

Lowestoft Town Council

Pandemic Contingency and Recovery Policy

1. Terminology

A pandemic is declared by the World Health Organisation when a new disease for which people do not have immunity spreads around the world beyond expectations. This Pandemic Contingency and Recovery Policy has been developed at the time of COVID-19; particular emergencies may require different tailored policies and plans including where the consequences of a pandemic will be immediate and may also last many months.

Within this Policy the term pandemic is used as shorthand to cover all of the situations to which this Policy applies.

2. Purpose and application

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

The Policy applies from the time of the first of the following:

- a) The UK Government or World Health Organisation declares an epidemic or pandemic (www.gov.uk, www.who.int),
- b) The UK Government declares any nationally or locally significant high consequence infectious disease (as defined by Government www.gov.uk),
- c) The UK Government declares that local authority meetings, and public gatherings are suspended and social contact and travel are to be avoided, or
- d) At any time when Council so decides, regardless of the nature of the emergency.

The Policy aims to ensure that the 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 employees, and others affected by its business including the public, councillors, contractors and partners.

3. A Plan and Delegation

Full Council adopts this Policy but recognises that in any emergency, policies provide a framework but have to remain organic, responsive and flexible.

The Council recognises that its policies, plans and actions are subject to Government guidance and any laws (emergency or otherwise) that might apply to the circumstances arising during any emergency. The Council delegates authority to the Clerk to implement this Policy including any deviations to reflect relevant Government guidance, laws and any new circumstances that might arise.

Authority is delegated to the Clerk to deal with any urgent and necessary matters that might arise, especially where in-person meetings are not reasonably possible, subject to legal and budgetary limitations that apply, notwithstanding that that expenditure might exceed the relevant limit specified in the Council's Financial Regulations. However, this delegation is subject to the normal banking and other safeguards, to act reasonably and with appropriate consultation where reasonably practicable, and a requirement to report decisions to Council at the first reasonable opportunity.

The Clerk is responsible for ensuring that councillors are regularly kept advised of relevant information and for ensuring that alternative measures for communication are implemented, including video conferencing to avoid councillors, staff and the public being subject to undue

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risk; and it is accepted that these public safety measures take precedence over parish council procedural law in such circumstances.

4. Employee Safety and Office Facilities

The requirements in this section have due regard to the contractual obligation on employees to undertake activities and provide Council office/business support. However, where relevant, it will also be applied to councillors and other persons who may voluntarily attend Council premises.

The Clerk is responsible for ensuring that employees understand this Policy and its application to any relevant Council activities and will ensure updates are provided to Council as appropriate.

Employees are responsible for familiarising themselves with the procedure and should speak to the Clerk should they have any questions.

The Clerk will ensure employees are sufficiently trained/familiar with any new functions that they are required to perform in to ensure that adequate cover is provided for Council business.

The Clerk will ensure relevant information to help ensure that business can be continued as safely as possible in the circumstances, is provided to employees as effectively and as soon as reasonably possible.

The Clerk will brief employees on the symptoms of the relevant pandemic disease and who to contact should they believe they, or a colleague, has the virus. The Clerk will also provide employees with instructions regarding personal hygiene and cleaning regimes to avoid spread of the disease.

The Clerk will advise employees of measures that they are required to observe to keep the risk of infection to an absolute minimum, which might include:

- Social distancing at work such as maintaining at least two/three metres distance between participants in essential meetings, avoiding unnecessary travel, cancellation of face-to-face meetings and working from home
- Increased levels of hygiene management including keeping hands clean and coughing and sneezing into tissues which are immediately disposed of
- Strict adherence to Government guidance on management of symptoms and self-isolation where recommended with employees actively discouraged from attending work in line with any such guidance.

The Council accepts that employees may not be able or may be required not to attend the office where this becomes impossible owing to parental, other serious responsibilities or Government social distancing measures connected with the pandemic.

Employees must be prepared and able to work from home or from any other base as might reasonably be required, using the equipment provided for this purpose, in the event of a pandemic. Normal working hours will apply with the potential for increased flexibility to deal with the impact of the pandemic.

