



Civic Headquarters
Lagan Valley Island
Lisburn BT27 4RL
Tel: 028 9250 9250
www.lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk



LISBURN & CASTLEREAGH CITY COUNCIL

Island Civic Centre
The Island
Lisburn
BT27 4RL

18 March 2020

TO: The Right Worshipful the Mayor, Aldermen & Councillors of Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council

A **special meeting** of Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council will be held in the Council Chamber, Island Civic Centre, The Island, Lisburn, BT27 4RL, on Wednesday, 18 March 2020 at 7.00 pm for the transaction of the business on the undernoted Agenda.

Hot food will be available from 5.30 pm in Lighters Restaurant.

You are requested to attend.

DAVID BURNS
Chief Executive
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council

AGENDA

1 APOLOGIES

2 DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

- (i) Conflict of interest on any matter before the meeting (Members to confirm the specific item)
- (ii) Pecuniary and non-pecuniary interest (Member to complete the Disclosure of Interest form)

3 Report by the Chief Executive in connection with:

3.1 Council Response to COVID-19

Corporate Services Committee

18th March 2020

Report from:

Chief Executive

Item for Decision

TITLE: Council Response to Coronavirus (COVID19) – Operational Planning

Background and Key Issues:

Background

1. Since 6th March, the Council's Internal Co-ordination Group has been meeting regularly to ensure a cross departmental, cohesive approach to preparing for the spread of COVID-19.
2. As the virus begins to spread across Northern Ireland, there has been increasing public pressure for our statutory bodies to react. The acceleration of the virus has resulted in changing circumstances on a daily basis.
3. To slow the pace of virus spread, both the Prime Minister and the Public Health Agency has issued guidelines for the general public and employers to follow. This includes social distancing for everyone where possible and social isolation for those experiencing symptoms of Coronavirus, those who are pregnant, those over 70 and those with an underlying medical condition.
4. Communications have been issued to our staff to ensure self-isolation where signs of the symptoms are experienced. We are experiencing unprecedented circumstances and officers have been considering impact on services. This morning, CMT activated the Council's Corporate Business Continuity Plan in recognition of the likely impact and already reducing staff numbers. Subsequently the chief officers felt it necessary to activate the Council's emergency plan.

5. It is estimated that the virus may impact on our services for 12-16 weeks. Therefore, there are a number of steps that we as a Council need to consider at this time.

Key Issues

Priority Services

1. The Council's agreed Business Continuity Plan outlines the 3 priority services in emergency circumstances as waste collection/disposal and street cleansing, registration and burials. Furthermore, additional support is provided to these services through our Emergency Planning, Communications and Human Resources functions. Steps have been taken to monitor attendance levels in each of these teams with action being taken to increase resilience where necessary.

Finance

2. We have created specific cost codes to allow us to record expenditure specifically related to actions taken through our emergency planning. It is likely that we will incur additional payroll costs in the short term through the need to temporarily employ staff during high periods of absence. To mitigate this, non-essential services could be postponed.
3. Due to the current situation, there are a number of financial implications for both the current and future financial years of the Council. There are a number of projects that will not be completed or items that will not be received as expected by the end of the current financial year. Not only will there will be an impact on the income levels in the next number of months due to facilities being closed, there is a major risk of not receiving the expected levels of income generated by the district rate. Although it has been confirmed the assistance with business rates will come from the Northern Ireland Executive, this will not include the possibility of a reduced number of businesses within the Council area.
4. Vitality Household Membership Scheme: Over the last 2-3 weeks a number of members have cancelled their memberships. It is anticipated that given the wider economic uncertainty, government advice about social distancing and avoiding mass gatherings, and if facilities close that membership cancellations will increase. It is recommended to stop a gradual haemorrhaging of memberships and to retain the longer term goodwill of members that memberships be suspended for a period of 2 months at the end of which the position can be reviewed.
5. With significant reductions in income expected both to businesses and our communities and our Council facilities between now and June, I will write to the relevant Ministers outlining the extreme financial impact this medical emergency is having and the need for financial support from central government.
6. Inevitably there will be a requirement for all managers to review their budget estimates and how they plan to allocate these given the anticipated downturn in income. As part of this review I am recommending that the members agree to a review of the planned capital expenditure

Training & Redeployment

7. To allow us to provide sufficient resources in our priority areas, there is an opportunity to temporarily redeploy staff in to these services. This is a Council priority and work is ongoing to identify roles that can be carried out without significant levels of training. Some staff already have the required training or skills and will be redeployed immediately. Where possible, this workstream will be completed prior to significant increases in temporary posts within our teams, unless specialist knowledge or skills are required.

