

**PATCHWAY TOWN COUNCIL**  
**RISK ASSESSMENT AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY RESPONSE TO COVID19**

**This Risk assessment has been conducted specifically for Keynsham Town Council (& adapted for use by Patchway Town Council) with reference to its staff, Councillors, and activities including public events. The Town Council accepts no liability whatsoever should any other person or body choose to utilise the information contained herein for their own purposes. You are strongly advised to consult Government websites for advice on coronavirus and conduct your own risk assessment pertinent for your own situation/organisation which will be**

## 1.0 Introduction

On 31 December 2019, Chinese authorities notified the World Health Organization (WHO) of an outbreak of pneumonia in Wuhan City, which was later classified as a new disease: COVID-19.

- 1.1. On 30 January 2020, WHO declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern” (PHEIC). On 11<sup>th</sup> March WHO categorised the outbreak as a pandemic. And subsequently stated on 14<sup>th</sup> March that Europe is now the centre of the pandemic
- 1.2. UK Chief Medical Officers HAD classified the risk to the UK as moderate. This has now been raised to high as of 12<sup>th</sup> March
- 1.3. On 10 February, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock, announced [strengthened legal powers to protect public health](#). [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus\) Regulations 2020](#) have been put in place to reduce the risk of further human-to-human transmission in this country by keeping individuals in isolation where public health professionals believe there is a reasonable risk an individual may have the virus.
- 1.4. On 3<sup>rd</sup> March the Government published its response plan to the virus which consists of 4 phases
  - Contain: detect early cases, follow up close contacts, and prevent the disease taking hold in this country for as long as is reasonably possible (This includes individuals at risk of carrying the virus being asked by NHS111 to self-isolate for 14 days. Those testing positive are placed in quarantine (either under appropriate medical care or at home) and are required to undergo further testing with two negative results before being released from quarantine.
  - Delay: slow the spread in this country, if it does take hold, lowering the peak impact and pushing it away from the winter season. This may involve social distancing measures including closure of schools and cancellation of public events.
  - Research: better understand the virus and the actions that will lessen its effect on the UK population; innovate responses including diagnostics, drugs and vaccines; use the evidence to inform the development of the most effective models of care
  - Mitigate: provide the best care possible for people who become ill, support hospitals to maintain essential services and ensure ongoing support for people ill in the community to minimise the overall impact of the disease on society, public services and on the economy
- 1.5. The main public health campaign messages from the Government are as follows:
  - wash your hands with soap and water often – do this for at least 20 seconds
  - always wash your hands when you get home or into work
  - use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
  - cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
  - put used tissues in the bin straight away and wash your hands afterwards
  - try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell
  - do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean

- 1.6 As of 12<sup>th</sup> March, the Government announced it was moving from containment phase into delay phase. New advice has been issued as follows:
- Anyone who shows certain symptoms is now required to self-isolate for 7 days, regardless of whether they have travelled to affected areas. This means people should stay at home and avoid all but essential contact with others for 7 days from the point of displaying mild symptoms, to slow the spread of infection
- The symptoms are:
- a high temperature (37.8 degrees and above)
  - a new, continuous cough
- Individuals are no longer asked to call NHS 111 to go into self-isolation. If their symptoms worsen during home isolation or are no better after 7 days contact NHS 111 online at 111.nhs.uk. If they have no internet access, they should call NHS 111. For a medical emergency dial 999.
- 1.7 The Government has announced that it will be considering further social isolation measures including banning large public events as from next week. Whilst schools remain open at this time closure may be considered at a later date. It should be noted that breaking news over the weekend indicates elderly people may be quarantined for 4 months and other drastic measures may need to be implemented including forced requisitioning of buildings as temporary hospitals.

## 2.0 Sources of Information

- 2.1. The Town Council will be acting on information and guidance available from the following sources to which all Councillors, staff and members of the public will be signposted.
- (a) Coronavirus – UK Government Response  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>
  - (b) General information to the public  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>
  - (c) Guidance for non-clinical settings – Employers and Businesses\_  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/covid-19-guidance-for-non-clinical-settings-and-the-public>
  - (d) NHS Overview, symptoms and advice\_  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
  - (e) Government Action Plan\_  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan>
  - (f) Government Advice for Self-Isolation at home  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-people-with-confirmed-or-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>
  - (g) WHO – Getting Workplace ready  
[https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7\\_6](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7_6)

