**RISK ASSESSMENT AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY RESPONSE TO**

**COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS)**

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# INTRODUCTION

* 1. This policy sets out the general principles and approach that the Town Council will follow in respect of the Covid-19 / Coronavirus outbreak.
	2. The main areas of concern for Wetherby Town Council are:

a) Ensuring the Health and safety of staff, Councillors, volunteers, contractors and Members of the Public participating in Council activities

b) Maintaining effective and lawful decision-making processes

c) The continuing operation of essential services and contractual obligations

* 1. Although the Dept of Health and Social Care, Public Health England and the NHS are leading on the UK response to the outbreak, the Town Council nevertheless has a duty of care to staff, Councillors and members of the public to conduct its own risk assessments at local level specific for its activities and take steps accordingly.
	2. The Town Council cannot control what people do in their personal time and how they choose to respect (or not) the guidance from the government or indeed take additional steps to limit their exposure (such as taking holidays, visiting public places etc).
	3. This document will be regularly reviewed for the duration of the Covid-19 outbreak and will be amended where necessary. Approval for subsequent versions of the document will be taken by the Full Council, if meetings can be convened, or by the Clerk under delegated authority.

# COVID 19 - CORONAVIRUS

* 1. On 31 December 2019, Chinese authorities notified the World Health Organisation (WHO) of an outbreak of pneumonia in Wuhan City, which was later classified as a new disease: COVID-19.
	2. On 30 January 2020, WHO declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a “Public Health emergency of International Concern” (PHEIC).
	3. UK Chief Medical Officers have classified the risk to the UK as moderate.
	4. On 10 February, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock,

announced [strengthened legal powers to protect public health.](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/health-secretary-announces-strengthened-legal-powers-to-bolster-public-health-protections-against-coronavirus)

[The Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/129/contents/made) have been put in place to reduce the risk of further human-to-human transmission in this country by keeping individuals in isolation where public health professionals believe there is a reasonable risk an individual may have the virus.

* 1. On 3rd March the Government published its response plan to the virus which consists of 4 phases:
* Contain: detect early cases, follow up close contacts, and prevent the disease taking hold in this country for as long as is reasonably possible (This includes individuals at risk of carrying the virus being asked by NHS111 to self-isolate for 14 days. Those testing positive are placed in quarantine (either under appropriate medical care or at home) and are required to undergo further testing with two negative results before being released from quarantine.
* Delay: slow the spread in this country, if it does take hold, lowering the peak impact and pushing it away from the winter season. This may involve social distancing measures including closure of schools and cancellation of public events.
* Research: better understand the virus and the actions that will lessen its effect on the UK population; innovate responses including diagnostics, drugs and vaccines; use the evidence to inform the development of the most effective models of care.
* Mitigate: provide the best care possible for people who become ill, support hospitals to maintain essential services and ensure ongoing support for people ill in the community to minimise the overall impact of the disease on society, public services and on the economy.
	1. On 11th March the WHO characterised COVID-19 as a pandemic.

On 12th March the Government’s response moved to the delay phase.

* 1. The main public health campaign messages from the Government are as follows:
* wash your hands with soap and water often – do this for at least 20 seconds
* always wash your hands when you get home or into work
* use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
* cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
* put used tissues in the bin straight away and wash your hands afterwards
* try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell
* do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean

# SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The Town Council will be acting on information and guidance available from the following sources to which all Councillors, staff and members of the public will be signposted:

1. General information to the public:

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

1. Guidance for non-clinical settings – Employers and Businesses:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/covid-19-guidance-for-non-clinical-settings-and-the-public>

1. Guidance for Local Councils:

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

1. NHS overview, symptoms and advice:

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

1. Government Action Plan

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

1. WHO – Getting workplace ready:

<https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7_6>

# KEY FACTS UNDERPINNING THE RISK ASSESSMENT

The following information has been used to underpin the risk assessment:

* 1. This is an enveloped respiratory virus spread in aerosols/droplets via person to person direct contact and indirect contact with infected surfaces/hands.

