



DECISION BOOK

Issue: 602 Date: 19 JUNE 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.

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DECISION BOOK - ISSUE 602 - 19 JUNE 2020

1. ONE READING COMMUNITY HUB - OPERATING DAYS OPTIONS

<u>DECISION</u>	<u>LEAD COUNCILLOR(S)</u>	<u>WARDS AFFECTED</u>	<u>PAGE NO.</u>
1. ONE READING COMMUNITY HUB - OPERATING DAYS OPTIONS	COUNCILLOR BROCK	BOROUGHWIDE	1

This report sets out the decision to reduce the One Reading Community Hub call centre, triage and food operation from 6-days a week (weekdays 9am-5pm, Saturdays 9am-1pm) to 5-days a week (weekdays 9am-5pm, weekends and Bank Holiday closed).

As context to this, the report provides an overview of One Reading Community Hub operation to date, the Hub having been set up to take calls from the public to:

- (a) Support those who were shielded with food parcels
- (b) Pass on requests to voluntary sector partners from those who were not shielded but required support regarding access to food, benefits advice, befriending and assistance with collection of prescriptions etc

The report focuses on the numbers of calls to the Hub during the week versus weekends, the resulting caseload being managed by the Triage team and the cases that are then passed to the Food Distribution centre at the Hexagon to supply food parcels to those who are shielded. This information is provided in the context of seeking a further review of operating days of the Hub, an initial review and agreement to operation reduction having been approved 24 April 2020.

The report also notes the transition arrangements for the Hub Call Centre operation due to the current contract for the Hub call centre provision (with Huntswood), which expired Saturday 13 June.

It is the decision of the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to reduce the One Reading Community Hub call centre, triage and food operation from 6-days a week (weekdays 9am-5pm, Saturdays 9am-1pm) to 5-days a week (weekdays 9am-5pm, weekends and Bank Holiday closed) with effect from 1 July 2020.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

LEAD COUNCILLOR:	JASON BROCK, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL		
DATE:	19 JUNE 2020		
TITLE:	ONE READING COMMUNITY HUB - OPERATING DAYS OPTIONS		
SERVICE:	ALL	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
AUTHOR:	KATE GRAEFE	TEL:	(0118) 937 4132/74132
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the decision to reduce the One Reading Community Hub call centre, triage and food operation from 6-days a week (weekdays 9am-5pm, Saturdays 9am-1pm) to 5-days a week (weekdays 9am-5pm, weekends and Bank Holiday closed).
- 1.2 As context to this, the report provides an overview of One Reading Community Hub operation to date, the Hub having been set up to take calls from the public to:
 - (a) Support those who were shielded with food parcels
 - (b) Pass on requests to voluntary sector partners from those who were not shielded but required support regarding access to food, benefits advice, befriending and assistance with collection of prescriptions etc
- 1.3 The report focuses on the numbers of calls to the Hub during the week versus weekends, the resulting caseload being managed by the Triage team and the cases that are then passed to the Food Distribution centre at the Hexagon to supply food parcels to those who are shielded. This information is provided in the context of seeking a further review of operating days of the Hub, an initial review and agreement to operation reduction having been approved 24 April 2020.
- 1.4 The report also notes the transition arrangements for the Hub Call Centre operation due to the current contract for the Hub call centre provision (with Huntswood), which expired Saturday 13 June.

2. DECISION

2.1 It is the decision of the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to reduce the One Reading Community Hub call centre, triage and food operation from 6-days a week (weekdays 9am-5pm, Saturdays 9am-1pm) to 5-days a week (weekdays 9am-5pm, weekends and Bank Holiday closed) with effect from 1 July 2020.

