

CORONA VIRUS and the PARISH COUNCIL

SOURCES OF ADVICE

The coronavirus situation is fast-moving and there is an increasing amount of misinformation online. The Parish Council is using government advice to inform decisions and is checking that advice regularly from the following bodies:-

- **Public Health England** has FAQs that will be updated regularly
- **ACAS** for considering any employment-related matters
- For further reading, the **Local Government Association** has published a very useful list of different government advice sources

If you need to take time off ...

STATUTORY SICK PAY

The Statutory Sick Pay (General) (Coronavirus Amendment) Regulations 2020 were made on 12 March 2020 and came into force on 13 March. They amended the Statutory Sick Pay (General) Regulations 1982 and provide that statutory sick pay will be available to anyone isolating themselves from other people in such a manner as to prevent infection or contamination with coronavirus disease, in accordance with the guidance published by Public Health England, NHS Scotland or Public Health Wales and effective on 12 March 2020, and by reason of that isolation is unable to work. The government has said that the Statutory Sick Pay will be payable from the first day (not, as previously from day four) and that employers with fewer than 250 employees will be able to reclaim the cost from the government up to a maximum of two weeks' Statutory Sick Pay.

The Secretary of State is required to keep the operation of the Regulations under review and they will cease to have effect eight months after they come in to force.

SUPPORTING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Local councils are ideally placed to inform and support residents as they already do in so many spheres — from assisting during flooding and other emergencies to supporting vulnerable or lonely people. And this will almost certainly be the case in the current situation. Cllr Sue Baxter, chairman of NALC met Nigel Huddleston MP (DCMS representative on COBRA) who saw a potentially big role for parishes during the current period, keeping an eye on vulnerable people and encouraging new volunteers to come forward to help. We are assessing the implications of this week's budget and other announcements and will keep you informed.

Borden Parish Council is looking into how it can use local facilities, such as the parish hall, to assist those in need. If you are aware of a vulnerable person in our community please contact the clerk on **07769 254176** and we will do what we can do help.

MANAGING RISKS TO THE COUNCIL

The Parish Council has considered different scenarios and what actions might help mitigate any risks to the council.

The council has reviewed its scheme of delegation to ensure it is fit for purpose and that the decision making powers available ensure minimal disruption to the work of the council if councillors are not able to attend meetings and committees. Certain decisions can be delegated to the clerk, in consultation with the chairman and vice-chairman, as a contingency plan in case council meetings are postponed due to the coronavirus

- We understand that we will have local residents with queries about coronavirus, in which case we will signpost them to government information and advice as highlighted above.

WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY ABOUT HOLDING COUNCIL MEETINGS?

There are a number of statutory meetings and deadlines that apply to local councils. There has been no change to legislation or government guidance to amend these statutory duties.

Where the law does not provide for a particular scenario we shall be guided by the government as to what should happen. The National Association of Local Councils will be engaging with government on this and a range of other issues and will be advising us.

WHAT ABOUT THE FINANCIAL YEAR-END AND AGAR?

After the completion of accounts at the close of the financial year (31 March), they must be certified by the council's responsible financial officer (RFO), considered and approved by full council by no later than 29 June, and published by 30 September. If a planned full council meeting is not able to approve the accounts e.g. the meeting is not quorate due to councillor absence, then an extraordinary council meeting can be called at a later date as long as it is within this timeframe.

NALC and Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments (SAAA) have discussed and agreed to keep an eye on the situation. SAAA will keep in close contact with auditors as well.
