



# **OTTERY ST MARY TOWN COUNCIL BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN AND RELATED MATTERS RESULTING FROM THE CORONA VIRUS**

(TO TAKE EFFECT FROM WEDNESDAY 25TH MARCH 2020)

**APPROVED BY OTTERY ST MARY TOWN COUNCIL AT ITS MEETING ON 23<sup>RD</sup> MARCH 2020  
MINUTE NO:- 20/3/34**

1.1 This Business Continuity Plan has been prepared by Christine McIntyre, Chief Executive Officer (`CEO`) of Ottery St Mary Town Council (`the Council`) with reference to its Officers, Councillors, Volunteers, services and activities.

1.2 The Council actively seeks to protect the Officers, Councillors and Volunteers working for and on behalf of the Council and its activities.

1.3 This document sets out the general principles and approach that the Council will follow and undertake in relation to COVID-19.

## **SCOPE OF THIS PLAN**

2.1 The main areas of concern for the Council in relation to COVID-19 are:

- ⑩ Ensuring the health and safety of all Officers, Councillors, Volunteers and members of the public participating in council activities;
- ⑩ Maintaining effective and lawful decision-making processes;
- ⑩ The continuing operation of essential services and contractual obligations

## **BACKGROUND - COVID-19 (Coronavirus)**

3.1 A pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan, China was first reported to the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 31st December 2019. It was later classified as a new disease: COVID-19. The outbreak was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30th January 2020.

3.2 The Coronavirus disease was confirmed to have spread to the United Kingdom (UK) on 31st January 2020. On 11th March 2020, the WHO categorised the outbreak as a pandemic and then subsequently stated on 14th March 2020 that Europe is now the centre of the pandemic. As of the 12th March 2020, the UK has classified the risk as high.

3.3 On 3rd March 2020, the government published its Coronavirus Action Plan and subsequently, The Health Protection (Coronavirus Regulations) 2020 have been put into place to reduce the risk of further human-to-human transmission in the UK by keeping individuals in isolation where public health professionals believe there is a reasonable risk an individual may have the virus.

3.4 The Government on 20<sup>th</sup> March issued new more stringent isolation guidance as follows:

**We (the Government) are advising those who are at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19) to be particularly stringent in following social distancing measures.**

**This group includes those who are:**

- ⑩ *aged 70 or older (regardless of medical conditions)*
- ⑩ *under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below (ie anyone instructed to get a flu jab as an adult each year on medical grounds):*
  - ⑩ *chronic (long-term) respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis*
  - ⑩ *chronic heart disease, such as heart failure*
  - ⑩ *chronic kidney disease*
  - ⑩ *chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis*
  - ⑩ *chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), a learning disability or cerebral palsy*
  - ⑩ *diabetes*
  - ⑩ *problems with your spleen – for example, sickle cell disease or if you have had your spleen removed*
  - ⑩ *a weakened immune system as the result of conditions such as HIV and AIDS, or medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy*
  - ⑩ *being seriously overweight (a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above)*
  - ⑩ *those who are pregnant*

**Note: there are some clinical conditions which put people at even higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. If you are in this category, next week the NHS in England will directly contact you with advice about the more stringent measures you should take in order to keep yourself and others safe. For now, you should rigorously follow the social distancing advice in full, outlined below.**

**People falling into this group are those who may be at particular risk due to complex health problems such as:**

- ⑩ *people who have received an organ transplant and remain on ongoing immunosuppression medication*
- ⑩ *people with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy or radiotherapy*
- ⑩ *people with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia who are at any stage of treatment*
- ⑩ *people with severe chest conditions such as cystic fibrosis or severe asthma (requiring hospital admissions or courses of steroid tablets)*
- ⑩ *people with severe diseases of body systems, such as severe kidney disease (dialysis)*
- ⑩ *What is social distancing?*
- ⑩ *Social distancing measures are steps you can take to reduce social interaction between people. This will help reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).*

**They are to:**

- ⑩ *Avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). These symptoms include high temperature and/or new and continuous cough*
- ⑩ *Avoid non-essential use of public transport when possible*
- ⑩ *Work from home, where possible. Your employer should support you to do this. Please refer to employer guidance for more information*
- ⑩ *Avoid large and small gatherings in public spaces, noting that pubs, restaurants, leisure centres and similar venues are currently shut as infections spread easily in closed spaces where people gather together.*
- ⑩ *Avoid gatherings with friends and family. Keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media*
- ⑩ *Use telephone or online services to contact your GP or other essential services*

⑩ *Everyone should be trying to follow these measures as much as is practicable.*

**We (the Government) strongly advise you to follow the above measures as much as you can and to significantly limit your face-to-face interaction with friends and family if possible, particularly if you:**

⑩ *are over 70*

⑩ *have an underlying health condition*

⑩ *are pregnant*

**This advice is likely to be in place for some weeks**

## **MEASURES**

4.1 A significant proportion of Officers and Councillors are either in 'at risk' groups themselves or have close family members they either live with or care for, that are.