3. BACKGROUND AND WORK TO DATE

- 3.1 The Council set up a Hub to take calls from the public to:
- (a) support those who were shielded with food parcels
 - (b) pass on requests to voluntary sector partners from those who were not shielded but required support regarding access to food, benefits advice, befriending and assistance with collection of prescriptions etc.
- 3.2 Given the high number of calls coming into the Council call centre during March ahead of and moving into lockdown, a contract was agreed with Huntswood to provide a Hub call centre service Monday-Friday 9am-5pm. Based on an estimated 15 call agents per day, the estimated cost for the call centre over a 3-month period was £130k. Huntswood however agreed that they would charge for the number of agents used per day rather than the total number 'on duty' initially to then ensure ongoing charging was more aligned to resource need. Subsequent to this, any changes to team size would be agreed with a weeks notice.
- 3.3 The call centre went live on 24 March (day 2 of full lockdown). To extend support to residents as quickly as possible in the absence of the Government delivery service being operational, it was agreed with Huntswood that they would operate 9am-1pm from Saturday 28 March and provide a service 9am-1pm for subsequent weekends and bank holidays. Both the internal Triage and Food Distribution team operations were similarly extended to ensure no backlog of delivery of urgent food requests over the weekend period. This was managed as far as possible through a seven-day rota so that staff are not exceeding 37-hour weeks and incurring overtime.
- 3.4 Based on this model, Huntswood charges for the first month were approx. £29k as call volumes have not warranted use of the full 15 agents per day, with an average of 8 agents being required. For month 2, the team has remained at 8 agents per day during the week and a maximum of 4 agents for weekends, resulting in month 2 costs of £30k. Month 3 is expected to be lower as we have reduced to 6 agents during the week and 2 at weekends, in line with reducing call volumes.
- 3.5 A subsequent paper to GOLD on 21 April and Decision Book Decision of 24 April recommended moving to a six day operation (no longer operating on Sundays or bank holidays), on the basis of reduced demand for the Hub on Sundays and bank holidays. This was approved and Sunday and bank holiday operations ceased from Sunday 3 May. There has been no negative feedback associated with this change to date. This paper revisits the recommendation from that paper to

review Saturday working at a later date and now makes the case for moving to a five day a week operation.

- 3.6 The table in Appendix 1 shows the number of calls that have come in to the call centre and the number of emergency food parcels delivered by the team at the Hexagon. As this data shows, the call volumes and food parcels delivered overall have been reducing, with zero calls and only eight deliveries on Saturday of Week 9 (ongoing parcels). The chart in Appendix 1 shows the call and emergency parcels trend for Saturdays only.
- 3.7 The recommendation for moving to a five-day operation is based on several factors:
 - Reduced demand for the Hub on Saturdays (in part due to implementing scheduled ongoing emergency parcel deliveries as well as residents better able to access other support, including online shopping slots availability)
 - Reducing operations back to Mon-Fri will enable staff on Triage and Food Operations to return to normal weekday working patterns and in turn will enable better cover resilience given a smaller team available given some staff returning to their substantive roles
 - Reducing all operations back to Mon-Fri is in line with seeking to transition initial response provisions back to more ‘business as usual’, being mindful of where continued support is required and necessary.
- 3.8 Some research has been carried out regarding the approach of other Councils regarding weekend operations. Both neighbouring West Berkshire and Oxfordshire Councils have reduced to 5-day operations. Wokingham, Bracknell Forest and Slough remain open six days per week but have also reported low weekend numbers.
- 3.9 It should be noted that shielded residents requiring food are being provided with weekly supply parcels from the government on an ongoing basis and the Council’s role is to provide top ups for those with specific dietary needs as well as delivering emergency parcels whilst residents are in the process of being set up for government parcels. RBC launched scheduling for ongoing deliveries from the Council Food Distribution Centre on a weekly basis from w/c 27 April. Currently, shielded residents will continue to be shielded until the end of June with a further review proposed w/c 15th June.
- 3.10 To note: officers have been working with Huntswood and voluntary sector partners to review the options for the call centre part of the operation past the end of the current Huntswood contract. The options appraisal is as set out in Appendix 1, with option 3: Transition Huntswood operation directly to RBC Call Centre being worked towards, the in-house provision to be effective from Monday 15 June.