Main transmission routes are therefore as follows:



* 1. The key to managing the risk of contracting the virus is to limit the opportunities for spread/transmission. This not only includes the main campaign measures suggested by NHS England in respect of hand sanitisation and reducing aerosol transmission by using tissues, but also adopting procedures for surface decontamination of “multi-use touch points” such as door handles, keypads etc.
	2. This is a novel virus hence, unlike influenza, there is no natural immunity/vaccine. Therefore it is likely a high proportion of people will become infected (current estimates are 80% of the UK population) and according to the Governments action plan up to 20% of the Council’s staff/Councillors may be infected during the peak of the outbreak. Business continuity planning is therefore key to maintaining Council services and corporate decision-making capabilities.
	3. The population segments at most risk of severe disease/death are those over 60 or with underlying medical conditions including diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular and renal issues and respiratory issues. This has implications when assessing the risk to the public, councillors and staff in Wetherby as there is a higher than average proportion of residents over the age of 60 and a significant proportion of Councillors and staff are either over the age of 60 or may have pre-existing conditions.
	4. Children can be infected and can have a severe illness but based on current data overall illness seems rarer in people under 20 years of age.

So far, there has been no obvious sign that pregnant women are more likely to be seriously affected

* 1. Unlike flu, there is a much longer incubation period where people can be shedding the virus but not have any symptoms.
	2. The key risk of exposure is therefore from asymptomatic staff, Councillors or members of the public having contracted the virus and subsequently attending Council activities and thereby transmitting the virus to others.

# CURRENT POSITION

* 1. 15th March 2020

As of 9am on 15 March 2020, 40,279 people have been tested in the UK, of which 38,907 were confirmed negative and 1,372 were confirmed as positive. 35 patients who tested positive for COVID-19 have died. There have been 26 confirmed cases in the Leeds and North Yorkshire areas.

**CONTINUATION OF COUNCIL SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES**

# DELEGATED AUTHORITY

* 1. The Council’s existing Scheme of Delegation already includes the following clause:

“1.4 In an emergency the Town Clerk is empowered to carry out any function of the Council.”

* 1. In the event of the Clerk being unable to work then there is provision for this delegated authority to be transferred to the Deputy Clerk or other officer of the Council.
	2. The following advice was received from the Yorkshire Local Councils Associations on 16th March 2020:

“YLCA suggests that it may be prudent, if there is no scheduled council meeting coming up imminently, that the chairman convenes an extraordinary meeting of the council for the purpose of delegating functions to the clerk and/or the RFO (particularly if there is a separate RFO), to ensure that the Council can keep ticking over, even if meetings cannot be held.

In our view, the delegation needs to be broad and to the effect that the council empowers the clerk/RFO to do anything expedient and necessary to ensure the continuous business of the council, and to deal with mandatory undertakings in order to prevent the authority from incurring liability during the period that the delegation is applicable. This wording can be used in a minute. If wished, councils can agree that the officer will consult with the chairman and/or vice-chairman in the decision making but councils must acknowledge that it is the officer that is the decision maker.”

**Recommendation:**

**That to allow the Council to operate on a minimum requirement basis, the following resolution be adopted for the duration of the activation of this policy, thereby empowering the clerk/RFO to do anything expedient and necessary to ensure the continuous business of the council, and to deal with mandatory undertakings in order to prevent the authority from incurring liability during the period that the delegation is applicable.**

“The Clerk shall have delegated authority, for the duration of the Covid-19 outbreak, to make decisions on behalf of the council where such decision cannot reasonably be deferred and must be made in order to comply with a commercial or statutory deadline. This will be carried out where possible by consultation with members of the Budget & Governance Committee by electronic means or telephone. The clerk will further consult with the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Chair of the Budgets & Governance Committee or relevant Committee Chairman (as available) for guidance as necessary. Any decisions made under this delegation must be recorded in writing and must be published in accordance with the relevant regulations.”

# PUBLIC MEETINGS

* 1. Legislation states that all Meetings shall be open to the public and the press unless their presence is prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted or for other special reasons. (Public Bodies Admissions to Meetings Act (1960).
	2. Furthermore, current legislation means that any decisions must be made by a quorate meeting of Councillors present and voting in the room by show of hands. (i.e. not by videolink or email).
	3. On 16th March the Government announced that it will consider bringing forward legislation to allow council committee meetings to be held virtually for a temporary period. The Clerk has investigated methods of facilitating this and, following a test meeting convened by 40 clerks across the country, proposes that [Zoom](https://zoom.us/) provides a suitable platform for this, should it be required.
	4. A practice meeting on the zoom platform will be held to ensure that all Councillors are familiar with its operation.