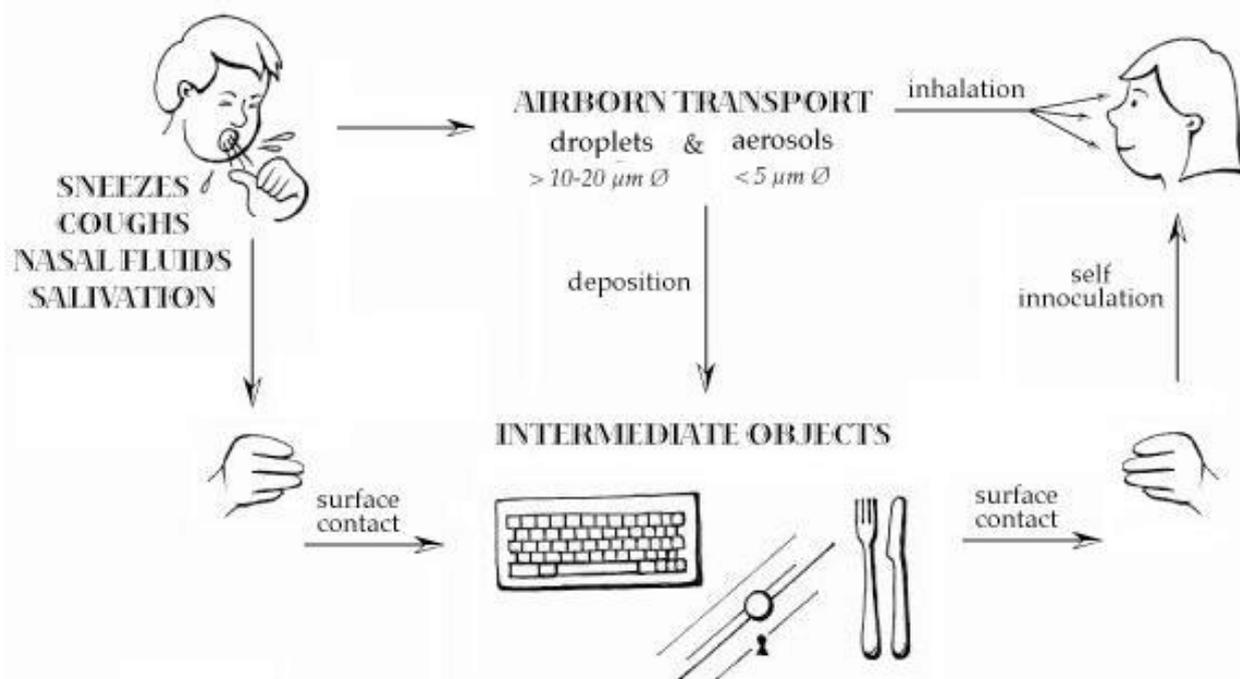
2.2. In the preparation of this updated risk assessment and the subsequent business continuity plan, additional information/guidance has been utilised by the Clerk from the following sources:

- (a) Research published by Chinese Centre for Disease Control
- (b) WHO website technical guidance
- (c) Society of Local Council Clerks
- (d) National Association of Local Councils
- (e) Local Government Association information for Councils  
<https://www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus-information-councils>
- (f) Ellis Whittam (Employment and Health & Safety Advisers) (for Keynsham Town Council). Dr Robin Cordell, Cordell Health for Patchway Town Council
- (g) National Joint Councils for Local Government Service – Advisory notice 6<sup>th</sup> March

### 3.0 Key facts underpinning the risk assessment

The following information has been used to underpin the risk assessments.

3.1. This is an enveloped respiratory virus spread in aerosols/droplets via person to person direct contact and indirect contact with infected surfaces/hands. Main transmission routes are therefore as follows:



The key to managing the risk of contracting the virus is to limit the opportunities for spread/transmission. This not only includes the main campaign measures suggested by NHS England in respect of hand sanitisation and reducing aerosol transmission by using tissues, but also adopting procedures for surface decontamination of "multi-use touch points" such as door handles, keypads etc.

3.2. This is a novel virus hence unlike influenza, there is no natural immunity/vaccine. Therefore it is likely a high proportion of people will become infected (current estimates are 80% of the UK population) and according to the Governments action plan up to 20% of the Council's staff/Councillors may be infected during the peak of the outbreak. Business continuity planning is therefore key to maintaining Council services and corporate decision-making capabilities.

