

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Briefing for Breckland Council elected members (3 March 2021)

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

NEW: New campaign encourages the nation to keep going and stay at home

Everyone across the UK is being reminded of the importance of staying at home and the risks in relaxing their behaviour at this crucial point, in a [new advertising campaign](#) running across TV, radio, out-of-home advertising and on social media. It is reminding people that everything they've done – working from home, washing their hands, wearing a mask, maintaining social distancing and video calling – is helping stop the spread of COVID-19 and new variants.

NEW: Confirmed cases of COVID-19 variants identified in UK

Up to 6 cases of a 'Variant of Concern' first detected in Manaus, Brazil, have [now been found in the UK](#). Public Health England (PHE) has identified 3 of these cases of the Variant of Concern in England - two of the cases are from one household in South Gloucestershire with a history of travel to Brazil and there is a third, currently unlinked case.

NEW: All households with schoolchildren to get rapid COVID-19 tests

Households with schoolchildren, including childcare and support bubbles, will be able to [test themselves from home](#) as schools return from 8 March. Secondary school and college students will now be tested twice a week, receiving three initial tests at school or college before transitioning to twice weekly home testing. Primary school children will not be regularly asymptotically tested due to low levels of transmission between younger aged children but will continue to need to come forward for tests if they have symptoms.

NEW: UK charities join together to boost vaccine drive

Sixteen frontline charities have [formed a new partnership](#) to encourage those with long-term health conditions and their carers to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Organisations including The British Heart Foundation, Macmillan Cancer Support and Mencap are joining with the government and NHS to promote vaccine uptake among those the charities support every day. Since 15 February those in cohort 6 – people with certain underlying health conditions and their carers – have been receiving invites from their GP practice to come forward for life saving vaccinations to protect them from COVID-19.

NEW: Update on the Vaccine Taskforce

Now the national vaccine rollout is well underway, cabinet-level [ministerial responsibility](#) will move from the Business Secretary to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, allowing for end-to-end oversight of the programme to sit with a single minister. The change will further strengthen relationships with the therapeutics taskforce and with other vaccination policies and programmes. Nadhim Zahawi will remain in his role across the 2 departments, having been appointed Vaccines Minister in December.

NEW: New data show vaccines reduce severe COVID-19 in older adults

Public Health England (PHE) has submitted a pre-print of a real-world study that shows that both the [Pfizer and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines are highly effective](#) in reducing COVID-19 infections among older people aged 70 years and over. Since January, protection against symptomatic COVID, 4 weeks after the first dose, ranged between 57 and 61% for one dose of Pfizer and between 60 and 73% for the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine.

NEW: COVID-secure election campaigning will go ahead

From 8 March, rules will allow for individual campaigners to [deliver election leaflets](#) and to engage with electors on their doorsteps in the run up to the May elections - but campaigners should always be socially distanced and not enter inside people's homes. Outdoor activity remains prohibited until this point and it is vital the current national lockdown rules continue to be followed.

NEW: New education recovery package for children and young people

Schools are to receive a share of a new [£700 million package](#) to help children recover from the disruptions covid has had on education. Money is to be spent on one-to-one and small group tutoring programmes, as well as supporting the development of disadvantaged children in early years settings, and summer provision for pupils who need it.

NEW: Government updates on identifying and tackling COVID-19 disparities

A [second quarterly report](#) has been produced to help understand and tackle COVID-19 disparities experienced by individuals from an ethnic minority background. Comparing first and early second wave data, disparities have improved for some ethnic groups including Black Africans, Black Caribbean, Chinese and Indians but have worsened for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. The Department of Health has updated the list of people shielding, using a new predictive risk model which combines factors including underlying conditions, age, sex, ethnicity, body mass index and the postcode where people live and its link with deprivation.

NEW: Launch of Project SPEED challenges rail industry to cut time and costs of rail upgrades

The government has challenged the rail industry to pioneer new ways of working that will halve the time and reduce the cost of delivering critical infrastructure projects, as the country aims to recover from the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19). The next stage of rail Project SPEED has been launched calling on faster, smarter and more efficient ways for projects to be delivered.