**Recommendation:**

* **That all committee and other meetings be cancelled with immediate effect.**
* **That the Town Council continues to meet on a monthly basis to consider urgent items of business, whilst it has a quorum of Councillors and venue available to facilitate this.**
* **That Full Council meetings be cancelled upon receipt of advice to this effect from the government.**
* **That virtual meetings be convened if and when enabling powers are received to facilitate this.**
	1. To protect Councillors, staff and members of the public who attend Full Council meetings during the Covid-19 outbreak the following precautionary measures will be implemented:
* Meetings will only take place where adequate handwashing facilities are available.
* Additional space will be provided between seats.
* Reasons for absence from non-attending Councillors will be routinely approved where they are due to the current outbreak of corona virus.
* Hard copies of papers will not be made available. Documents will be made available by e-mail and online at [www.wetherby.co.uk](http://www.wetherby.co.uk)

# CEMETERY

* 1. The Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) was founded in 1913 and since that time has provided policy and best practice guidance to Burial and Cremation authorities. Council officers are monitoring guidance on their website (<https://www.iccm-uk.com/iccm/coronavirus/>), including advice sheets on preparations for burials during a pandemic.
	2. The Deputy Clerk has instigated, and will maintain, regular communications with the Council’s preferred gravedigging contractor (Abbotts of Knaresborough). As there may be significant demand for gravedigging services over the forthcoming months an alternative contractor has already been identified.
	3. The cemetery can usually accommodate a maximum of 2 burials per day. In the event of high demand for burials in the cemetery, the allocation of new plots would be monitored to ensure that optimum levels of service can be provided.
	4. Restrictions on congregation numbers at burials will be monitored and funeral directors asked to intervene where required.
	5. Funeral Directors will be required to ensure that infection control measures are in place should Wetherby cemetery be asked to inter the body of a victim of coronavirus.
	6. Annual leave for cemetery staff will be monitored and managed according to requirements.
	7. Cemetery records are kept on a computer in the Town Hall office and cannot be accessed remotely. There may be a requirement for staff to attend the office to process burial records, even in the event of a full closure of the Town Hall / Town Council.

**Recommendation:**

* **That the cemetery continues to operate as normal during the coronavirus pandemic.**
* **That the Clerk, Deputy Clerk and Cemetery Superintendent work to provide additional capacity for burial services as and when required.**
* **That restrictions be approved on the pre-purchase of plots for the duration of the current Covid-19 outbreak in accordance with the terms detailed in 9.9.**
	1. Cemetery staff are, at this stage of the pandemic, confident that there is sufficient capacity in the cemetery following its expansion in 2013, provided that normal purchase trends continue.
	2. In the event that ‘panic buying’ of burial plots takes place (i.e. the Council receives significantly more requests to purchase plots than can be sustained) the following policy will be implemented by the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Deputy Clerk, Cemetery Superintendent and Deputy Mayor.
1. Requests to pre-purchase plots will not be approved. Only plots required for immediate use will be sold.
2. Requests to purchase plots for non-Wetherby residents will not be approved. Only plots required for the burial of Wetherby residents will be approved.
3. Requests to purchase plots for recent Wetherby residents (i.e. people who have recently moved out of the area, or to residential care settings) will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

# STATUTORY DEADLINES

* 1. It has been announced that the deadline for local government financial audits will be extended to 30 September 2020.
	2. The Government will consider bringing forward legislation to remove the requirement for annual council meetings to take place in person, however this is not confirmed as of 17th March.
	3. Guidance on changes to statutory deadlines will be received from the Yorkshire Local Councils Associations, with this policy reviewed as required.

# MARKET

* 1. Wetherby Town Council runs the regular outdoor market each Thursday.
	2. [NABMA](https://nabma.com/) is the leading markets organisation in the country and looks after the interests of market operators.
	3. Their advice, sought on Tuesday 17th March, is as follows:
1. Markets form part of the retail sector which remains open.
2. There is currently no guidance / advice to suggest that markets or shops should close.
3. Updated guidance / advice should be monitored for changes to the above.
	1. Requests have been received from some traders to continue trading. Some stalls provide basic goods that may be welcomed by the public (e.g. Amos & Welsh bakery).
	2. Provision is already in place for reduced fees in the event of few traders attending. Consideration will be given to the optimum layout of the market in the event of reduced stallholders attending.
	3. Staff who are handling cash will be asked to wear gloves and wash hands immediately after the banking is complete.