3.3. Of 44,672 confirmed cases in China

- 80.9% (or 36,160 cases) were considered mild
- 13.8% (6,168 cases) severe (requiring hospitalisation)
- 4.7% (2,087) critical (requiring assisted ventilation/intensive care)

(Source - China Centre for Disease control)

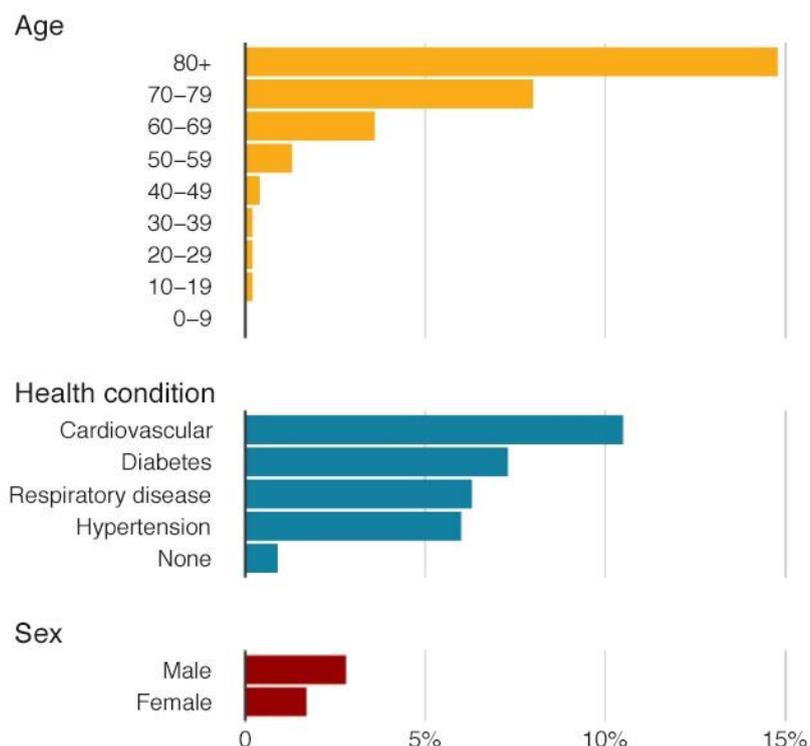
Children can be infected and can have a severe illness, but based on current data overall illness seems rarer in people under 20 years of age

So far, there has been no obvious sign that pregnant women are more likely to be seriously affected

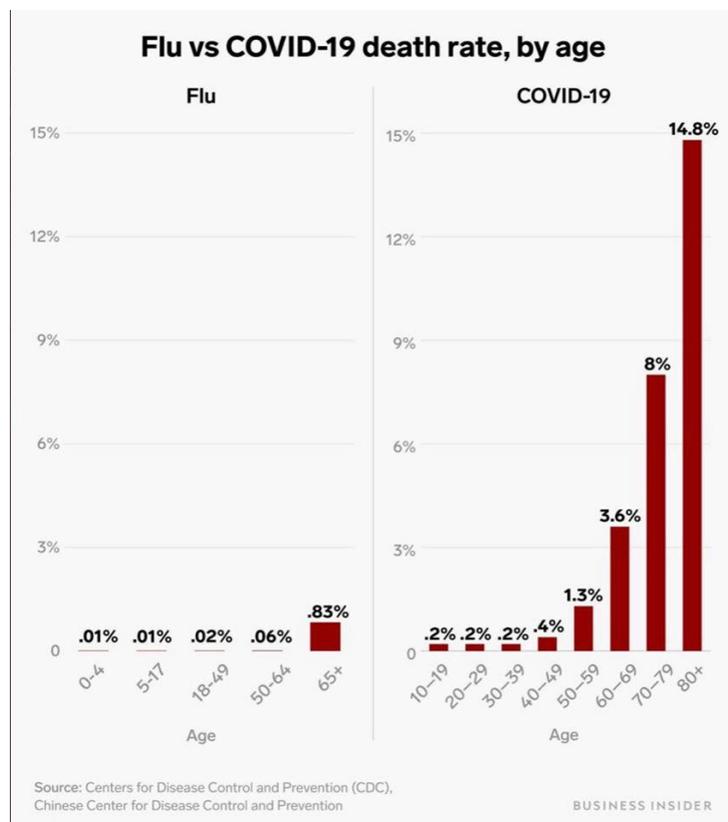
3.4. The population segments at most risk of severe disease/death are those over 60 or with underlying medical conditions including diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular and renal issues and respiratory issues. This has implications when assessing the risk to the public, councillors and staff in Keynsham as there is a higher than average proportion of residents over the age of 60 and a significant proportion of Councillors and staff are either over the age of 60 or have pre-existing conditions.

