

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Briefing for Breckland Council elected members (20 January 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: More than 4 million people receive first dose of COVID-19 vaccine in UK

More than 4 million people in the UK have [received their first dose](#) of a COVID-19 vaccine as part of the largest vaccination programme in British history. The NHS vaccinated a total of 4.06 million people between 8 December and 17 January, including more than half of those aged 80 and over and more than half of elderly care home residents. This is more than double the number of vaccinations, per person per day, than any European country and is a significant step towards hitting the Prime Minister's target of offering vaccines to the top 4 priority groups by the middle of February. This group of around 15 million people accounts for 88% of COVID deaths, so vaccines will play a crucial role to saving lives and protecting the NHS.

NEW: Social care sector to receive £269 million to boost staffing levels and testing

[Funding is being released](#) to protect and support staff and residents in care homes and those receiving help in their own homes. The impact of the new variant is being felt across the country, with staff absence rates rising sharply both in care homes and among home care staff, due to testing positive or having to self-isolate. The funding will protect and support the social care sector, including care homes and domiciliary care providers, by increasing workforce capacity and increasing testing.

NEW: National free school meals voucher scheme opens to orders

Schools can begin [ordering free school meal vouchers](#) for eligible pupils from today as the Government's national scheme launches, adding to the support available for disadvantaged families. An online service for schools, the scheme allows schools to place orders for supermarket gift cards on behalf of parents and carers whose children are eligible for free school meals. The vouchers are worth £15 a week per child and families can receive codes by email to redeem themselves, or as a gift card provided by post, collection or delivery to families without internet access.

NEW: AI at the forefront of efforts to treat coronavirus patients

Patients with COVID-19 are set to benefit from faster treatment, improved outcomes and shorter hospital stays thanks to the use of the [latest artificial intelligence](#). NHSX, a unit tasked with driving the digital transformation of care in the NHS, has brought together over 40,000 CT scans, MRIs and X-rays from more than 10,000 patients across the UK during the course of the pandemic. Access to this National COVID-19 Chest Imaging Database (NCCID) has now been extended to hospitals and universities across the country who are using the images to track patterns and markers of illness.

The database can speed up diagnosis of COVID-19, leading to a quick treatment plan and greater understanding of whether the patient may end up in a critical condition.

NEW: British public urged to play their part in historic vaccine roll out

Members of the public are being urged to join the national effort by helping family and friends aged 80 and over to get their life-saving jabs. The Government has called on people to [commit to 3 pledges](#) to support the roll out of COVID-19 vaccines. The NHS has vaccinated around 45% of those aged 80 and over in England and is encouraging people who have been offered a vaccine to book their appointments as soon as possible. The 3 pledges are:

- Help out - help those aged 80 and over by supporting friends, family and loved ones with their appointments, as well as volunteering to help those in the community
- Join up - sign up to clinical trials for COVID-19 vaccines and treatments
- Stay informed - keep up to date with accurate and trusted NHS advice and make sure to share facts with friends and family

NEW: Health and Social Care Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19)

A speech by Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Matt Hancock made at the Downing Street coronavirus briefing on 19 January can now be [read online](#).

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

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

2. Supporting businesses and employees

REMINDER: if you know a business that needs financial support, please ask them to engage via our [website](#) or email 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.

UPDATED: Rolling grants for businesses under the new lockdown – LRSG (Closed) – 5th January onwards

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. 1,000) 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 was live as soon as the lockdown was confirmed, and to date we have supported almost 1,000 businesses with around £2.1m.

UPDATED: One-off top up payments for Closed Businesses during national lockdown

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

The initial payment to businesses will be made on a 42-day basis as per the LRS (closed), further payments will be reviewed but are not guaranteed. We hope this support will reach around 750 extra businesses by February.

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

REMINDER: “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 – (£37,000 paid to date). This scheme closes on 29th January 2021 as per Government instruction.
- 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 (£364,184 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 (£1,376,548 paid to date)

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

Other National Support

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme has been extended until the end of April 2021. The government will cover the cost of 80 per cent of the wages of furloughed employees for hours not worked.

The Self-Employed Income Support Scheme is extended until April 2021. The government is now providing a third SEISS grant, covering 80 per cent of average trading profits between November and January 2021, capped at £7,500 in total

For the Bounce Back Loan Scheme, Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, and the Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme the application deadline has been extended until the end of March.

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.

We have already issued 9 confirmation letters, with grants worth almost £50,000.

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: Enhanced Track & Trace**

The Enhanced Track and Trace service has now launched in Breckland, which involves our officers speaking to residents who have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 to ensure they understand the rules of self-isolation, check compliance, and provide support and guidance to help them isolate.

We launched the enhanced T&T process on Friday 15th January and have already carried out around 60 visits. Our new Covid Support Officers are assisting with these visits and, in addition to offering covid support, have referred a number of individuals for further welfare support which for our elderly and most vulnerable residents can be vital. Welfare support includes financial aid, access to essential supplies, loneliness and mental health advice, and guidance on transport options to get to vaccination centres.

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.**

If their need falls outside the immediate offer, the call is triaged to our local Community Hub. The Hub has the following provisions in place to support residents:

- Emergency food parcels for a one-off need, supplies 7 days of food
- Able to provide foodbank vouchers to residents in financial hardship
- Able to register vulnerable people for an online priority delivery slot with Tesco and Iceland via DEFRA service
- Hardship grants to provide financial support to Breckland residents in need
- Access to community groups and volunteers to collect shopping, medication and provide assistance, such as dog walking

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.

We have recently been dealing with some relatively minor disruption to our waste collection service, due to a combination of staff sickness, snow/flooding and vehicle breakdowns. We are prioritising general and recycling collections where necessary, so garden waste bin collections in particular may be a day or two later than normal.

Updates on this service have been communicated with residents via our social media channels and the [waste collection service status page of our website](#).

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](#).

UPDATED: Covid officer activity

The Covid Support Officers have been very busy this week and have been really increasing activity and outputs to keep Breckland safe and provide maximum visibility. This has included:

- Patrolling the streets of our market towns to monitor how businesses and members of the public have responded to the new restrictions in place and where necessary they have educated, advised and offered support to these businesses and members of public.
- Increasing visible presence in the district and have engaged positively with the residents giving advice and support where needed. Our local businesses and residents can easily identify our officers through the high-viz vests with the Breckland logo on and the officers are becoming a familiar face to businesses and residents alike and in general their advice, support and visibility has been positively received.
- Continuing to escalate issues or concerns where there is continual non-compliance of the current restrictions with a view to support and where necessary, enforce
- Gathering and feeding back increased intelligence, enabling the targeting of certain businesses/sectors where insufficient measures were in place.
- Advising businesses on what they can do to help reduce the spread and to ensure they are complying with the restrictions in place.

Leader, Breckland Council
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