



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

DECISION BOOK

Issue: 591 Date: 9 APRIL 2020

Decisions set out in the book have been made under delegated powers by the Chief Executive, Executive Directors or the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer, in consultation either with the relevant committee or Lead Councillor.

The Decision Book process has been altered to suspend the current Councillors' call-in arrangements within the 10-day period after its publication and replace it with the ability during that period for three Councillors to request a retrospective review of the decision in writing to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

The decision book can be accessed on the Council's website - www.reading.gov.uk/decisionbooks.

The officer reports accompanying the decisions are attached..

Contact:	Richard Woodford	Committee Services
Tel:		0118 937 2332
e-mail:		richard.woodford@reading.gov.uk

DECISION BOOK - ISSUE 591 - 9 APRIL 2020

1. DECISIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) PANDEMIC

<u>DECISION</u>	<u>LEAD COUNCILLOR(S)</u>	<u>WARDS AFFECTED</u>	<u>PAGE NO.</u>
1. DECISIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) PANDEMIC	COUNCILLOR BROCK	BOROUGHWIDE	1

This report sets out decisions that have been taken as a matter of urgency in response to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic under the Chief Executive's delegated authority to protect the Council's interest in the current emergency.

The report sets out in Appendix A decisions that have been taken or will be implemented to support and protect the most vulnerable and isolated people in our communities; and to support businesses and the local economy, and secure Reading's economic recovery, in accordance with the refocused Corporate priorities.

It is the decision of the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to implement and record the decisions taken in response to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic set out in Appendix A, with the purpose of protecting the most vulnerable and isolated people in our communities and supporting businesses to preserve the local economy.

It is the decision of the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to publish the log of service closures and changes set out in Appendix B for information.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

LEAD COUNCILLOR:	JASON BROCK, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL		
DATE:	9 APRIL 2020		
TITLE:	DECISIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) PANDEMIC		
SERVICE:	ALL	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
AUTHOR:	MICHAEL POPHAM	TEL:	(0118) 9372153
JOB TITLE:	DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER	E-MAIL:	Michael.popham@reading.gov.uk

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out decisions that have been taken as a matter of urgency in response to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic under the Chief Executive's delegated authority to protect the Council's interest in the current emergency.
- 1.2 The report sets out in Appendix A decisions that have been taken or will be implemented to support and protect the most vulnerable and isolated people in our communities; and to support businesses and the local economy, and secure Reading's economic recovery, in accordance with the refocused Corporate priorities.
- 1.3 Appendix B sets out a log of service closures and changes for information.

2. DECISION

- 2.1 It is the decision of the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to implement and record the decisions taken in response to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic set out in Appendix A, with the purpose of protecting the most vulnerable and isolated people in our communities and supporting businesses to preserve the local economy.
- 2.2 It is the decision of the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to publish the log of service closures and changes set out in Appendix B for information.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 To enable the Council to fulfil its leadership role at this incredibly challenging time, and to guide its work with partners in providing the support that residents and businesses need, the Council's current Corporate Plan priorities have been reframed to provide clarity of purpose and a new three point strategic framework has been adopted as follows:

- To support and protect vulnerable children and adults by ensuring the social care system continues to function effectively;
- To support the people who are most vulnerable and isolated in our communities;
- To support businesses and the local economy, and secure Reading's economic recovery.

3.2 In addition, the Decision Book process has been made more flexible to make it easier for the Council to take decisions urgently. It is envisaged that the Decision Book can be used to publicise decisions being taken as a matter of urgency in response to the Covid-19 pandemic to maintain transparency in decision-making process.

4. THE DECISION

4.1 Current Position:

The Council has significant duties to respond to emergencies under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. This is the most relevant legislation in relation to an emergency response to a Pandemic. This Act delivers a single framework for civil protection in the UK and establishes a clear set of roles and responsibilities for those involved in emergency preparation and response at the local level. The decisions that are recorded in Appendix A are a response to the emergency caused by the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic.

4.2 Options Proposed

The decisions set out in Appendix A have been taken or will be implemented in accordance with the Chief Executive's delegated authority to protect the Council's interests at times of emergency. The Chief Executive has also decided to publish a log of service closures and changes for information, which are set out in Appendix B.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The Council's reframed three broad priorities, as set out above, are consistent with the Council's strategic aims.

