

Sevenoaks Town Council

Pandemic Contingency Plan Policy

In addition to Sevenoaks Town Council's Business Continuity Plan, the Town Council recognises the need to have a separate pandemic recovery plan and procedure. The reason for this is that a general continuity recovery plan focuses on a short-term recovery programme whereas, for example, in circumstances where a public health emergency is confirmed such as the Coronavirus, the effects of the pandemic could last many months.

The following procedure sets out the contingency measures that the Town Council will bring into effect in the event of a pandemic.

The procedure aims to ensure that the Town Council will be able to operate its business to the best of its abilities in such an event while protecting, as far as is reasonably possible, its Councillors, employees and members of the public.

Communication with the public

A statement will be placed on the Sevenoaks Town Council's Website www.sevenoakstown.gov.uk and information issued by social media as and when necessary.

Procedure

The Town Clerk and Councillors are responsible for ensuring that employees understand the Town Council's pandemic recovery plan policy and procedure. Employees are responsible for familiarising themselves with the procedure and should speak to the Town Clerk should they have any questions.

Council Meeting 23rd March 2020 Minute 567 ii)

RESOLVED: *To agree emergency measures that if it was not possible to convene a meeting of the Council or Committee in reasonable time or where restrictions are in place, the Town Clerk (and Deputy Town Clerk) shall have delegated authority under s.101 of the Local Government Act 1972 to make decisions on behalf of the Council where such decision cannot be reasonably 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 by electronic means or telephone. The Town Clerk will further consult with the Mayor for guidance as necessary. The delegation does not extend to matters expressly reserved to the council in legislation or in its Standing Orders or Financial Regulations. Any decision made under this delegation must be recorded in writing and must be published in accordance with the relevant regulations.*

The Town Council will identify a Pandemic Crisis Management Team. The team will consist of the Mayor, Cllr Eyre, Cllr Parry, Cllr Dr Canet, Cllr Clayton, Cllr Shea, (Reserves Cllr Morris Brown, Cllr Camp, Cllr Bonin, Cllr Hogarth), Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk, Responsible Financial Officer.

Members of the Pandemic Crisis Management Team in the event of a pandemic, will be expected to exercise leadership and make operational and business decisions in accordance with delegated

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authority. This may be via email if necessary. Notes of all actions taken will be reported to Council in due course.

As a contingency measure, employees will be trained in various functions to ensure that adequate cover is provided in different roles.

A pandemic communications strategy will be developed to ensure that employees are provided with up-to-date and accurate information on the status of the pandemic. Information will be provided to employees via e-mail. As well as other important information, employees will be briefed on the symptoms of the virus and who to contact should they believe they, or a colleague, has the virus. Employees will also be provided with instructions regarding personal hygiene to avoid spread of the virus.

The Council's leave and absence policies will be reviewed as the status of the pandemic changes. This includes the Council's policies on sickness absence, time off for dependants and bereavement leave.

Employees will be required to observe several measures put in place by *the government* to keep the risk of infection to an absolute minimum. This will include self-isolating, social distancing and working from home where possible. Some facilities will be closed in line with public health guidelines and staff will be furloughed in line with government policy.

Information at 16th March 2020 – updated 22nd April 2020

National Public Health advice should always be followed.

Priorities

Sevenoaks Town Council needs to prioritise its core purpose of delivering priority and statutory functions and facilities for the general public and concentrate on these bearing in mind potential reduction of staff and operational arrangements in the future.

There is also a need to remain calm and provide confidence to the local community.

Sevenoaks Town Council does not have the resources, particularly now to take on a secondary public health role or coordinate house to house volunteers, there are several voluntary groups now established and the Town Council will do what it can to assist these.

- i) **Burials** – maintain a dignified service to the public whilst meeting public health guidelines.
 - The cemetery will remain open for people to visit graves unless specifically directed to close under government public health guidelines.
 - Personal choice will be respected as far as possible and having due regard to the deceased in a manner that is consistent with the deceased wishes, religion, or beliefs.

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- Mourners will continue to be able to attend funerals and pay respects. During times of restrictions of public gatherings this will be restricted to ten mourners. The chapel will not be open for services to be held during this period.
- No ashes interments will take place at this present time.
- The relevant burial information within this policy will be provided to all funeral directors using the Town Council's cemetery.
- Funeral directors will be required as part of the booking of a funeral to confirm that there will be no more than ten mourners. Also, to confirm that they have no information that the numbers may exceed this policy.
- Should it become apparent that this policy is being exceeded and funeral numbers where families may not be willing to comply with restrictions around those attending the funeral will either be cancelled (if known in advance) or the police contacted as an emergency to attend and disperse.
- Funeral Directors be requested to remind family that no one should attend a funeral if they have tested positive or are self-isolating.
- The Town Council will liaise with funeral directors to enable them to record the burial for mourners who are unable to attend,
- All staff to wear appropriate PPE.
- The Town Council will comply with providing information on burials as required for the national data base relating to capacity for funerals.

ii) **Paying of Bills** – avoiding problems where possible for the local economy. Most expenditure is delegated, there are some larger amounts of expenditure which require two councillors' signatures. This would be agreed electronically and signed off on hard copies retrospectively.

iii) **Planning**

1. Delegated authority is granted jointly to the Ward Councillor, Chairman of The Planning Committee, and the Town Clerk to discharge Sevenoaks Town Council's role as a statutory consultee during this period, subject to consultation with other Members as far as possible.
2. Planning Applications on which the Town Council is a statutory consultee will be allocated to Ward Councillors as usual but will be circulated electronically only.

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3. In the place of the standard format Planning Committee agenda, a report will be circulated (electronically only) on the Wednesday preceding the meeting. This will also be available to view via the Town Council's website.

4. By 12noon on the day of the date originally scheduled for the meeting, Councillors are requested to submit the following by email, to both the Planning Committee Clerk and Planning Assistant:

i. Any comments on the main agenda items

ii. Comments on any applications which they have been allocated, using the previously agreed standard template [Minute no. 559]

5. During the afternoon of the day of the meeting, collated response sheets of draft comments for both (i) and (ii) above will be circulated to all Members for review.

6. If possible, a meeting will be held remotely (TBC).

7. If an agreement cannot be reached in the absence of a vote, the planning application will be forwarded to SDC Development Control.

8. In the place of minutes, a report will be submitted to the District Council by close of business on Wednesday. This will be circulated and uploaded to the Town Council website as usual.

9. Councillors will be reminded of the importance of completing the Pro Forma form providing comments on plans which can then be emailed to Town Council staff if necessary. This will be important as it might not be planning staff passing comments on to the District Council.

iv) **Town Council Meetings** – A Council Meeting held on 23rd March 2020 signed off delegated powers to enable the business of the council to continue without meetings. Virtual meetings will be arranged when appropriate and possible.

v) **Health & Safety Checks** – where possible these need to continue e.g. play areas, public open spaces, legionnaires, litter picking to enable facilities to remain in public use, unless closed by government public health guidelines.

vi) **Stock** – these need to remain high to enable facilities to remain in public use.

vii) **Lower Priorities** – In the future if staff are reduced the following would be considered lower priority – mowing frequency, non-essential work on building improvements, arranging events.

The above policy and procedure will be continuously reviewed and updated to take account of the changing status of a pandemic.