Officer Authority

Events Planned by the Council or held in Council facilities

8. The PHA advice indicates that social distancing of 2 metres should be achieved wherever possible. Furthermore, the Prime Minister indicated that people should stop visiting pubs, clubs, restaurants and theatres due to the risk of accelerating spread of the virus. Over the past few days, we have experienced a number of event organisers cancelling their event, while there has been significant public enquiries requesting refunds on bookings. In the short term and recognising the fluidity of the position, officers took steps to temporarily remove room hire costs where events were postponed with more than 24 hours' notice. By taking these steps and working with event organisers, we are doing our utmost to protect the reputation of our venues as a first class location for corporate and community events. Due to the PHA advice regarding social distancing and the Prime Minister's advice to the general public, it is recommended that members consider postponing public events planned by the Council or events held by others in Council facilities up to and including 30th June 2020. This includes hire of the Council's conference facilities and Island Hall. Major events planned during this time include the Mayor's Parade & Family Fun Day, VE day celebrations, and the Lisburn Half Marathon/10k & Fun Run.

Council Premises

9. For our Council facilities, consideration is required of the impact on the Council's reputation if we deviate from key sources of advice, how we protect staff in our front facing services from contracting the virus, income and expenditure and our ability to source key service requirements (such as chemicals, sanitiser, maintenance support & parts etc). In this context, and particularly in light of government guidance around "social distancing" and "mass gatherings" Members are recommended to consider the following actions.
10. **Community Centres [Council managed]:** Most bookings by 3rd parties have now cancelled, and many users groups are in the categories of people defined as vulnerable. Staff could be used to support wider community support activity related to the pandemic. Recommendation – closure to the public.
11. **Community Centres: [Leased to Community Associations]:** It is recommended Community Associations be advised to consider closure to the public, however the decision to do so rests with the individual managing Association. Members should note that closure will deprive associations of a significant income stream and many depend on this along with a council grant to pay the wages of staff. To assist ease the short term cash flow for these Associations it is recommended Members approve the payment of a full year's Council grant in April rather than the normal two stage process which would see half paid in April and the remainder in September. Council could then review the overall position faced by these Associations later in the year as the course of the pandemic becomes clearer.

12. **Island Arts Centre:** most performances, classes and tutor sessions by 3rd parties have been cancelled by those using our spaces. Attendance at those continuing has significantly reduced as a result of Government Guidance on social distancing. Staff could be redeployed. Recommendation – closure to the public.
13. **Irish Linen Centre/Lisburn Museum** – Government guidance indicates not to attend these spaces. Staff could be redeployed. Recommendation – closure to the public.
14. **Pitches** – All pitch based sport associations have postponed official matches until early April and remain subject to review by league Associations. Recommendation – closure for bookings in line with IFA and leagues' governing bodies position
15. **Parks and Play Areas** – people are using outdoor space more frequently and risk of virus spread from play facilities is low. Usage and risk may increase should schools close. Recommendation – remain open at present and keep under review, subject to staffing availability to carry out standard equipment checks etc.
16. **Golf Courses** – Subject to mitigating steps around social areas the risk of infection transmission is considered low, and facilities could continue to support healthy living. Recommendation – courses remain open to members at present with no pay & play. Social areas of clubhouse to be closed to public and members.
17. **Dundonald International Ice Bowl:** – attendance last weekend and prior to the Prime Minister's guidance showed a 70% reduction over weekend of 14th March. Significant impacts on catering provider and space hire through Clip n Climb/Escape Rooms will require negotiation with contractors. Staff to be redeployed to assist in other services as practicable. Ice will require to be maintained over any period of closure. Energy saving measures to be implemented where practicable. Recommendation – closure to the public.
18. **DIIB Caravan Park** – already a very significant drop in bookings which is expected to be maintained due to international travel restrictions. Recommendation – closure to the public.
19. **Leisureplex** – attendance last weekend and prior to Prime Minister's guidance represented an 80% reduction over weekend of 14th March. Pool water treatment will require to be maintained over any period of closure. Staff to be redeployed when necessary and where practicable. Energy saving measures to be implemented where practicable. Recommendation – closed to public
20. **Activity Centres and Lough Moss Centre:** staff to be redeployed when and if required subject to practicability. Negotiation to take place with gym contractor. Recommendation – closed to the public.
21. **Allotments:** Recommendation - to remain open at present to support mental wellbeing.
22. **Bowling Greens:** Recommendation – it is recommended these be closed to the public.
23. **Public Toilets** – Recommendation – to remain open with enhanced cleaning regime.