### Death rate varies by age, health and sex

Proportion of deaths among confirmed cases



The death rate will be significantly higher in the elderly (who are immunised against flu) than for an influenza outbreak as the following comparison shows:



- 3.5. Transmission of the virus is no longer contained or restricted to direct contact with people travelling abroad. The virus is now spreading within the community.
- 3.6. Unlike flu, there is a much longer incubation period, and people start shedding the virus at a much earlier stages before any symptoms are showing (pre-symptomatic phase) Although studies in China show the incubation period can range from 0-27 days. WHO have determined a quarantine/isolation period of 14 days to be appropriate. Most people start showing signs between 5-11 days post infection.
- 3.7. Data available suggests the virus can survive in the air for at least 3 hours, on cardboard for 24 hours and on hard surfaces (e.g. stainless steel, melamine etc) for up to 72 hours, possibly longer. In respect of infection by close contact, advice is to limit contact to no more than 15 minutes and to stand more than 2m distance.
- 3.8. Once recovered from the virus, an individual has immunity. Tests are still being conducted to understand how long after recovery infectious viral particles (as opposed to fragments of viral RNA) are shed. Recent published research indicates that people with mild symptoms stop shedding infectious virus after about day 10 of the onset of symptoms. This is relevant in respect of how soon after recovering from coronavirus staff can return to work and Council can resume business.

- 3.9. The key risk of exposure is therefore from pre-symptomatic staff, Councillors or members of the public having contracted the virus and subsequently attending Council activities and thereby transmitting the virus to others.
- 3.10. The Town Council cannot determine or control what people do away from the workplace.

#### **4.0 Current position**

As of 9am on 14 March 2020, 37,746 people have been tested in the UK, of which 36,606 were confirmed negative and 1,140 were confirmed as positive. 21 patients who tested positive for COVID-19 have died.

A daily bulletin is issued at 2pm giving the number of confirmed cases. There is a 24-hour delay before details of the locations of the confirmed cases are released by Public Health England. This is now recorded by Upper Tier Local Authority (i.e. B&NES, South Gloucestershire) so unless it is published in the press, it may not be possible to readily identify whether there are confirmed cases in Patchway. The bulletins are monitored daily by the Town Clerk as the risks will increase once cases start to be confirmed within the local community.

The government has announced that it will not be testing people with mild symptoms for coronavirus who are self-isolating. Therefore, the number of confirmed cases will not accurately reflect the extent to which the population of Patchway is infected.

There are two confirmed cases in South Gloucestershire. As at Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

Although the Dept of Health and Social Care, Public Health England and the NHS are leading on the UK response to the outbreak, the Town Council nevertheless has a duty of care to staff, Councillors and members of the public to conduct its own risk assessments at local level specific for its activities and take steps accordingly.

#### **5.0 PEOPLE AT RISK**

The Town Council cannot control what people do in their personal time and how they choose to respect (or not) the guidance from HMG Gov or indeed take additional steps to limit their exposure (such as taking holidays, visiting public places etc). Councillors and Members of the Public have a choice in whether they undertake Town Council activities however staff do not.

All staff have been asked to update their medical questionnaire to ensure those in vulnerable risk groups are identified. It may be that decisions in respect of working from home for these at risk members of staff may need to be taken at an earlier stage.

In addition, some members of staff care for close family members in vulnerable groups. Their specific concern is not that they become infected but that they unknowingly transmit the virus during the 14-day asymptomatic period to their vulnerable relatives. Again, if they have vulnerable dependents, then decisions on working from home may need to be made at an earlier stage.

### **5.1. Administrative Staff**

Risk of infection from Patchway Town Council staff - currently high owing to sharing office space and operating the reception. Hand sanitiser is available but it is limited and each member of the office staff have alcohol wipes for surfaces. Toilets have pull down handles, screw locks, screw taps, antibacterial hand pump soap dispensers, hot air dryers (risk of aerosols and pull cord light switches). Hand towel have been placed to use to flush the toilet, turn off tap, open doors and turn off the light switch.