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Employees should keep receipts and records of any reasonable expenses made on behalf of the Council which will be considered for reimbursement and subject to the usual authorisation safeguards.

All staff will be provided with an additional sum of £4 per week (£6 per week from 1 April 2020) which will support their ability and obligation to work from home; this covers such matters as additional electricity and heating, and is the tax threshold limit for home working expenses.

All staff will be provided with advice on home working to ensure physical and mental well-being, including safe working practices, ergonomics and display screen use.

The Council and employees accept that there may also be a need for additional flexibility on when employees work their hours where reasonably necessary and possible.

The Council's leave and absence policies will be reviewed as the status of any pandemic changes. This includes the Council's policies on sickness absence, time off for dependants and bereavement leave. Where employees are well but, in line with Government guidance, are instructed to self-isolate or work from home, this will not be recorded as sick-leave. However, where an employee decides to self-isolate without instruction to do so, the Council reserves its discretion to determine the facts before deciding whether to apply the same approach.

Where employees are self-isolated but 'well' they can continue to work on full pay, until they are confirmed as having a high consequence infectious disease when the usual sickness provisions apply.

Where employees have dependents, including children, who need care for example because of school closures, lack of access to support services or facilities or owing to having contracted a high consequence infectious disease, the Council will consider these individually depending on the circumstances, with due flexibility including through home working, changed working patterns, or annual leave .

5. Services and facilities

The Clerk will ensure that the management of staff, events, crowds, facilities and other aspects of Council business is in line with Government guidance and takes account of the particular duty on the Council, as a public authority, to execute its functions with leadership and responsibility, with public health the foremost consideration.

The Council recognises that in the circumstances of a pandemic, due consideration is required in relation to:

- Interactions between staff, councillors and the public (in particular respecting social distancing and addressing public safety concerns, such as through introducing home working and cancelling meetings)
- Tenants (in particular in relation to social distancing, business continuity and public safety implications, such as through providing relevant information and the flexible application of lease terms)

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- Events by third parties on Council land (in particular in relation to social responsibility and public safety, such as through cancelling/deferring events)
- Council events, markets, launches and similar where the public are invited (in particular in relation to social responsibility and public safety through cancelling/deferring events)
- Provision of Council facilities, including sporting/leisure and public conveniences (in particular in relation to social responsibility and public safety, such as through closure or restrictions where appropriate)
- Council meetings and decision-making (in particular in relation to public safety, legality, efficacy and accountability with all meetings in person suspended or conducted through alternative measures, such as video conferencing with delegation to the Clerk)
- Statutory duties, banking, salaries and other significant financial matters such as audit (in particular in relation to public safety, legality, efficacy and accountability with normal safeguards in place as far as is reasonably possible and delegated authority to the Clerk with normal signatories and, for audit, the Mayor and Chair of Finance or other alternate councillors where they are unavailable being able to sign off statutory returns where applicable)
- Recommendations on planning matters (in particular in relation to the suspension of site visits with delegation to the Clerk who shall consult with relevant councillors to help determine the response to the planning authority)
- The application of the grants budget and funding for activities of third-party organisations (in particular in relation to public health, safety, economic and environmental emergencies, such as through diverting funding support to more urgent activities as far as is permitted within parish council powers and subject to the application of normal, insofar as is reasonably possible)
- Emergency action required by the Government, Health and Safety Executive, Public Health England or similar national or local regulatory authority (in particular with delegation to the Clerk to follow published guidelines and authorise release of resources or assets if required).

6. Recovery

The Council is committed to maintaining and, where relevant, returning to business as usual as quickly as reasonably possible following a pandemic. It is also committed to learning any lessons arising from the pandemic and incorporating any learning points into its policies and procedures.

The Clerk is expected to monitor the situation and provide regular updates during any pandemic as well as to advise the Council in relation to any longer-term impacts or problems with recovery from a pandemic. During a pandemic and in at least two months following the formal cessation of a pandemic in the UK, Council will retain an item on its agenda to deal with any issues arising and to enable the review of relevant policies and procedures.

7. Review

No later than May 2021 and where amendment is required to reflect new information or another significant development.