4. OPTIONS

- 4.1 Option 1: Leave the Hub call centre, triage and food distribution delivery as a six day a week operation (do nothing). This leaves the operational costs and concerns regarding such costs outweighing the relative benefit. For these reasons, this option is not recommended at this time.
- 4.2 Option 2: Reduce the Hub call centre, triage and food distribution delivery back to Mon-Fri operation only. On the data as contained in Appendix A, this

would be the most cost-effective option and would allow services to move away from six-day service rotas. However, there is a risk of a small number of people having urgent food requirements at a weekend that are not picked up. This is a far smaller risk since the initiation of scheduled ongoing parcels from RBC for the shielded, low numbers of new shielded and better availability of on-line supermarket slots. This was the initial recommended option, albeit with the potential impact of test & trace not yet clear, option 3 was proposed as the most suitable alternative.

- 4.3 Option 3: Leave the Hub call centre as open six days a week, reduce triage and food distribution delivery back to Mon-Fri operation only with an 'emergency' referral ability to access a driver/emergency food parcel delivery in the exceptional case we get a call on a Saturday that requires an immediate response. Maintain this operation until the end of June to understand any shielding support changes and possible impact of test & trace demand. Operation reduced at this time if demand remains stable/ decreasing. This would still leave some operational costs and issues to manage. For these reasons, this option was not the initial recommendation but preferable to Option 1 in giving an indicated timescale for Hub services to plan to. As part of decision consideration, this became the recommended option.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The Council's three broad priorities within the Pandemic Strategic Framework are consistent with the Council's strategic aims.
- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 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.

7.2 Specifically as a result of this decision if agreed, the opening hours of the Hub will be amended on relevant communication. Written communication (Reading Chronicle banner advert and the Hub leaflet) contains no reference to opening days or hours, the same is the case for recorded radio adverts. The Hub details on the Council website will be updated and any social media posts updated appropriately. Voluntary organisation partners are being actively engaged in any possible changes and Reading Voluntary Action will include it as part of their weekly updates. The Hub number out of hours message would be updated with the revised opening days and times if agreed.

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 has reviewed

its decision-making processes, including holding online meetings where appropriate and possible.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The costs of operating the Hub call centre are as set out in 3.4. Costs for options 1 and 3 would be based on overtime rates for a minimum cover of staff if and where a 6-day rota work pattern cannot be sustained. There are no current quantified costs for this at present.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 None

