Government guidelines issued in order to provide business continuity and support to the community.

INTRODUCTION

Everyone will be aware of the global covid-19 pandemic. The Council's response is guided by advice it receives from Public Health England (PHE) and other official government bodies.

This advice is available online and updated daily during the epidemic:

- Coronavirus – UK Government Response - <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>
- General information to the public - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>
- Guidance for Employers and Businesses - <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/covid-19-guidance-for-non-clinical-settings-and-the-%20public>
- NHS Overview, symptoms and advice - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
- Government Action Plan - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan>
- World Health Organisation - <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

In addition, the Council receives advice from the ERNLLCA and NALC, available online:

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

This report draws on the advice received and sets out the urgent actions required by the Council.

1 CURRENT POSITION

1.1 The Country faces a massive challenge to effectively manage the Covid-19 epidemic as more people start to become infected. The Government's strategy is changing from day to day, to try to protect the NHS and other services from being overwhelmed if everyone gets the virus over a short period of time. If these measures were not implemented, then it is stated the country could expect to see over 250,000 deaths by August.

1.2 By implementing the measures, it is hoped that contagion will be reduced and spread over a longer period allowing the NHS to cope better and reduce the death rate considerably.

1.3 The Council as a public service, should do all it can to help the population comply with the Government policy and to this end the report sets out proposals to cancel meetings and events that are not essential.

1.4 Kirton-in-Lindsey faces a big challenge over the coming weeks and months as it is likely that businesses may need to temporarily close and others may suffer from a lack of trade. Some older or vulnerable residents may feel more isolated than usual, especially if they are required to self-isolate for up to 12 weeks. Parents are going to need support as schools and educational establishments are closed. The Town Council should consider whether there are other things that can be done to help residents through the difficult period.

2 PROPOSALS

2.1 Meetings and Events

2.2 It is proposed that Council recognise that public health and the health of Councillors and employees is of a higher importance than day to day Council business and to this end all non-essential meetings (Full Council and Committee) and events are cancelled.

2.3 It is proposed that the Annual Town Meeting (not a Council meeting) is cancelled, pending confirmation on the legal position to do so – see legal obligations below

2.4 Give delegated power for a period of 4 months to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor having regard to Government guidance, to determine whether other future meetings should be cancelled or go ahead.

2.5 These measures should be reviewed when the government of the United Kingdom has reinstated all public meetings and/or when legislation is in place to allow the holding of meetings remotely and voting via other means than within face to face meetings.

2.6 Business Continuity

2.6.1 To keep essential Council business going and to ensure that invoices are paid on time, which is essential for struggling businesses, it is likely that some of the usual procedures and practices may need to be streamlined. It is proposed therefore that there is a suspension of Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and procedures to enable processes to be streamlined. The Town Clerk will be authorised to temporarily modify policies and procedures in order to expedite the management of the Council's finances, and payments whilst also protecting the Council's interests. Any actions taken outside of current policy will be fully documented and will be presented to Full Council for scrutiny once normal business resumes. Regular weekly updates will be provided to all Councillors in the interim period.

2.6.2 To ensure that there is a continued involvement in Planning Consultation, it is proposed that the Town Clerk is given delegated authority to collate e-mailed comments from Councillors and write a representative response in consultation with the Mayor or Deputy Mayor. (**Local Government Act 1972 Section 101 and The Localism Act 2011, qualified by SI 2012/965 - Town Councils (General Power of Competence) (Prescribed Conditions) Order 2012**)

2.6.3 In respect of attendance of Council representatives at meetings and groups, generally it is up to the organising body to determine whether any meeting will go ahead. In cases where meetings do proceed, the Council does not expect any attendee to put themselves in harm's way and so representatives can decline to attend with Council's full backing.

2.6.4 The Council accounts are due to be submitted by 30th June 2020. Under legislation these must be approved by Council before that date. It seems as though the deadline may be extended to 30th September 2020 and the Town Clerk will consider this and any other changes in determining the need for Council to meet.

2.6.5 Legislation also provides that the Annual Town Council Meeting where the new Mayor is elected is held in May each year. Again, there is the possibility that this will be relaxed and again the Town Clerk will consider this and any other changes in conjunction with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor when determining the need for Council to meet. Under normal protocols, the existing Mayor and Deputy Mayor will continue in office until the new Mayor is elected at the first meeting of the Council following resumption of public meetings.

OPERATIONAL MATTERS

2.7 Most operational matters are already made under delegated powers and so it is not envisaged that any further changes to existing powers and those set out above are required.

2.8 The public opening hours of the Town Council office will be suspended until agreement is reached that no danger is posed to staff or the public from re-opening. The public to be kept fully informed on this.

3 LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

3.1 It is noted that whilst any decisions relating to the holding of the Annual Town and Annual Council meeting are contrary to existing legislation (as of 19th March 2020) the Town Council decisions are made in order to place public safety at the forefront which it considers is compliant with the Government advice and directives.

4 OTHER MEASURES

4.1 The activation of the Emergency Plan on 17th March 2020 enabled the process to be started for those named within the plan to help the Community and support the elderly, vulnerable and anyone in need. This can be through practical help (e.g. picking up supplies) or providing emotional support (e.g. being a point of telephone contact for people to ring for a chat if they are lonely) as well as through delegation to a contact list approved by the Town Clerk, Mayor or Deputy Mayor to enable the swift responses required.

4.2 In view of this, the Council will encourage residents to get to know their neighbours and be aware of anyone in their street who may need help. Making contact with somebody near-by is the best source of support. In addition, the Council will stand ready to deploy its resources as may be directed by the public agencies leading the response.

4.3 The same action noted in 4.1 provided the response to commission a special one off edition of the Kirton First Community Newsletter and any financial implications put upon Kirton First by this action should be considered with due attention.

4.4 Ward members may wish to consider if they can coordinate a support group in Ridge Ward.

4.5. Communications and Public Information - While the Council has no formal role or expertise in public health matters, it is well placed to distribute information to local residents and to keep people informed. Therefore, it seems sensible that the Council should pass on and sign-post information provided by those statutory agencies responsible for leading the response to the epidemic.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Council are recommended to:-

- a) Note the report
- b) Approve the proposals set out in section 2
- c) Consider any other measures in section 4

FOR DECISION