4.2 The Council cannot control what people do in their personal time and how they choose to respect (or not) the guidance being issued, or indeed, take additional steps to limit their exposure however, the Council's measures should reflect the Government strategy and prioritise the shielding of all 'at risk' groups.

## **COUNCIL CONTINUITY**

5.1 The Council Office is situated within the Council Building in the town centre. This is a public building and Officers do have contact with members of the public. Officers do have close family members who are in the 'at risk' groups and some Councillors themselves are in the 'at risk' group

5.2 All Officers have the appropriate equipment to work from home. All calls to the Council Office number can be forwarded to the CEO's landline. In addition other measures can be taken with appropriate software to ensure the CEO and DCEO can carry out their normal tasks as far as practicable. Council information will be placed on the Council's website, social media and noticeboards

5.3 The CEO will be responsible for the overall control of assets, services and functions. In the absence of the CEO, this will be undertaken by the Deputy CEO.

5.4 The CEO shall prepare payments in accordance with the Financial Regulations (and on the banking system) and provide financial information/accounts payment sheets to all members and operate within the Council's agreed budget. The Chairman of the Finance Committee will authorise the aforementioned payments on the banking system and provide any additional information required

5.5 The CEO in conjunction with the Deputy Mayor will instruct its current solicitor to progress current or new conveyancing transactions

5.6 The CEO will take emergency action/spending in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation and/or the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations

5.7 The CEO will hold the debit card for the main Council account. This will be held in a secure location. Zurich insurance has been informed and advised that this is acceptable.

5.8 The CEO and Deputy CEO will provide regular updates and reports on activities and decisions to the Council, as is practicable to do so in the circumstances.

## **COUNCIL OFFICE STAFF**

6.1 Office based staff to work from home from Wednesday 25th March until further notice. This will allow time for preparations to be made beforehand

6.2 To provide an allowance for Council staff up to a max of £700 for software and IT equipment to enable them to work from home. Call divert would be operational so calls would be diverted to the CEO

6.3 It was acknowledged that in both employment contracts, the Council would be required to reimburse staff for office sundries, office equipment, connection, rental or use of telephone line and Internet/broad band; an allowance for using home for business purposes and any increase in insurance premiums for homes being used for home working

6.4 To arrange for `gofers` to assist staff (eg purchasing stationery and IT support etc

## **COUNCIL PROPERTIES TENANTED OR OTHERWISE**

### **7.1 COMMERCIAL TENANTS OCCUPYING FIRST FLOOR OFFICES IN THE COUNCIL BUILDING**

All commercial tenants will be asked to work from home with immediate effect. However with regards to the Help Scheme then due consideration will need to be given to any request from the Help Scheme for the continued use of their office, in view of the service they will be providing during the crisis. It will be necessary to implement a rent freeze during the period the commercial tenants are unable to use their offices but would be subject to review

### **7.2 THE MUSEUM AND SILVER BAND ROOM**

The Museum and Silver Band volunteers/tenants shall adhere to all government guidance in relation to their occupancy but in any event shall be closed to the public until further notice

### **7.3 THE STATION**

The Station and its occupants/hirers/tenants shall adhere to all government guidance in relation to their occupancy but in any event the Station shall be closed to the public until further notice. All commercial tenants occupying offices and portacabins will be required to work from home. However with regards to the Help Scheme then due consideration will need to be given to any request from the Help Scheme for the continued use of their office, in view of the service they will be providing during the crisis. It will be necessary to implement a rent freeze for commercial tenants during the period they are unable to use their offices/portacabins but would be subject to review

### **7.4 STRAWBERRY LANE**

The Pavilion will be closed to organisations and individuals for the foreseeable future and the key contained in the key safe at the rear of the building will be held by the CEO. Regular checks of the pavilion will be carried out by the CEO and Deputy CEO. In addition, the members of the Petanque Club and the Bowling Club shall adhere to all government guidance and cease their use of the pitch and other facilities until further notice

## 7.5 THE INFORMATION CENTRE

Volunteers will adhere to all government guidance and cease all volunteering work in the library until further notice

## 7.6 ALLOTMENTS

There will be no plot inspections taking place across the Allotment Gardens until further notice and no warning or eviction letter for non cultivation will be sent out to tenants until this outbreak has passed. We would urge all our allotment holders to do what they can to their plots to help reduce the growth of weeds and grasses during this time that may overwhelm the plot if you are unable to visit for an extended period. As a Council we will also face restrictions over the coming weeks as to what we are capable of doing in terms of maintenance and repairs that might be needed. We will try and rectify these issues when we can, but it might be necessary in the mean time for the Ottery St Mary Allotment Association Management Committee to come up with short term solutions themselves. All government guidance and that from the National Allotments Association to be adhered to. For any further information contact Liz Graveney

