

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Briefing for Breckland Council elected members (10 February 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: NHS COVID-19 app alerts 1.7 million contacts to stop spread of COVID-19

Over 1.7 million app users across England and Wales have been advised to isolate by the NHS COVID-19 app following a close contact with someone who goes on to test positive, [new data shows](#). This means the chains of transmission have been broken. The app is the fastest way to notify the public they have been at risk of contracting the virus, sending alerts to close contacts to tell them to isolate as quickly as 15 minutes after an app user enters a positive result into the app.

NEW: Surge testing to be deployed in areas around Manchester in connection to new variants

Working in partnership with the local authority, additional [surge testing and sequencing](#) is being deployed to targeted areas around Manchester, where a COVID-19 variant has been found. Surge testing is in addition to existing extensive testing, and in combination with following the lockdown rules and remembering Hands Face Space, will help to monitor and suppress the spread of the virus. Positive cases will be sequenced for genomic data to help understand COVID-19 variants and their spread within these areas. People living in the targeted area are being strongly encouraged to take a COVID-19 test, whether they are showing symptoms or not.

NEW: British manufacturer SureScreen Diagnostics to supply 20 million rapid lateral flow

The UK government has secured 20 million British-manufactured rapid coronavirus (COVID-19) tests in a new contract with UK test manufacturer SureScreen Diagnostics. These [lateral flow antigen tests](#) produce a result in under 30 minutes and are the first British tests to be validated in the laboratory by Public Health England (PHE). The SureScreen test will be used as part of the government's rapid testing programme for those without symptoms, which has seen lateral flow tests deployed across the country to test NHS and care home staff, as well as in targeted settings including schools, universities and to allow key workers to continue their vital work during lockdown.

NEW: Bounce back loan borrowers can delay repayments by extra six months

Bounce Back Loan borrowers will now have the option to tailor payments according to their individual circumstances, [it has been announced](#). The Pay as You Grow repayment flexibilities now include the option to delay all repayments for a further six months, meaning businesses can choose to make no payments on their loans until 18 months after they originally took them out. The option to pause repayments will now be available to all from their first repayment, rather than after six repayments have been made.

NEW: Government boost to rapid workplace testing

The government is working closely with organisations across different sectors to encourage them to take up the offer of [rapid workplace testing](#), marking efforts to normalise testing in the workplace across both public and private sectors. The focus is on areas that are vital to the running of our country and where employees cannot work from home during lockdown, from transport networks to food manufacturers. This will help stop the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) and ensure vital public and economic services can continue.

NEW: New vaccines partnership to rapidly respond to new virus variants

A new partnership between the UK Government and vaccine manufacturer CureVac has been established to [rapidly develop new vaccines](#) in response to new Covid-19 variants if needed. Both the Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines are safe and effective and appear to work well against the Covid-19 variants currently dominant in the UK. The new agreement will utilise UK expertise on genomics and virus sequencing to allow new varieties of vaccines based on messenger RNA technology to be developed quickly against new strains of Covid-19 if they are needed.

NEW: Latest monitoring data confirms safety of COVID-19 vaccines

Routine safety monitoring and analysis of the approved COVID-19 vaccines by the UK's medicines regulator, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), shows that the [safety of covid vaccines remains as high as expected](#) from the clinical trial data that supported the approvals. The safety profile of the vaccines remains positive and the benefits continue to far outweigh any known side-effects.

NEW: Government confirms mandatory hotel quarantine to be introduced from 15 February

Building on existing tough measures, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has confirmed that from 15 February anyone travelling to the UK from a country on the UK's travel ban list will be required to [quarantine in a government-approved facility](#) for a period of 10 days. The DHSC issued a commercial specification to hotels near ports and airports, asking for proposals on how they can support the delivery of Managed Quarantine Facilities ahead of formal contracts being awarded.

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.

UPDATE: Rolling grants for businesses under the new lockdown – LRSG (Closed)

We continue to provide grants to businesses forced to close due to the national lockdown, with grants of up-to £1,500-per-14-days available. We have made payments to all known eligible businesses (c. 2,000) to cover an initial 42-day period and are ready to extend payments if guidance confirms the lockdown will last longer.

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 23rd December 2020, and we have supported almost 1,000 businesses with £2,593,722

UPDATE: 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 (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 have launched a complimentary set of grants using Breckland’s discretionary resource. Under this approach, any business can apply if they are ineligible for LRS (Closed) and struggling. Awards are grouped into four categories:

- Businesses with high fixed property costs, who are forced to close (i.e. B&Bs) - £1,334 per 28 days
- Businesses with high fixed property costs, who can still open but are struggling (i.e. supply chain, manufacturers) £1,000 per 28 days
- Businesses with low / no fixed property costs, who are forced to close (i.e. regular market traders, hairdressers renting space) - £1,000 per 28 days
- Businesses with low / no fixed property costs, who can still open but are struggling – (i.e. self-employed, open market traders) £667 per 28 days

We hope this support will reach around 750 extra businesses by February. Any business can apply via our [website](#).