**Recommendation:**

* **That the outdoor Thursday market continues to operate unless otherwise instructed by the government.**

# TOWN HALL

* 1. Bookings in the Town Hall have been significantly impacted by the outbreak of Covid-19 with the majority of both regular and ad-hoc bookings having already been cancelled. The situation changes on an almost hourly basis.
	2. Many of the Town Hall’s hirers are self-employed / sole traders who rely on having a venue to trade / operate from. They are concerned about keeping their customers safe, acting in accordance with government guidance and earning a living.
	3. The Clerk has already taken the step of closing the Town Council’s offices (situated within the Town Hall) to the public. This is because there are alternative means of communications (telephone, e-mail and website enquiry form) which avoid contact with the public.
	4. Town Hall staff already maintain high standards of cleanliness and hygiene in the building. Additional measures have been put in place to include regular cleaning of high contact areas such as door handles, bannisters and lift buttons. Furniture is being disinfected as it’s put away. There are good stocks of cleaning products with which to maintain this standard throughout the Covid-19 outbreak.

Saturday Antiques Fair

* 1. Two of the stalwart traders at the regular Saturday antiques fair have indicated that they wish to continue for at least Saturday 21st March 2020.
	2. Due to the limited contact required between Town Hall staff, traders and members of the public it is reasonable for the fair to continue until circumstances dictate otherwise.
	3. Staff who are handling cash will be asked to wear gloves and wash hands immediately after the banking is complete.
	4. Careful scheduling will be undertaken to ensure that the fair is serviced by two members of staff who have regular contact with each other.

**Recommendation:**

* **That the Town Hall remains open for those hirers who wish to continue to use the rooms, until such time as government guidance is received to indicate that a full closure is necessary.**
* **That the weekly antiques fair continues to run until it becomes unviable due to staffing or trader shortages or government restrictions.**
* **That where bookings are cancelled, slots be held for regular hirers, no penalties be applied for any hirer and deposits be carried forward to replacement bookings after the conclusion of the outbreak.**
* **That the Town Council offices, located within the Town Hall, remain closed to public enquiries to reduce the amount of contact between staff and the public.**
* **That in the event of the Town Hall being required to shut, or shutting through lack of bookings, staff be given the option of being deployed to deep cleaning and decorating tasks or taking unpaid leave.**

# STAFFING

**Recommendation:**

**That the Town Council adopts the following policy in relation to the management of its staff during the Covid-19 outbreak and that it communicates this to them.**

General

* 1. Specific advice on the Covid-19 / coronavirus pandemic has been sought from the Town Council’s H&S and HR advice provider ([ELAS](https://www.elas.uk.com/)) when drawing up this policy.
	2. The Town Council has a duty to take steps that are reasonably necessary to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all its employees, including those who are particularly at risk for any reason. Employees also have a duty to take reasonable care of their own health and safety and that of people they work with. Employees must cooperate to comply with their duties under health and safety legislation.
	3. It is known that there are members of staff who fall into the vulnerable person category, though their age or underlying health conditions.
	4. All employees will be asked to ensure that their contact numbers and emergency contact details are up to date.
	5. The Town Clerk will supervise any relevant processes, for example sickness reporting and sick pay. All members of staff have contracts of employment in place which will be referred to as appropriate.
	6. Flexible working arrangements will be facilitated where required by members of staff (e.g. to facilitate the care of relatives).
	7. Unpaid leave, with no penalties, will be automatically approved where members of staff wish to self-isolate on a precautionary basis.
	8. The Town Council will work on the basis of ensuring job security for all staff members throughout the pandemic.
	9. Employees will be updated on actions being taken to reduce risks of exposure in the workplace.
	10. Tissues, hand soap and cleaning products (e.g. sanitising wipes, disinfectant) will be made available to Town Council staff in their workplaces. Staff will be advised and expected to use these products to protect themselves and the area they work in.
	11. The Town Council will ensure there are clean places for staff to wash hands with hot water and soap and encourage everyone to wash their hands regularly.
	12. If protective face masks are required these will be provided by the Town Council in due course.
	13. From 23rd March procedures will be implemented to ensure minimal contact between individuals in the workplace so that cross-contamination is limited, though home-working arrangements or alterations to working hours.