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

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

2. Supporting businesses and employees

REMINDER: Business support remains available

If you know a business that needs financial support please ask them to engage via our [website](#) or by emailing us: regeneration@breckland.gov.uk.

We use our single grant application form to match companies to every available national scheme, and our revised discretionary policy should mean that every legitimate Breckland-based business should be eligible for some direct financial support.

NEW: Restart Grants

The Government has trailed additional support as part of the roadmap out of lockdown, and the imminent national budget with the announcement of a £5bn Restart Grant Scheme. Under the press notices we expect shops will be eligible for up to £6,000 grant to reopen on April 12, with hospitality and leisure businesses eligible for grants of up to £18,000 to cover the period to June 2021 when it is hoped the final restrictions will be lifted.

We are currently awaiting some further details and announcements from BEIS and HMT to support our deployment of these, however, anticipate being able to operate a very similar process to LRSG (Closed) and the recent one-off payment grants. We expect businesses will be automatically paid where we hold up-to-date records, and payments to be released as soon as possible.

UPDATED: Rolling grants for businesses under the current lockdown – LRSG (Closed)

We are still able to provide business grants under the LRSG (Closed) financial assistance scheme. Payments are now available for a period from 5 January to 31 March 2021. For the majority of Breckland businesses, this means they have just received a top up for 44 days' worth of grants, based on recent announcements.

Eligibility is defined nationally, and effectively covers rate paying businesses (100% rate relief still eligible) that are legally required to close due to the lockdown. We are processing most payments automatically based on data previously acquired, but any business can apply via our website.

The Breckland implementation of this scheme went live on 23 December, and we have supported almost 1,000 businesses with £5,123,862.

UPDATED: One-off top up payments for closed businesses.

In addition to the rolling payments outlined above, we are also able to make further one-off payments to all businesses required to close that are registered for business rates for the period 5 January – 15 February 2021 (100% rate relief is still applicable). The size of the one-off award is based on rateable value of the business premise:

£15,000 or under = £4000
£15,001 to £50,999 = £6000
£51,000 or over = £9000

Under this scheme we have already issued over £4m additional support to almost 1,000 businesses. As with the rolling payments, we are processing the majority via automatic pay runs using existing data. However, any business can apply, and we will match wherever we can to the national criteria.

UPDATED: Additional Restrictions Grants – Breckland’s discretionary policy.

Based on the gaps left from the LRS (Closed) policy we continue our complimentary set of support using Breckland’s discretionary resource. Under this approach, any business can apply if they are ineligible for LRS (Closed) and struggling. We are currently reviewing how far we can extend this support under the new national timetable for reopening.

Currently awards are grouped into four categories:

Businesses with high fixed property costs, who are forced to close (i.e. B&Bs) - £1,334

Businesses with high fixed property costs, who can still open but are struggling (i.e. supply chain, manufacturers) £1,000

Businesses with low / no fixed property costs, who are forced to close (i.e. regular market traders, hairdressers renting space) - £1,000

Businesses with low / no fixed property costs, who can still open but are struggling – (i.e. self-employed, open market traders) £667

Any business can apply via: <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/article/16267/Covid-19-Business-Grant>

Current awards from Breckland now reach almost £1m, supporting almost 800 businesses.

UPDATED: “legacy” grant schemes.

We are still supporting and paying any eligible business we can under the support schemes relevant to previous Tiers and Restrictions. These include:

Winter Support Payments / Grants for Wet Led Pubs – A one-off payment of £1,000 for pubs which derive majority of their income through drinks sales – (£42,000 paid to date) The deadline for applications for the Christmas Support Payment has been extended to 28 February 2021.