Breckland has now allocated over £750,000 of support to almost 500 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 (£376,617 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 (£1,379,216 paid to date)

Any business can apply via [our website](#).

Other National Support

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.

UPDATED: 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 we have 20 live grants being processed, with 10 confirmation of award letters having already been sent out. Grants offered to date total £44,250. PR is being planned, focusing on one of the successful applicants who has used funding to help with renovations to the property, stock, signage and partially funding a refrigerated van. We have paused the process for new applications while we process those already received as the money requested is higher than the overall scheme provision (£75,000).

UPDATED: Support for High Streets

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: Supermarket Delivery Slots

We are able to offer access to online priority delivery slots for vulnerable and Clinically Extremely Vulnerable residents:

- Residents who are Clinically Extremely Vulnerable are encouraged to register on the [National Shielding Service System](#).
- Vulnerable residents can also be registered for priority slots via our Community Hub, with residents able to express a preference in deliveries from Tesco or Iceland supermarkets. The supermarket then contacts the resident directly with a priority code. This service usually takes around 7 days, however once they have the code they can self-manage online booking at their convenience.

Most supermarkets do still have regular delivery slots available at the moment. If residents need any assistance setting up online accounts with local supermarkets and ordering online, we can support this via a referral to the library service.

NEW: Vaccination Transport

There is an [online tool](#) to help residents find out which transport services operate in their area and how to access them. The tool will provide information about bus services, rail services, dial-a-ride

services, and community car schemes in the area. While we are all expected to follow advice to only make essential journeys at the moment, this tool may be particularly useful for residents who have been called to receive the vaccine but are unable to travel to the appointment independently.

NEW: Tripstart Overview for January 2021

Tripstart Breckland has been extremely busy during January, with all existing service users contacted to provide an update on the service and the individuals wellbeing. Due to government restrictions 23 face to face interventions have taken place and these have been in the form of Walk & Talk sessions. 482 non-face to face interventions via telephone, email and other forms of multi-media have also taken place.

We are delighted to announce that a service user has successfully attended an employment interview and been offered meaningful, fulltime employment.

Due to COVID restrictions, Tripstart Breckland also continues to provide a crucial collection and delivery service in support of vulnerable residents across the Breckland area. With GP surgeries providing contact details directly to their patients, Tripstart Breckland has delivered 31 prescriptions, containing 126 items of medication during January 2021. These have been delivered to individuals and families either shielding due to their current health conditions, or to those that have tested positive for COVID 19 and are therefore, isolating. January 2021 has seen Tripstart Breckland provide those most vulnerable residents with transport to and from vaccine centres. As a service they are delighted to assist in this and will continue to do so when requested.

Food parcels continue to be in demand and January 2021 has seen Tripstart Breckland deliver 49 food parcels, containing 156 days' worth of food. Delivering food parcels provides the IAG Support Worker with an opportunity to meet and have a chat to the recipient; this very often leads to further support needs being identified, which can either be met by the support worker or by signposting the individual to other organisations to provide specialist help.

NEW: The Silver Social

In July 2020 The Silver Social launched the reimagined programme, inviting existing and new participants to join in activities online. A programme of live workshops, pre-recorded shows and 'cuppa and chat' sessions have followed, making full use of our website and Zoom videoconference calls.

We have conducted participant surveys after events which show:

- 92% agree or strongly agree that the events have enabled them to try out new activities and pastimes
- 24% of are from single occupancy households.
- All of our survey respondents are over 55, 56% are 60-69 and 38% are 70 or over.
- 76% agree or strongly agree that the activity they participated in made them feel part of their community

We recognise that not all residents will be online, though Zoom does allow for participants to join via the telephone and we have also tried to reach out with activities by post. However, residents haven't really engaged via telephone or offline so we continue to focus our efforts online.

You can see a short round up of the project on [The Silver Social website](#).

REMINDER: Support for vulnerable residents

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

NAS can help with food, 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.

As with other parts of Norfolk, the winter weather has meant some disruption to our bin collection schedule due to the risks of carrying out the service in icy or on untreated roads. Most collection rounds have been temporarily suspended and we have communicated this via our social media and website. Latest service information and advice is available on our [service updates](#) webpage.

Critical services, such as Housing, Customer Services and Public Protection, all continue to operate, albeit in some cases, this is being managed in a more flexible way. You can see an overview of our [service updates on our website](#).

Leader, Breckland Council

10.02.21