Administrative Staff (Clerk, Deputy Clerk & Office Administrator)

* 1. Procedures are already in place to facilitate the Clerk working from home.
	2. Procedures are already in place to facilitate overtime and the delegation of functions to the Deputy Clerk and Office Administrator if required.
	3. There are limitations as to the remote working opportunities due to constraints posed by the financial management and cemetery software.
	4. A presence in the office, albeit reduced, will be required to facilitate the following tasks:
* Collection of post.
* Checking answering machine.
* Collection of tolls on market day.
* Processing of payroll and financial payments.
* Processing of burial administration.
	1. Arrangements will be made for reduced staff contact, by staggering work times throughout the day.
	2. Investigations will be made into home working opportunities for the Deputy Clerk and Office Administrator. Caution will be exercised to protect the Council’s data.

Grounds Maintenance Staffing (Cemetery Superintendent & Town Handyman).

* 1. The Cemetery Superintendent and Town Handyman are considered lower risk as the majority of their work is outside. They will be advised to avoid contact with members of the public unless essential.
	2. The Town Handyman can, if required, oversee burials in the cemetery.
	3. The Cemetery Superintendent can, if required, carry out the routine maintenance of the Council’s green space areas.
	4. The Council has contractors who are familiar with the maintenance routines of its green spaces, parks and gardens and could be brought in to provide an emergency service if required. This was undertaken in 2019 due to extended staff absence and is known to work.
	5. The Town Handyman and Cemetery Superintendent will be asked not to interact on a face-to-face basis for the duration of the activation of this policy.

Town Hall Staff (Main Caretaker, Part-Time Caretakers & Cleaner)

* 1. Two members of the Town Hall staff are on zero-hours contracts. One member is on a contract limited to one shift per week. Others are on part-time, fixed hours contracts.
	2. The Town Hall has already seen a significant reduction in requirements for the usual caretaking service.
	3. In the event of the building closing to the public (whether through restrictions or demand) staff will be redeployed to undertake alternative tasks including deep cleaning, decorating or administrative tasks.
	4. Staff on zero-hours contracts will be offered these alternative tasks for a period of time which is equivalent to their usual working hours so as to maintain income levels. This will be on a voluntary basis.
	5. Scheduling of shifts will be undertaken in a manner so as to avoid contact between all staff members.
	6. The Town Hall’s staff are to be commended for the high standards of cleanliness and hygiene that they maintain in the building. This has undoubtedly made it easier to consider the implications of the current Covid-19 outbreak.

# PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Leeds City Council routinely carries out consultations on planning applications and proposals for works to protected trees. The consultations are time sensitive and usually require a response within 21 days. The Planning Committee usually meets on a three-weekly cycle to agree responses to the consultations on behalf of the Town Council.

**Recommendation:**

**That the following policy be implemented for the duration of the Covid-19 outbreak to remove the requirement for meetings of the Planning Committee:**

* 1. Members of the Planning Committee will be notified of all consultations being carried out by Leeds City Council as soon as possible, but usually within 48 hours of receipt.
	2. Members of the Planning Committee should use [Leeds City Council’s Public Access](https://publicaccess.leeds.gov.uk/online-applications/) facility to view the particulars of the application online and then submit their opinion n the proposal to the Clerk via e-mail.
	3. Councillors with a pecuniary interest in an application or proposal will be expected to declare this in writing and not comment on the proposal.
	4. Councillors with a non-pecuniary interest in an application or proposal will be expected to declare this is in any consultation response.
	5. On the date of each [scheduled Planning Committee meeting](http://www.wetherby.co.uk/_UserFiles/Files/Town%20Council/Planning%20Committee/Planning%20Committee%20Meetings%202020.pdf) the Clerk will compile the responses received on each application.
	6. The Clerk will further consult with the Chairman of the Planning Committee for guidance as necessary.
	7. The Clerk is hereby given the delegated authority to use Planning Committee Members’ responses to form and submit a corporate response on each planning application to Leeds City Council.
	8. Any decisions made under this delegation will be recorded and reported to the next meeting of the Planning Committee after the deactivation of this policy.
	9. In the event of a major application or proposal for significant development being received during the activation of this policy, all Town Councillors would be invited to submit comments for inclusion in any response to Leeds City Council.

# EVENTS

* 1. The Old Men’s Parliament has confirmed that it will not be holding their regular Tuesday or Thursday sessions until the coronavirus outbreak has passed.
	2. The Church on the Corner congregation has confirmed that it will not be holding its regular Tuesday service for the foreseeable future.
	3. The VE Day Working Group has already determined that its ‘Proms’ concert should be postponed.

 **Recommendation:**

**That the Council does not organise any events, other than Full Council meetings whilst permitted and reasonable to do so, until the threat from the current Covid-19 outbreak has subsided.**