Tier 2 Restrictions Grants – Grants of up to £1,050 for every 14 days in Tier 2, for businesses which were significantly impacted by the specific Tier 2 restrictions (£373,001 paid to date)

November National Restrictions – Grants of up to £3,000 for every for businesses which were significantly impacted by the specific November enhanced restrictions £1,381, 884 paid to date)

Any business can apply via: <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/article/16267/Covid-19-Business-Grant>

Other National Support

£20 million SME Brexit Support Fund – this offers support to help small businesses adjust to new customs procedures, rules of origin, and VAT rules when trading with the EU. Eligibility businesses can get up to £2,000. Requirements are that business have no more than 500 employees, and no more than £100 million annual turnover. Further details may be found [here](#).

The Self-Employed Income Support Scheme for the third grant is now closed for new applications. Details about the fourth grant will be announced on 3 March 2021.

Bounce back loan borrowers can delay repayments by extra six months. Businesses that took out government-backed Bounce Back Loans to get through Covid-19 will now have greater flexibility to repay their loans. Further details may be found [here](#).

Start-up Scheme

Our scheme to support new enterprises in the wake of the pandemic continues to grow and provide support of between £2,500 and £10,000 to bridge the costs of starting a new enterprise.

Currently have 20 Live grants on the Business Start Up, 10 Confirmation of award letters have been issued. Grants offered to date are £44,250. We have assisted with renovations to the properties, stock, signage and new equipment. We have paused applications as money requested is higher than the overall scheme provision (£75,000), although are reviewing additional resources into the scheme now.

UPDATED: Support for High Streets

We are currently revising our plans for support to the High Streets in response to the recently announced roadmap out of restrictions, and will be bringing forward a new set of plans and proposals for supporting Market Towns in their recovery.

In the meantime we continue to push for safe and vibrant numbers of shoppers via:

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) We have made 11 awards so far – more information and applications via

<https://www.breckland.gov.uk/digital-high-street>

Shop Local campaigns through **#EnjoyDiscoverExplore programme**, which include video testimonials based in each town, and new banner arms and column wraps in all market towns

E-directory of local businesses - which is being supported via social media, and will continue to grow <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/shopping-in-breckland>

3. Community Support

NEW: Councillors providing befriending support

A number of Breckland's Members undertook befriending training in November 2020, with a view to supporting local residents who may feel lonely as a result of lockdown. Since this training took place, we now have four residents being supported with regular befriending calls from Members, which is making a big difference to their welfare.

We continue to offer welfare calls to residents who we identify as potentially being in-need of this support. During the most recent lockdown, we noticed an increase in people accepting this type of advice, so if anyone else wishes to get involved and support this activity please contact samantha.armitage@breckland.gov.uk.

REMINDER: Young carers encouraged to sign up to new programme

Breckland Council will be launching a new support programme this month, designed to provide social connection to young carers aged 16-24 years. Called the MyFuture:Social programme, it will include employability and self-awareness workshops to help highlight the skills and attributes a caring role can provide and how these can translate into the workplace.

Initially, a range of activities and events such as online art classes, comedy events and wellbeing sessions will take place, with attendees invited to shape the future of the programme around their collective needs and interests. The MyFuture:Social launch event will be held on 18 March, 2pm - 4pm. Young carers can register for a free place by visiting www.breckland.gov.uk/myfuture

REMINDER: Support for vulnerable residents

The single point of contact for general information and enquiries, including financial support, is **Norfolk Assistance Scheme – available by calling 0344 800 8020.**

NAS can help with food, supermarket online delivery slots, paying bills, and money for everyday essentials. The scheme can also help if people can't meet their everyday needs and are struggling for reasons other than coronavirus.

Residents are encouraged to access the Norfolk Assistance Scheme in the first instance so demand can be effectively triaged. However, for direct referrals to our Community Hub, please email communitysupport@breckland.gov.uk. Further information can be found [on our website](#).

4. Breckland service updates

UPDATED: Frontline services

The vast majority of the services that we provide continue where the service is essential, subject to risk assessments and latest guidance issued to staff. You can see an overview of our [service updates on our website](#).

Our annual council tax billing process is going smoothly and bills for the new financial year are currently being generated in preparation for distribution in the next few weeks.

Waste collections are back to normal collection days and garden waste collection has been resumed, followed a short period of disruption caused by recent winter weather.

***Breckland Council
03.03.21***