

AGENDA ITEM 7: OPERATIONAL UPDATE REPORT

Council is requested to note the following update report on Council events and services since the Coronavirus lockdown period and consider the specific matters raised therein.

Council Meetings and Delegated Authority

All Council meetings were postponed until recent legislation enabled formal meetings and decision-making to be conducted online.

To ensure that Council operations and decision making could continue in lieu of formal meetings, urgent arrangements were put in to place with wide-ranging authority delegated to the Town Clerk. Minute 516 of the Extraordinary Council meeting of 24 March 2020 refers (p.13-15 of the Agenda) and states:

- (xv) all functions of the Council, other than those matters specifically reserved by law to be determined by a meeting of the Council, to be delegated to the Clerk (as the Council's Proper Officer) in consultation with Mayor and Chairman of the appropriate relevant Committee (or the Deputy Mayor if usually Council) until the next Ordinary or Extraordinary Council meeting, at which time the delegation must be reviewed;**

Council is therefore asked to review these delegation arrangements since formal meetings are now able to be resumed.

Planning

In accordance with delegated authority, the Clerk has responded to planning application consultations on the Council's behalf, submitting recommendations to East Suffolk Council on a weekly basis. To aid this process, Council's Planning Administration Officer has provided summaries of applications for the Review Panel.

Formal Planning & Environment Committees recommence on Wednesday 6th May and will follow the previously approved meeting schedule unless otherwise determined.

Town Hall

The Town Hall has remained closed as of 4pm Monday 23.03.20, since which time the Council's administrative staff have been working from home.

Security settings and health and safety for employees working from home were reviewed. Council's insurers confirmed that staff and equipment is insured for home working.

Regular security checks on Town Hall are being made by caretaking staff, equipment is being serviced in accordance with schedules and server backups are taking place.

Weddings and Town Hall Bookings

All Town Hall bookings and weddings to at least 1 June have been cancelled or postponed until further notice.

Refunds for bookings affected by the coronavirus restrictions are being offered on request.

Administration/Enquiries

Email and telephone enquiries are received in the usual way and staff have been able to service a range of enquiries, helping or signposting in any way they can.

Mayoral and other events

All Mayoral engagements and events for current Municipal Year were cancelled. It is anticipated that the forthcoming Municipal Year will be affected, the extent to which is not yet known. Social distancing rules are expected to remain in place for some time.

Cemetery

Burials are being prioritised as usual. Other duties have not been scaled back significantly as most have been able to be carried out without close contact with the public and social distancing measures being maintained. Grounds staff have also carried out a grass cut on the Langley Ave Playing Field as this had not been able to be done by Norse.

The cemetery has not seen a significant increase in funerals in the short-term compared to the same period as last year:

23rd March – 30 April 2019: 4 urn burials 1 full burial

23rd March – 30 April 2020: 3 urn burials 3 full burial

However, with lockdown rules restricting the number of attendees, it is anticipated that many families may be waiting until the restrictions ease before booking funeral services.

During this time, staff working from home have been able to make significant progress with the inputting of burials/memorials/transfers data on to the digital burial software as well as handling phone calls and enquiries from the public and local funeral directors.

Allotments

Allotment inspections were suspended at the beginning of the lockdown period.

Some allotment sites around the county closed completed, deeming it to be non-essential activity. Following discussion with Suffolk Police, our allotments were kept open for existing tenants to enable daily exercise and access to food.

As well as regular contact with tenants, staff have been liaising with FSALG to approve measures to minimise risk to ploholders attending sites, such as ensuring water taps for handwashing were turned on earlier than usual, keeping gates open to enable hands-free access. Reports of a couple of nuisance bonfires were received and the tenants responsible were reminded of the Council's guidance re bonfires.

A hold was placed on new tenancies so as not to promote any new non-essential public activity and in consideration of the number of people prevented from taking up a new plot, having been advised to self-isolate for the 12-week period.

There are currently 19 people on the waiting list for an allotment plot and prospective tenants can be engaged in accordance with social-distancing rules to take up an allotment plot once it is deemed appropriate to recommence lettings.

Council is requested to consider the circumstances in which new lettings should be recommended.

Walton Community Hall

Closed since 24.03.20 with regular external and internal checks being made by Council's caretakers. A chain and padlock were added for extra security at this time and a notice on door explaining the closure and giving contact details for the Town Council is displayed.

Staff have maintained contact with regular hirers to defer bookings or issue refunds as appropriate and will advise when bookings can restart.

Broadway House

Senior Citizen's Centre is closed, and all other groups cancelled until further notice.

Regular visual checks being conducted by centre manager who will consult with the Town Council prior to any reopening.

The Council is continuing to carry out annual servicing in line with its landlord responsibilities.

The Felixstowe Old People's Welfare Association (FOPWA) have asked whether Council would be prepared to reduce the forthcoming 2020/21 licence fee to exclude any period of enforced closure, on a pro-rata basis.

Felixstowe in Flower

Felixstowe in Flower Launch event and competitions were cancelled.

All floral baskets for Felixstowe in Flower had been ordered and funds committed before the lockdown started. Last year's Felixstowe in Flower sponsors were advised that we are still planning to install the baskets in late June, subject to the lockdown being lifted by this point, and that plaques recognising their contribution to date will be re-installed this year at zero cost. For anyone who has already paid sponsorship for 2020, this will carry forward to 2021.

Any brand-new sponsors that have already paid will have a plaque this year and next year.

Floral baskets will still be installed around the town to bring much needed cheer and to support our local businesses, subject to rules permitting late June. Council's Civic & Community Committee in June is able to have a final review of this.

Staffing

No Council staff have been required to be furloughed. Two staff members were advised, for higher-risk health reasons, to self-isolate for 12 weeks when the Government advice was issued.

All other staff have either worked from home (administration) or on site (grounds, caretaker) as required.

Grants: See Agenda Item 10.

Council is requested to note update report since the Coronavirus lockdown period, review the delegation arrangements and make any decisions it deems necessary.