24. **Bridge Community Centre: Advice Services:** Recommendation – Advice Services staff are now working from home. As a result, it is recommended that the building close to the public and staff can play a significant role in community co-ordination activity outlined at point 28.
25. **Tourist Information Centres** – Recommended closure and staff to be considered for redeployment. Very few enquiries due to reduction of people on street. Staff could be redeployed.
26. **Household Recycling Centres** – with people more at home and possible risks with a reduced workforce, household recycling centres will be crucial to our continuing ability to meet our waste service requirements. Some additional staff could be deployed to here to support social distancing while supporting segregation of waste. Recommendation – to remain open and subject to sufficient staff, explore opportunities for increased hours.
27. **Lagan Valley Island** – It is anticipated that numbers calling to our offices will significantly reduce however, steps may require to be taken to protect staff on our reception areas. Members of the public will still require to call to our offices to access our Registration service. Some alterations may need to be made to interview rooms to reduce the risk from customers accessing our Registration service. Recommendation – closure of Lagan Valley Island to the general public for all services except Registration.

Community Services

28. The Head of Communities in a community planning and emergency plan context is developing a scheme in consultation with the Health Trusts and other agencies as to how the council through community services staff might support the local voluntary sector in providing assistance to the socially isolated, elderly and vulnerable within the local community. Recommendation – it is recommended Members note this and await being appraised of progress to provide a co-ordinated approach to community support.
29. Community Hardship Fund: in light of approaches from a number of community associations Officers are investigating the feasibility of establishing some form of community hardship fund to assist groups in local community outreach to assist the elderly, and most vulnerable deal with the practicalities arising from self-isolating and social distancing. It is recommended Members provide the Mayor in consultation with Chief Executive, delegated authority to finalise and implement such a fund.
30. Community Festivals Fund and VE Day Celebrations Grant Schemes : It is recommended these grant schemes which have recently been advertised as open to applications be frozen and applicants advised the council will review the position as the pandemic develops with a view to progressing schemes later in the year.

Committee Meetings

31. With the virus expected to spread significantly over the coming weeks, it is proposed that all Council committee meetings be postponed for the month of April. Should this be agreed, meetings planned for May and June should be reviewed by the Mayor and Chief Executive in line with social distancing guidance at that time. Officer focus over the next 2 -3 months will be to ensure that our priority services are delivered. To support that process, it is recommended that the Chief Executive and Directors be granted delegated authority, in

consultation with the Mayor, Chair and Vice Chair of the relevant committee, to take whatever operational decisions are required to ensure business can continue in these circumstances. Matters such as new policies, performance reporting and service improvement will be postponed while resources are targeted at our essential services. Decisions during this time may have financial implications and stopping of non-essential services at short notice as Government Guidance is updated.