Risk of infection from each other – relies on all members of staff acting responsibly and following all precautions to keep the work area free from contamination and not coming into work if they feel ill.

Risk from members of public – A restricted door entry system is planned to be installed on Monday the 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020, which will enable staff to restrict access to the Council offices unless it is essential. Staff are advised not to meet in small confined rooms, to ensure they are 2m away and limit contact time to no more than 15 minutes. As the incidence of infection within the local community increases, members of the public will be asked to wear a surgical mask to reduce the amount of infective droplets released into the office atmosphere. (this is providing masks can be obtained)

### **5.2. Grounds Maintenance**

Less at risk owing to outdoor working although there are six outside staff, these visit the office regularly so risk of infecting each other. Main risks are from approaches by members of the public, direct contact with play equipment etc recently touched by members of the public and emptying Council bins and dog bins. Also, contamination from e.g. petrol hoses and when visiting suppliers (B & Q, Arco etc).

### **5.3. Councillors**

Risk from staff, each other and members of the public whilst Attending Council meetings/events and undertaking constituency work with residents

### **5.5 Members of Public (MoP)**

In particular MoP attending Council meetings and events such as the Annual Town Meeting, VE Day celebration and Scott Park football fixtures.

Attendance at Council and Committee meetings is normally low.

## **MEASURES**

The measures adopted will be defined by whether the Government is still working to contain the virus or merely delay it. The point at which further measures will need to be undertaken, including working from home, will be determined by when the first cases start to be confirmed in the local community.

### **6.1. INFECTION CONTROL MEASURES – hand and surface sanitisation**

The Town Clerk has had to act quickly and purchased a considerable amount of supplies in order to ensure the Council is fully equipped to deal with the outbreak. The Council does not have a budget for this so the Council will need to decide on how it wishes this expenditure to be accounted for. The recent change to the Council's financial regulations 4.1 have enabled these purchases to be made

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in conjunction with the Chairman (for any items below £1,500 or in an emergency below £5,000).

These authorisations to be evidenced by a minute or by an authorisation slip duly signed by the Clerk and where necessary the appropriate by the Chairman. Due to the current and possible future emerging situations these signatures can be electronic or retrospective.

#### 6.1.1. For individuals

- 50ml clip-on alcohol hand sanitiser bottles provided to all members of staff. All staff instructed to wear it at all times whilst in Patchway Town Council offices and to disinfect hands before returning to their desks.
- N.B. Use of toilet facilities – staff also provided with option to wear gloves to and from toilet facilities in Patchway Town Council offices to save on hand gel and alcohol wipe usage
- Correct hand washing and indirect contact transmission videos shown to all staff
- Pack of Alcohol wipes per office member of staff for surface decontamination of phone/keyboard/door handles etc.
- Box of tissues per person

#### 6.1.2. For use by residents/Councillors at meeting rooms/events etc

- alcohol gel/foam dispensers for members of the public (providing the delivery arrives (due by Monday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020 not received as yet)
- Regular use of Dettol cleaning products for decontamination of surfaces prior to/after event/meetings
- Alcohol wipes for decontamination

#### 6.1.3. Other measures

- Staff will be encouraged to bring in their own identifiable mug for personal use.
- Masks – staff have been consulted on use of the limited supply of both surgical masks (to limit release of infected droplets by infected people) and FFP3 Personal protective masks (protect individuals from infection but not everyone else from them if they are infected). The general agreement is that when cases start to be confirmed in the local region, they would prefer members of the public (including Young People) and Councillors visiting the office/meeting rooms to wear surgical masks for the duration. The FFP3 masks will be reserved for use by those staff members in vulnerable groups. (this is dependent on being able to obtain them)

#### 6.1.4. Storage/use of products

Most stocks of hand sanitiser and alcohol wipes are sold out everywhere including on-line. This is especially the case for refill bottles for automatic dispensers. The Town Council has hand gel for the next 4 weeks provided the imminent delivery is received and it is used sensibly, and once alcohol wipes have been used will try to procure 70% alcohol spray and ordinary tissues for surface decontamination.

It has been stressed to all staff that the supplies they are given are for work-related activities and not for personal use at home. All personal supplies are now locked away when staff go home with the exception of the 50ml personal clip on bottles.

All stocks are currently kept under lock and key at Callicroft House with the office administrator keeping records. Release of stocks requires authorisation by the Town Clerk.