5.2 The strategic aims are:

- To Develop Reading as a Green City with a sustainable environment and economy at the heart of the Thames Valley;
 - To establish Reading as a learning City and a stimulating and rewarding place to live and visit;
 - To promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all.
- 5.3 None of these can be achieved unless the entire Borough comes together to address this emergency and emerges strongly on the other side. Although we have taken the step of closing some of our buildings to protect staff and service users, in line with government guidance on social-distancing, we are still meeting the needs of our customers.
- 5.4 We are working in partnership with key partners, the business community and our vibrant voluntary and community sector to mobilise to address both the immediate and longer-term needs of the Borough.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers). We will not lose sight of this imperative and if progress reports are not immediately evident during the heightened activity to respond to the virus, members should be assured that work will continue nonetheless.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to involve local representatives when carrying out "any of its functions" by providing information, consulting or "involving in another way". We have already started to consult with the voluntary sector and businesses community on how we should respond to the emergency. We will be working over the coming weeks to make sure that residents voices help shape our work going forward.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 8.2 It is imperative, that in responding to this emergency we look to protect the most vulnerable and marginalised in our society. Our revised priorities

facilitate this. We will continually review our progress to ensure that we do not leave behind any section of our community.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Chief Executive has authority to take decisions on behalf of the Council as necessary to respond to emergencies where it is not practicable to obtain the necessary urgency approvals from the Council or its committees. The Chief Executive also has delegated authority in times of emergency to take such action as he considers necessary to protect the interests of the Council, having consulted with the Leader of the Council, and Lead Councillors where appropriate. These provisions are set out in the Council's Delegations Register.
- 9.2 The Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, took a decision to amend temporarily the Decision Book process to enable decisions to be taken more flexibly during the current Covid-19 pandemic, which will enable Executive Directors and Statutory Officers, in consultation with the relevant Lead Councillor(s) to take decisions on an urgent basis to protect the Council's interests.
- 9.3 The Coronavirus Act 2020 received Royal Assent on 25 March 2020 and contained provision for the Secretary of State to make Regulations in relation to the arrangements for holding local authority meetings (Section 78), during the current pandemic.
- 9.4 The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, came into effect on 4 April 2020. The Council is reviewing its decision-making processes, including holding online meetings in light of the new Regulations.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are significant financial implications in responding to this emergency both in terms of additional costs as well as reduced income levels and officers have put in place procedures to record and track both. Additionally, the refocusing of staff to deal with this emergency will inevitably mean some savings are delayed or not delivered as planned. The Council's monthly budget monitoring arrangements will be used to formally report on the financial position. However, early projections suggest the cost to the Council over a six month period could be up to £13m.
- 10.2 The Government has to date announced £1.6bn of funding for local government (£3.8m for Reading) to meet additional costs including: adult and children's social care, support for rough sleepers, support for those at higher risk and lost income. A further £3.2m (£21k for Reading) emergency funding for rough sleepers has also been announced. The Government have assured councils that they should respond to the emergency and record costs so that they can be reimbursed later and in that spirit the Council has 'committed' £100k to support

the Voluntary and Community sector. It remains to be seen however, whether all costs are recoverable.

- 10.3 In addition to the above, the Government has announced widespread reliefs and grants for business rate payers. All reliefs (£44m) have been processed and Business Rate payers rebilled. Staff are currently processing the business grants and are writing to eligible rate payers where we do not hold the requisite information in order to process the payments as soon as possible. The cost of the Business Rate Reliefs and grants will be reimbursed by a S31 grant.
- 10.4 The £500m Hardship Fund is to support economically vulnerable households and primarily focused on Council Tax relief for residents in receipt of local Council Tax Reduction (£150 per recipient). Officers will rebill these residents once the software scripts have been updated and will review the Council's Hardship Policy and refer it back to Policy Committee for approval. It should be noted that this assistance is in addition to existing discounts, the ability to spread payment over 12 rather than 10 months and the Council's local Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
- 10.5 It is also worth noting that the Government has announced that Universal Credit and Tax Credits will increase by £20 per week for 12 months from the 6th April and the 7 day wait period for ESA has been removed.
- 10.6 Whilst support for bus companies has been announced, the details are yet to be published. Officers have been working with Reading Transport Limited to ensure it has sufficient cashflow to continue to operate in the interim.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 None