32. As with the other committee meetings we are also proposing to suspend the Planning Committee for the reasons outlined. However in order to ensure continuity of business I will require to amend both the scheme of delegation and the Planning Committee Protocol. These amendments must then be referred to the Department for Infrastructure for ratification. Given that many of the other council's will be probably going through a similar process this may take a few weeks. I am therefore proposing in the meantime that the planning schedule is managed in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair, Director and Head of Capital and Planning in bringing forward potentially contentious matters. This will not prevent any of the elected members calling in applications for valid planning reasons as per the current planning protocol. Any such applications, major applications and the council's applications will then be addressed in line with the amended protocol subject to members being in agreement with the proposed arrangements.

Communications and Governance

33. To support transparency in this process, it is also proposed that weekly remote meetings be held with Party Group Leaders to provide regular updates. Furthermore, a report would be presented to members at a future Council meeting to advise retrospectively on all decisions made in consultation with Mayor, Chair and Vice Chairs.

Recommendation

It is recommended that members agree delegated authority be granted to the Chief Executive and Directors, in consultation with the relevant Chair or Vice Chair, or the Mayor, to take whatever operational decisions are necessary to ensure continuation of operational services and temporary service alterations during this pandemic. Furthermore, it is recommended that members agree to:

1. All events arranged by the Council and events hosted in Council premises between now and 30th June 2020 be postponed
2. Submit to the Department of Infrastructure a reviewed planning protocol and scheme of delegation
3. Council resources are redirected as appropriate to support critical functions including supporting the NI Executive emergency response
4. Temporary closure to the public of Council facilities, including the Leisureplex, Dundonald International Ice Bowl, activity centres, Caravan Park, Arts and Museum facilities, community centres, pitches and Tourist Information Centres as outlined including temporary closure of Council reception points other than for Registration Services
5. Postpone all Council Committee Meetings and Council Meetings until further notice to support social distancing
6. Authority for operational decisions as required to ensure continuity of essential Council services as per the draft corporate business continuity plan

7. Development and implementation of a DEA focused Community Support Initiative to co-ordinate the input of statutory agencies, volunteers and local groups to mitigate the impacts of social distancing and social isolation

In addition members are asked to consider the following financial recommendations:

8. Make an additional contribution to the repairs and renewals fund for work not being able to be completed by March (including the work in the conference suite).
9. Earmark reserves to fund items not being received before the end of March due to current situation.
10. Earmark an amount to cover the potential loss of income both in relation to the leisure facilities but also in relation to the potential loss of rates income.
11. Any other remaining underspend to be transferred to the capital fund to allow the fund to steadily increase as planned.
12. Suspend Vitality membership payments and direct debits with immediate effect until 30th May and to keep this under review
13. A freeze on community grant applications with consultation around rescheduling of events with relevant community groups
14. A review of the councils planned expenditure including earmarking of in year resources to be carried forward for use in 2020/21
15. Alter planned financial payments to satellite community facilities to improve short term cash flow and to explore options to mitigate financial losses due to loss of bookings in such facilities

Finance and Resource Implications:

Due to the current situation, there are a number of financial implications for both the current and future financial years of the Council. There are a number of projects that will not be completed or items that will not be received as expected by the end of the current financial year. Not only will there will be an impact on the income levels in the next number of months due to facilities being closed, there is a major risk of not receiving the expected levels income generated by the district rate. Although it has been confirmed the assistance with business rates will come from the Northern Ireland Executive, this will not include the possibility of a reduced number of businesses within the Council area. The Council may be legally obliged to meet event costs even where events are cancelled. Dialogue is continuing with our Insurance company to minimise financial loss to the Council

Screening:

Equality and Good Relations

N/A

Environmental Impact Assessment

N/A

Rural Impact Assessment

N/A

SUBJECT TO PLANNING APPROVAL:

No

If Yes, "This is a decision of this Committee only. Members of the Planning Committee are not bound by the decision of this Committee. Members of the Planning Committee shall consider any related planning application in accordance with the applicable legislation and with an open mind, taking into account all relevant matters and leaving out irrelevant consideration".

APPENDICES:

None

HAS IT BEEN SUBJECT TO CALL IN TO DATE?

No

If Yes, please insert date: