

TOWN CLERKS REPORTS – 24TH MARCH 2020 – COUNCIL

CORONAVIRUS REPORT AGENDA ITEM 8

The current situation is unprecedented in recent times. Advice is emerging daily from the Government and Public Health England. All indications are that this situation will persist for 6 – 9 months at the very least.

Cornwall Council is the Emergency Planning authority for Cornwall. They are actively monitoring the ongoing daily Government and Public Health England briefings. Cornwall Council are releasing regular guidance for the benefit of their own service delivery and to inform a range of partners in the wider community. This includes Town and Parish Councils. It is anticipated that the Town Council will be called upon to assist in dealing with the Coronavirus locally. This might well be in a range of ways including the use of physical assets such as buildings, the use of Town Council staff to support the wider community.

Coronavirus – The latest advice and the ongoing receipt of advice from the Government, Cornwall Council and Cornwall Association of Local Councils (CALC) / National Association of Local Councils (NALC) has been incorporated into the recommendations below. However, further guidance is likely to be frequently received perhaps even on a daily basis. This will be considered and passed onto Councillors. It will be displayed on our website, passed on via social media and by other appropriate means.

Recommendations: - on the basis of latest advice the following are proposed for adoption:

Note re: a below – The legislation refers to the “Town Clerk / Proper Officer” (Stephen Vinson) being given delegated authority. However, from a Business Continuity perspective, to secure against the impact of possible illness and to take account of the division of responsibilities between staff it is recommended that the delegation be extended to the RFO/ Deputy Town Clerk (Yvette Hayward.) In the terms of area of work

responsibility the Facilities Manager (Jacqui Orange) and TIC Manager (Vicky Cutts) would provide function specific support and decision making authority should both the Town Clerk and RFO / Deputy Town Clerk be ill.

a) **Scheme of delegation / Business Continuity** – ***“That the Council delegates authority to the Clerk (RFO / Deputy Town Clerk and Facilities Manager depending upon the area of service responsibility and availability through sickness) in consultation with the Mayor (Deputy Mayor and Chair or Vice Chair of the relevant service committee and availability through sickness) to take any actions necessary with associated expenditure to protect the interests of the community and ensure council business continuity during the period of the pandemic Coronavirus, informed by consultation with the members of the council”.***

Note re: b below – currently, the legislation requires that an actual meeting is held. There is some limited electronic recommendation making, such as, the 5 day protocol within the Planning system. However, strictly speaking actual decisions rather than just recommendations should not be made on an electronic only basis. The Government have said that they are intending to introduce new legislation to permit electronic decision-making during the current crisis. As soon as the situation changes councillors will be notified.

b) **Conducting Council business electronically rather than through meetings** – ***“That the Council adopts the anticipated Government advice / requirement to discontinue physical meetings (immediate) in favour of the remote based decision making (anticipated receipt of guidance or statutory permission)”.***

Note re: c below – the Schedule of Payments currently approved by Finance Committee or Town Council will be circulated electronically. If Councillors have any questions can they be made within 3 working days. Thereafter payment will be made. This is pending any advice from Government.

c) **Fulfilling statutory requirements and authorising payments - (e.g. responding to planning consultations and approving payments)** – *“That the Town Council adopts, electronic circulation of the Schedule of Payments pending any Government advice / requirements that emerge, in respect of the remote consideration of Planning applications and the electronic authorisation of payments, in lieu, of cheques and the personal attendance of councillors in the office to authorise payments.”*

Note re: d below – The Facilities team will need to ensure that the public toilets are cleaned, if possible, more frequently than, at the moment. If schools are closed then there could be increased use of the Rapsons’ Multi Use Games Area, Thorne Park etc. These places need to hand litter to ensure sharp objects, such as, glass is removed. The office shall support the process of informing the public, through websites, social media, posters, leaflets and supporting meetings and remote working with community groups.

d) **Critical services** – *“That the Town Council identify critical services to maintain (e.g. statutory functions, including the making of payments and the provision of advice to the public) thus enabling the assets of both staff time and buildings etc. to be released for the support of proposals and measures emerging from the Emergency Planning team at Cornwall Council from emerging and ongoing Government advice.”*

e) **Management of Council facilities** – *“That the Council a) to recommend closure of the Public Hall and meeting rooms to the public and to carry out any redecorations and refurbishments. b) to confirm that the Town Council will sympathetically consider requests for is Guildhall tenants for rent deferments c) to confirm the cancellation of fees relating to bookings of the Public Hall cancelled through the Coronavirus”.*

Note re: f below – Some great news HMRC have finally accepted the RFO calculations, and agreed to refund £24,487.00 of the VAT paid on the Public Hall refurbishment.

Note re: f below – The current Financial Regulations are 4.1 the Town Clerk or RFO may in consultation with the Mayor or Chair of the appropriate committee approve an item of expenditure £2,500. (Note - possible increase to £5,000) Intended for operating expenditure, perhaps equipment purchase.

Financial Regulation 4.5. In cases of extreme risk to the delivery of council services, the clerk, RFO or Facilities Manager may authorise revenue expenditure on behalf of the council which in their judgement it is necessary to carry out. Such expenditure includes repair, replacement or other work, whether or not there is any budgetary provision for the expenditure, subject to a limit of £7,500 (Note – possible increase to £15,000). The Clerk/RFO shall report such action to the chairman as soon as possible and to the council as soon as practicable thereafter. For example, this is intended to help authorise immediate works to a threatened Council building to hopefully avoid a higher bill by delayed decision making. Council may wish to adopt the new figures of £5,000 and £15,000 pending guidance further advice from Government.

f) **Budget implications** – to note that there will be a reduction in bookings in the Public Hall and meeting rooms which could partially be offset by the Government’s proposals for UBR Relief for the Foresters Hall and Public Hall. ***“a). That in accordance, with the latest advice to consider the establishment of a Social Emergency Fund of £20,000 to assist with emergency situations. b). That the Council keep under review the amounts under the “delegated authority to approve” as currently set out in the Financial Regulations.”***

Note re: g below – at the time of writing no clear requirements had been set out by Cornwall Council as the Emergency Planning authority for the Town Council to assist with the Coronavirus. However, during informal discussions mention has been made regarding homeless people. It being noted that homeless people sleeping in cold wet clothes outside might be more prone to viral infections and might mean accommodating it a building in Liskeard. It was noted that whilst the use of the public toilets has dropped in some areas this is the only access to toilet and washing facilities open to homeless people.

At the time of writing the Town Council was organising a meeting (23rd March) of interested parties from a range of statutory organisations, voluntary sector groups and members of the public concerned forming a Coronavirus help and support group. This will better inform the Town Council (and Cornwall Council) going forward on community needs.

The Liskeard Foodbank is one organisation with a critical role to play in supporting the community of Liskeard.

g) Wider community support – “*That the Council consider how it might support the wider community, including businesses, community groups and vulnerable individuals*”.

Note re: h below – the Government has confirmed that the payment of Statutory Sick Pay should commence on day one rather than day four as in the regulations.

h) Human Resources – “*That the Council confirms that it in accordance with the Green Book, the staff will be supported by the payment of Statutory Sick Pay should they become ill. That, in consultation with the staff, the Council will actively redeploy its staff to support other needs and duties that emerge.*”