APPENDIX A - DECISIONS MADE IN RELATION TO COVID19

Service/ Activity	Decision	Cost Implications	Date made	Group/ sub-group
DECISIONS BY GOLD/SILVER				
Re-purpose of £100k grants to the voluntary sector	It has been agreed that the £100k funding agreed in the MTFP for voluntary sector grants be brought forward for access to support building infrastructure and capacity to respond to Covid-19 requests for support	Up to £100k	17/03/2020	(Chief Exec in consultation with the Leader)
Food Distribution Centre	To set up a service to distribute food parcels to vulnerable people, location agreed to allow appropriate space and HGV access	Contract with Bid-food wholesaler, CA Belcher (Fruit & Veg), packaging - for provision of supplies for vulnerable/ shielding people - orders raised for £90k Contract for additional security - order raised for £30k	24/03/2020 (food provision) & 25/03/2020 (location)	Gold
One Reading Community Hub	To set up and operate a call centre to help those most vulnerable, isolated and in need of support in the local area to connect them to volunteers, organisations and services that can support them during the COVID-19 outbreak	Contract to set up the Hub @130k Advertising of Hub in media etc @ £25k	17/03/2020	Silver
Homelessness	To accommodate rough sleepers into B&B accommodation, including those people with no recourse to public funds	Estimated at £490,000 for accommodation and food over a 3 month period	17/3/20	Silver - Housing & Homelessness Sub-group
Casual staff remuneration	To pay casual staff normally based on their pattern of working over the previous three months.	Estimated £180k per month (this excludes casual workers who will	12/02/2020	Chief Executive

APPENDIX A - DECISIONS MADE IN RELATION TO COVID19

Service/ Activity	Decision	Cost Implications	Date made	Group/ sub-group
		continue working as normal)		
Parking & Transport	To suspend parking charges for NHS staff during the coronavirus pandemic. NHS and social care workers will be able to park for free in council-owned car parks and parking bays. Residents parking permits free for healthcare professionals for the next 16 weeks. Thames Valley Police in Broad St Mall car park. Increase in time limit on temporary parking permits from 8 weeks to 16 weeks. Concessionary fares - relaxed limits on hours of use to link with shops opening early for elderly and vulnerable.	Loss of income	Various up to 31/03/2020	Deputy Director in consultation with Exec Director Leadership / lead member
Street Trading Licence Charges	Suspend Direct Debits for Street Trading Charges for April and May 2020 and review the situation to extending the suspension for June 2020.	Loss of income - £15K over two months	30/03/2020	Exec Director of Resources
Coroners	Provision of temporary mortuary facility at NHS cost at Wexham Park Hospital	None	27/03/2020	Gold
Booking fees	All booking fees refundable	Loss of income	27/03/2020	Silver
Temporary Cremator	Purchase of temporary cremator providing resilience for Cremation services	Circa £250k - other costs relating to build still being gathered.	03/04/2020	Gold
Payment of Concessionary Fares	To assist the cashflow of Reading Transport Limited prior to details of Government funding for bus companies being announced a decision was taken to pay concessionary fares funding for	Payment brought forward in accordance with the Council's budget provision		Exec Director of Resources

APPENDIX A - DECISIONS MADE IN RELATION TO COVID19

Service/ Activity	Decision	Cost Implications	Date made	Group/ sub-group
	20/21 in advance with a reconciliation being done at year end. The company were deemed not eligible for the Government loan scheme and avoided the necessity of an alternative loan being taken out			
Business Rates	Rebilled to reflect mandatory reliefs	£44m paid to be recovered by S31 grant		Exec Director of Resources
Business Rates	Processing Business Grants	Covered by grant funding		Exec Director of Resources
DECISIONS BY SUB-GROUPS				
Comms	Agreed to implement Orlo - platform to co-ordinate all social media platforms	£25k		Customer & Comms
ICT - Website	Contract extension with website hosting company as a result of delay in roll out of replatformed website	£39k	25/03/20	Customer & Comms
ICT - Mailbox migration	Migrate all mailboxes to the cloud not definitively defunct to enable access to 365 without VPN and seek to identify any further defunct mailboxes during 30-day grace period allowed prior to definitive licence purchase.	Risk of excess spend of order of £20k	18/03/20	Technology
ICT	Northgate instructed to proceed with connecting in our “disaster recovery” VPN server to make it live; requires work by a 3rd party supplier	£30k	31/03/20	Technology
ICT - Call-centre-type operation from home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase 50 additional laptops to deploy to desktop users to facilitate home working. • Purchase telephones, power packs and software licences to enable 	£55K	18/03/20	Technology