## 7.7 SKATEPARK

All government guidance shall be adhered to

## 7.8 THE CEMETERY

All government guidance and that from the ICCM guidance shall be adhered to

## **THE CHAMBER AND MEETING ROOM TO BE USED AS AN EMERGENCY CENTRE**

8.1 For the foreseeable future both rooms will be used by volunteers/co-ordinators of the Ottery St Mary Volunteers 24/7 in order to co-ordinate and implement a response plan to assist vulnerable and elderly persons in the community. All front/back door keys issued will be logged and key codes issued. It is likely that the Emergency Centre will be used by Darrin Abbott, Malcolm McDonald, Rob McGovern, Lucy De Garis, Stewart Lucas and Vicky Johns and possibly others. Chris McIntyre and Liz Graveney have offered to provide admin support in their personal capacities to assist the operations. All government guidelines issued now or in the future re working together and safe distance levels must be adhered to at all times. A coffee machine to be purchased as a priority and the phone line in the meeting room to be upgraded

## **SALARIES, WAGES, SICK LEAVE AND ANNUAL LEAVE**

9.1 The National Joint Council has issued guidance on the response by Employers to paid absence from work owing to coronavirus in accordance with the Green Book terms and conditions. Staff will continue to receive their salaries/wages subject to their contract and Green Book for:

- ⑩ Self-isolation
- ⑩ Illness
- ⑩ Working from home

Reference also to ACAS Guide 'Coronavirus: Advice for Employers and Employees'.

9.2 Currently, NHS advice states that anyone displaying coronavirus symptoms should stay at home for 7 days. If you live with other people, they should stay at home for 14

days from the day the first person got symptoms. Use the NHS 111 online coronavirus service if you cannot feel you cannot cope with your symptoms at home, your condition gets worse or your symptoms do not get better after 7 days. Only call 111 if you cannot get help online. Any period of self-isolation will be treated as absence with full pay but not as sickness absence.

9.3 Employees who are actually ill will be treated as off sick with associated sick pay in the usual manner as per their contract. However, employees cannot just unilaterally decide to self isolate without providing the Council with reasonable justification in order to qualify for full pay.

9.4 It is important that all staff and Councillors inform the CEO if they are ordered to self-isolate or feel ill.

9.5 Any annual leave booked over any period of self-isolation, illness or working from home will carry over in accordance with Green Book and ACAS guidance.

### **THE COUNCILS CLEANER– cleaner (self-employed)**

10.1 The Council's Cleaner is responsible for cleaning the Councils Offices. As the Council Chamber and Meeting Room have been seconded as the Emergency Centre; the Council Office is to be closed and the upstairs tenants are working from home and will not be using the toilet/kitchen facilities, then less cleaning will be required. The ground floor, particularly the toilet would be in constant use from the volunteers. It was suggested that the cleaner (who was self employed) should come in twice a day, 7 days a week to keep the toilet area clean and to clean the interior and exterior door knobs. However the CEO believed that the cleaner may be at the `at risk` category. The CEO would make enquiries. It was suggested that if the cleaner did not wish to undertake this work, then it would be necessary to look at other options ie another cleaner or volunteers to carry out this work

### **MEETINGS**

11.1 All Council meetings will be suspended where it has become necessary to close the Council Building.

11.2 Councillors are asked to continue to carry out their duties from home as far as practicable.

11.3 The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) is engaging with the Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments (SAAA) about audit and with the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) as a matter of urgency on a range of issues. These include:

- ⑩ Councils being able to use their discretion on deadlines for Freedom of Information requests;
- ⑩ The deadline for local government financial audits to be extended to 30 September 2020;
- ⑩ Bringing forward legislation to remove the requirement for Annual Council meetings to take place in person;
- ⑩ Bringing forward legislation to allow Council Committee meetings to be held virtually for a temporary period.

11.4 If the Government agrees for the provision of virtual meetings, then the protocol for these meetings should be adhered to (see Appendix attached). It was noted in the NALC guidelines that although it was not yet legal for meetings to be skyped, it was unlikely that councils would be open to legal challenge if they were to go ahead with this method of meetings. It was agreed that Skype should be set up by Al Findlay. Members of the public could be invited to join in the meetings. It was essential that there was one administrator and that the Protocol, which the CEO had e-mailed to all councillors, be followed

## **FULL COUNCIL**

12.1 The Council has the following meeting scheduled for April 2020:

⑩ Full Council - 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020

The above meeting shall be cancelled and any urgent issues to be delegated to the CEO (in her absence the Deputy CEO) , Mayor and Deputy Mayor

## **PLANNING COMMITTEE**

13.1 In the event that it is not possible to convene a Planning Committee Meeting of the Council (or it is prior to the implementation of virtual meetings) all planning applications will be emailed to Councillors within 72 hours of receipt by the Deputy CEO (`DCEO`) or in her absence the CEO.