## 6.2. INFECTION CONTROL MEASURES –Self Isolation, Working from Home, And Phase 2 Social Isolation Measures

### a) Self-Isolation

The NJC have issued guidance on the response by Employers to PAID absence from work owing to coronavirus in accordance with the Green Book terms and conditions. To avoid calling a further Personnel meeting, this will be considered under confidential business.

Self-isolation: Currently any order for self-isolation will be given by NHS 111 either as a result of contact tracing or as a result of the individual contacting them for advice. This will be treated as absence with full pay but not as sickness absence. Employees who are actually ill will be treated as off sick with associated sick pay in the usual manner. However, Employees cannot just unilaterally decide to self-isolate without providing the Town Council with reasonable justification in order to qualify for full pay.

**It is important that all staff and Councillors SPEAK DIRECTLY to the Town Clerk if they are ordered to self-isolate or feel ill as the individual circumstances /timing of the self-isolation will impact the risk assessments and may mean other staff/Councillors could be advised to self-isolate.**

### b) Working from Home

At some point, it will be necessary for the Council to consider staff working from home as per HM Gov advice. This will mainly apply to the office staff as the Grounds Maintenance team can continue to carry out their duties outdoors with much lower risk. (although they are regularly in contact with the public and empty bins, so this may need to be reconsidered)

- 1) The Town Clerk and Deputy Clerk/RFO already have laptops which they take home every night. The spare laptop has been configured to ensure it can also be accessed from home to enable the Office Administrator to work from home if required and this laptop has already been taken home for this purpose should the need arise.
- 2) South Gloucestershire currently provide our telephone system, they have been contacted to establish if the Council land line could be diverted to a mobile number, they are unsure if this is possible but are looking into it.
- 3) A spare mobile phone has been located and charged up with a working Sim card, which the Clerk has. If the office does have to close and remote working has to take place for the office staff then either South Gloucester will be able to divert the Council land line to this mobile or an answer machine message will be left on the office number asking the caller to ring the mobile number for assistance. This number will also be displayed on the Council's website and Facebook page. The mobile number is 07811 290759.

- 4) The Clerk will take all these calls and contact other staff to ensure appropriate action is taken if required
- 5) The Clerk/Deputy Clerk & RFO and the Office Administrator have access to all emergency staff contact information and Councillor contact information to ensure they can contact staff and Councillors at any time and provide any updates or advise as and when required.

**c) Cancellation of Public meetings**

It is a legal requirement that all Council and committee meetings must be open to the public (except for discussion of sensitive matters). Therefore, either the meeting takes place with members of the public attending if they wish, or it is cancelled. Options exist to ask everyone to wear surgical masks to limit release of infectious particles into the room and obviously Councillors can choose not to attend. Full Council/Committee meetings from March onwards and the Annual Town Meeting likely to be held in May (date to be determined) take place where arguably there is sufficient distance between the public and the Council members to reduce the risk of infection, however at some point it is very possible the Government will ban public gatherings. Obviously until then, Councillors and officers attending meetings also run the risk of infecting each other.

The NALC Legal Team are investigating whether an alternative to holding face to face meetings (e.g. video conferencing with live streaming to the public) can be utilised by Local Councils during a period of risk to public safety, or whether total suspension of the council decision making process is the only option. This information will be shared as soon as it is known.

**d) Council Events and other services**

Apart from meetings and events the weekend football/cricket matches at Scott Park and bookings at the Casson Centre and Council offices will be affected by any working from home policy, although office staff will be able to access any emails and electronic documents to assist with this.

Council may wish to cancel any future football/cricket bookings in line with national sporting event cancellations and advise from football and cricket leagues and also cancel any bookings at the Casson Centre and the Council offices.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (i) To approve the Risk Assessment**
- (ii) To ratify the purchase of infection control supplies by the Town Clerk under Financial Regulation 4.1 and that all purchase in connection with the COVID19 outbreak for health and safety be accounted for in a new budget code and money taken from reserves if required. (Full list of purchases to follow)**
- (iii) That implementation of Working from Home will be the decision of the Town Clerk in conjunction with the Chairman of the Council and Chairman of Personnel and reflect the risk to staff/Councillors of community spread in line with Government guidance**
- (iv) To adhere to NALC guidance when it is received relating to holding meetings once it is received.**
- (v) To review sports hire bookings and room hire bookings in line with Government guidance.**