APPENDIX A - DECISIONS MADE IN RELATION TO COVID19

Service/ Activity	Decision	Cost Implications	Date made	Group/ sub-group
	remote operation of call centre type services (customer services, adult and child social care single points of access, tenant services)			
ICT - Remote access	Purchase 200 additional Safenet licences (needed for VPN access) to enable remote working	£6K	18/03/20	Technology
One Reading Community Hub	Purchase additional 100 Firmstep licenses to set up a work-flowed triage of Hub requests and act as a datasharing platform with key partners	£5.75k		Voluntary Sector
One Reading Community Hub	Purchase food supplies to support foodbank provision to vulnerable until a longer-term solution is identified	£45k	30/03/2020	Voluntary Sector
DACHS - Provider Support	Agreed 3% Provider Uplift awarded for COVID19 related costs in line with LGA Guidance	£260,000 + 2 nd payment of £260,000 subject to evidence	30/03/2020	Adults Subgroup & Exec Director of Resources
DACHS - hospital discharge	Commissioned 20 additional Discharge to Assess beds in Nursing Care Home setting to support hospital discharges for those who will need ongoing care in a placement.	£572,000 for 6 months period. Payable as Block Contract (28 days'notice to terminate). Costs submitted as part of Discharge Costs to CCG	20/03/2020	Adults Subgroup & DMT
DACHS - hospital discharge/avoidance	Funding authorisation delegated in line with Covid-19 Discharge guidance. Focus on rapid discharge of patients within 2 hours when medically fit to leave. Locality Team Manager can authorise package up to £850. Over that to Deputy Director. All spend continue to be tracked and reported on weekly. Deputy	To be determined. At present all hospital discharge to be captured and attributed to COVID-19 / Health spend in line with guidance.	01/04/2020	Adults Subgroup

APPENDIX A - DECISIONS MADE IN RELATION TO COVID19

Service/ Activity	Decision	Cost Implications	Date made	Group/ sub-group
	Director and DASS have oversight. Finance Business Partner and Team collating all spend in order to capture total for reimbursement.			
DACHS - hospital discharge	Mobilising 30 Bedrooms in South Reading Hotel with wrap around care support and security as additional Discharge to Assess facility for those hospital discharges where the person is expected to return to the community.	£747,387 estimated 6 month cost (monthly rolling contract - paid as a block). Costs submitted as part of Discharge Costs to CCG	01/04/2020	Adults Subgroup & DMT
DACHS - Service Delivery	<p>Safeguarding of most Vulnerable in Reading. Safeguarding Team have taken over all work across the Directorate that requires safeguarding input. Safeguarding manager is virtual chair for all strategy meetings. Provider led concerns are being worked on jointly with Care Quality colleagues.</p> <p>DOLS (Deprivation of Liberty Service) team have moved to working on safeguarding. All current and incoming DOLS are RAG rated and urgent and high risk are responded to. Tracking in place.</p> <p>Social Work / Occupational Therapy - Frontline Practice. Decision made that only urgent visits are taking place - all cases open are RAG rated with high risk cases a priority for contact.</p>	N/A	20/3/2020	Adults SubGroup

APPENDIX B - SERVICE CLOSURES & CHANGES (16/03/20 - 04/04/20)