The DCEO will also post the planning applications on the parish website and notice boards to make residents aware of the application(s) and ask for comments to be emailed to [admin@otterystmary-tc.gov.uk](mailto:admin@otterystmary-tc.gov.uk) and/or EDDC Planning Department direct. The DCEO will then forward these comments to Councillors for consideration. Councillors will then formulate responses to be submitted to the DCEO. On receipt of these comments the Mayor (or Deputy Mayor) and the Chair of Planning will submit an agreed response to councillors. Subject to no further comments being received, the final response will then be sent to EDDC Planning Department within the deadline date for the submission of comments. This is to enable council business to continue.

## **ANNUAL PARISH MEETING - 14th APRIL 2020**

14.1 The Annual Parish Meeting is not a Council meeting, but is a meeting of local government electors registered for the area for which it is held. It must be held between 1st March and 1st June. (Local Government Act 1972, Sch 12, para 14 (1), (4).

The meeting to be rescheduled to a later date before 1<sup>st</sup> June but subject to Government advice

## **ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING - 4<sup>th</sup> MAY 2020**

15.1 The Council must hold an Annual Meeting every year which, because this is not an election year, must be held in May. (Local Government Act 1972 Sch 12 para 7 (1) (2).

15.2 There is only one statutory item of business and that is the election of the Mayor. However, normally the Annual Meeting also elects Committees etc as stated in Standing

Orders. Standing Orders also states that the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and those of Committees hold office until the next Annual Meeting, so until that meeting occurs, then the current positions remain.

It is agreed to proceed on the agreed date and wait for further Government/NALC advice.

15.3 Other statutory requirements applicable to the Council/Parish Sector may be suspended by the Government in an emergency situation.

## **EVENTS/ACTIVITIES**

16.1 The Government has now ordered pubs, clubs, restaurants, theatres and gyms etc to close. The Council's planned events have been assessed as follows:

VE Day Activities - to be cancelled however, the Council could consider holding an event for VE Day at a later date subject to Government advice

## **COMMUNITY ACTION FUND**

17.1 During the unprecedented circumstances at this time, communities are at risk of significant financial hardship. With the benefit of the power of 'First Resort', the General Power of Competence (Localism Act 2011, Sections 1-8) means that local authorities including town councils have "the power to do anything that individuals generally may do as long as they do not break any other laws". Councils with the General Power of Competence will be able to undertake more local actions to support the community using council resources (and money) than councils without this power. Therefore as this Council has the benefit of the General Power of Competence it should be at the forefront of efforts to alleviate the symptoms of financial hardship due to self-isolation as per Government guidelines. Therefore, initial funds of £10,000 are to be allocated to be used to support community action. This amount will be subject to review and other measures may be implemented as necessary.

## **EXPENDITURE**

18.1 All spending will be under delegated responsibility to the CEO (in the CEO's absence the Deputy CEO), who shall consult the Mayor and Deputy Mayor and the Chairman of the Finance Committee. In the absence of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor then the CEO/Deputy CEO shall consult with any one councillor together with the Chairman of Finance and, with the concurrence of those members shall have delegated power to act on behalf of the Council in respect of the particular matter then under consideration. All expenditure will need to be logged and invoiced in the name of 'Ottery St Mary Town Council'. This is to enable there is a clear audit trail if needed

## **SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

19.1 The Council will be acting on information and guidance available from the following sources to which all Officers, Councillors and members of the public will be signposted.

⑩ **Coronavirus - UK Government Response**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

⑩ **General Information to the Public**

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>

⑩ **Guidance for Non Clinical Settings - Employers and Businesses**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>

⑩ **NHS Overview, Symptoms and Advice**

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

⑩ **Government Action Plan**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan>

⑩ **Government Advice for Self Isolation at Home**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>

⑩ **Getting Workplace Ready**

[https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7\\_6](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7_6)

⑩ **NALC Advice**

[https://www.nalc.gov.uk/coronavirus?utm\\_source=Members&utm\\_campaign=e9eb3bfbe8-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_06\\_08\\_03\\_15\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_206970988f-e9eb3bfbe8-351646253&mc\\_cid=e9eb3bfbe8&mc\\_eid=f2e2181307](https://www.nalc.gov.uk/coronavirus?utm_source=Members&utm_campaign=e9eb3bfbe8-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_06_08_03_15_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_206970988f-e9eb3bfbe8-351646253&mc_cid=e9eb3bfbe8&mc_eid=f2e2181307)

⑩ **ACAS ADVICE**

<https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus>

**This Business Continuity Plan may be subject to change without notice in the light of Government advice.**