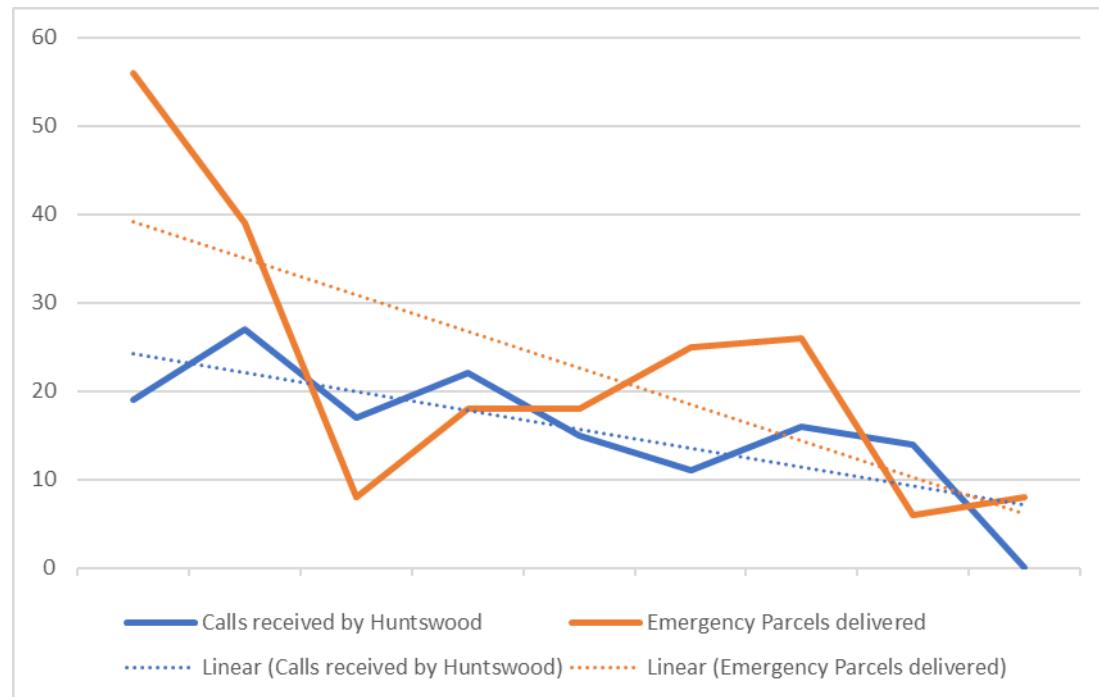
APPENDIX 1

Table A: Weekday vs Weekend volumes

Week	Day	Calls received by Huntswood	Emergency Parcels delivered
Week 1 (23/3)	Average weekday	65	24
	Saturday	19	56
	Sunday	Not open	Not open
Week 2 (30/3)	Average weekday	99	52
	Saturday	27	39
	Sunday	12	12
Week 3 (6/4)	Average weekday	92	43
	BH Friday	20	34
	Saturday	17	8
	Sunday	18	6
Week 4 (13/4)	Average weekday	84	37
	BH Monday	30	11
	Saturday	22	18
	Sunday	6	6
Week 5 (20/4)	Average weekday	83	40
	Saturday	15	18
	Sunday	11	6
Week 6 (27/4)	Average weekday	71	32
	Saturday	11	25
	Sunday	Not open (first Sunday closed)	Not open (first Sunday closed)
Week 7 (4/5)	Average weekday	75	40
	BH Friday	Not open (first bank holiday closed)	Not open (first bank holiday closed)
	Saturday	16	26
	Sunday	Not open	Not open
Week 8 (11/5)	Average weekday	57	26
	Saturday	14	6
	Sunday	Not open	Not open
Week 9 (18/5)	Average weekday	47	22
	Saturday	0	8
	Sunday	Not open	Not open
Week 10 (25/5)	Average weekday	46	2
	BH Monday	Not open	Not open
	Saturday	0	0
	Sunday	Not open	Not open
Week 11 (1/6)	Average weekday	41	2
	Saturday	2	3 (from late Fri)
	Sunday	Not open	Not open
Week 12 (8/6)	Average weekday	29	0
	Saturday	2	0
	Sunday	Not open	Not open

NB: not all calls result in a referral if they are not relevant calls or repeat calls

Chart A: Saturday Inbound Calls and Emergency Parcel Deliveries from Week 1 to Week 9



APPENDIX 2

Table B: Transition Arrangements Options Appraisal - Call Centre and Triage

	Benefits	Risks
Option 1: Do nothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No transition required saving time and money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not cost effective and unsustainable in long run Inefficient to continue to triage separately to call centre
Option 2: Retain Huntswood and transition Triage service to Huntswood or voluntary sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Triage Team released back to their day jobs RBC Call Centre unaffected by transition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not cost effective and unsustainable in long run
Option 3: Transition Huntswood operation directly to RBC Call Centre and Triage at same time with triage decision to be made at point of entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilising existing infrastructure and set up Transition could be fast and efficient Existing temporary Triage Team can be released on 13 June 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional workload reduces overall quality of Call Centre Additional pressure placed on staff Doesn't make use of capacity and expertise of VCS
Option 4: Mixed model		
Phase 1: Transition Huntswood operation directly to RBC Call Centre and Triage at same time with triage decision to be made at point of entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced impact on RBC Call Centre Makes effective use of all partners, in particular utilising local knowledge, infrastructure to target hard to reach/at risk groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management of service more complicated as across two organisations Ensuring a robust process in place for referrals back to internal RBC services such as Housing, ASC, BFfC Financial cost to resource voluntary sector
Phase 2: Split shielded/non-shielded and divert at point of entry (shielded to Council / non-shielded to voluntary sector). Additional Triage for BAME/Young People etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows RBC focus on shielded cohort 	