SERVICE AREA	CHANGE
Adult Social Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits essential only, phone assessments where viable • Provider quality visits suspended • Setting up of new Direct Payments & Direct Payment monitoring visits suspended • Closure of Maples Day Centre and Strathy Close Day Centre • Planned shut down of Whitley Respite cancelled and closed side opened to increase capacity
Archives	Closure
Bookings	Booking fees refunded where RBC have to cancel due to Covid 19
Civic Offices	General closure to public
Cleaning Service	Reduced cleaning service at non-priority sites
Communities and Partnerships	Legal action re unauthorised encampments suspended
Communications - Civic Events	Cancelled all events to end June including Armed Forces Day, VE Day, Childrens Festival and Waterfest
Communications - Mayoralty	Paused all mayoral activities (events, invites) for 8 weeks
Communications	<p>Postponed residents survey (proposed model is face to face, not possible under social distancing restrictions)</p> <p>Reduced focus on media work beyond Covid-19</p>
Coroners	The introduction of the Coronavirus Act last week has changed some of the processes for doctors and funeral directors, so the team are receiving a large number of queries about these changes but overall referral numbers remain steady.
Environmental Health / Regulatory Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forms and protocols have been agreed with the Police on the business closure measures of the latest regulations. • Proactive food inspections remain suspended and new processes have been developed to tackle high risk premises following recent updated guidance from the Food Standards Agency. • There is difficulty delivering the full animal warden service but strays have been taken in to kennelling or foster homes. • Hospital Discharge Scheme set up to assist colleagues in DACHS with discharging people from hospital home - involvement will be with those where a clean and clear is required.
FOIs/Complaints	Service suspended
Highways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highways commercial works suspended, except for urgent works • Abandoned vehicles responded to, only if a safety risk • Utility company works inspections suspended Capital re-surfacing programme delayed
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing repairs reduced core opening hours on phone from 9-5 to 10-3 • Planned maintenance suspended; reactive repairs emergencies only

SERVICE AREA	CHANGE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kitchen and bathroom refits postponed • Works to sheltered units - installation of upgraded smoke detectors, communal alarm systems, & upgrading and installing new lifts only • Rent Guarantee Scheme - changes to service operation • Viewing and lettings of property suspended • Tenant services - estate walkabouts and home visits suspended
Interpretation Service	Video interpretations only available
Leisure	After school clubs and holiday clubs closed except for key workers
Libraries	Closure
New Directions College	Closure
Registration and Bereavement Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express replacement certificate service suspended • Notice of marriage & new ceremony bookings suspended • No new bookings for birth appointments • Wedding and Citizenship ceremonies cancelled & period of booking for new ceremonies extended • Birth registrations suspended • Only very immediate family to attend funerals • Witnessed burials or scattering of ashes and other similar services suspended or postponed • Collection of ashes from the crematorium office suspended • Face to face appointments suspended • Closure of cemeteries to public
Revenues & Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The following recovery activity suspended: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ the recovery of debt by bailiffs ➢ the commencement of recovery through the courts, and ➢ the issuing of final demand notices - red reminders for the following service areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Council Tax ➢ Business Rates ➢ Housing Rents ➢ Social care contributions ➢ Commercial tenants' rents ➢ Parking fines and ➢ General Accounts payable debt • Business rates relief and grants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Business rates relief for businesses in the retail, leisure and hospitality sector to be extended further to give 100% relief to all properties ➢ £10,000 grant for small businesses that currently qualify for small business rates relief ➢ grant of up to £25,000 for all business in the retail, leisure and hospitality sector with a rateable value between £15,000 and £51,000 ➢ non-local authority providers of childcare will pay no business rates in 2020-21 • Cancellation of court hearings at Reading Magistrates Court • Revenues inspections suspended
Parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tree maintenance (except emergencies), allotment maintenance and enquiries, sports pitch maintenance and all commercial work suspended

SERVICE AREA	CHANGE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's playgrounds and outdoor gyms closed • Housing properties grass cutting suspended • Improvement works in childrens playgrounds suspended • Allotment grass cutting, maintenance and waste removal suspended • Reduced grounds maintenance service
Planning & Building Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site visits suspended • Processing planning & building control applications online only • Only online consultation responses processed • Site notices suspended
Schools	Closure - except for children of keyworkers
Sport and Leisure	Cancellation/ postponement of community events
Streetcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleansing services - change of frequency • Weed control contract suspended
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking enforcement suspended • Provision of parking for RBH staff at Queens Rd Car Park and for Thames Valley Police in Broad St Mall car park • Completion of town centre red route works postponed • Recovery of unpaid penalty charge notices is suspended • Parking enforcement relaxation: 10-minute grace period in resident permit zones • Telephone support for residents parking suspended • Off-street car parks no longer staffed • New waiting restrictions suspended • Major Transport Schemes - Phase 4 of A33 Mass Rapid Transit Scheme - construction postponed • New parking schemes delayed • Local Transport Plan consultation postponed • Responses to existing PCN enquiries suspended • Penalty Charge Notices for blue badges suspended
Valuations	Right to Buy inspections suspended
Waste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulky waste collections and bin deliveries suspended • Garden waste payments/renewals only available online • Household waste recycling site closed • Green waste collection service suspended