



LAPLEY, STRETTON AND WHEATON ASTON PARISH COUNCIL

RISK ASSESSMENT & BUSINESS CONTINUITY RESPONSE TO COVID19

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 11th March WHO categorised the outbreak as a pandemic. And subsequently stated on 14th March that Europe is now the centre of the pandemic

1.2. UK Chief Medical Officers have classified the risk to the UK as moderate. This has now been raised to high as of 12th 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 3rd 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 For those who think they may be infected or been in contact with a confirmed case, the advice is to ring NHS111 who may order self-isolation for 14 days. Individuals are advised not to visit pharmacy/GP Surgery/Hospital. Public Health England is also implementing contact tracing to ensure isolation of those who have been in close contact with confirmed cases.

1.7 The Government has announced that it will be considering further social isolation measures

including banning large public events W/C 16.3.2020). 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 (14/15th March) 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 LSWA PC 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) General information to the public

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>

- (b) Guidance for non-clinical settings – Employers and Businesses

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/covid-19-guidance-for-non-clinical-settings-and-the-public>

- (c) NHS Overview, symptoms and advice

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

- (d) Government Action Plan

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan>

- (e) WHO – Getting Workplace ready

www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7_6

2.1 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

www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus-information-councils

(f) Ellis Whittam (Employment and Health & Safety Advisers)

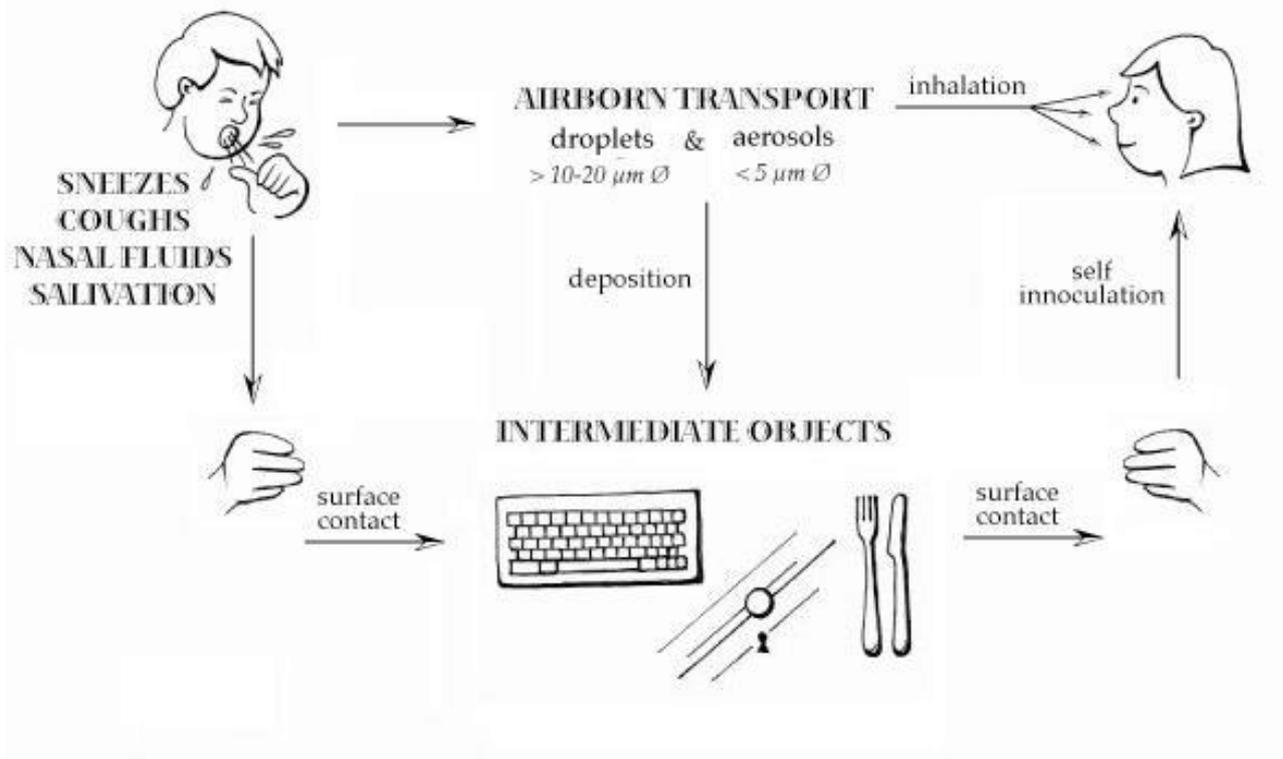
(g) National Joint Councils for Local Government Service – Advisory notice 6th March

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

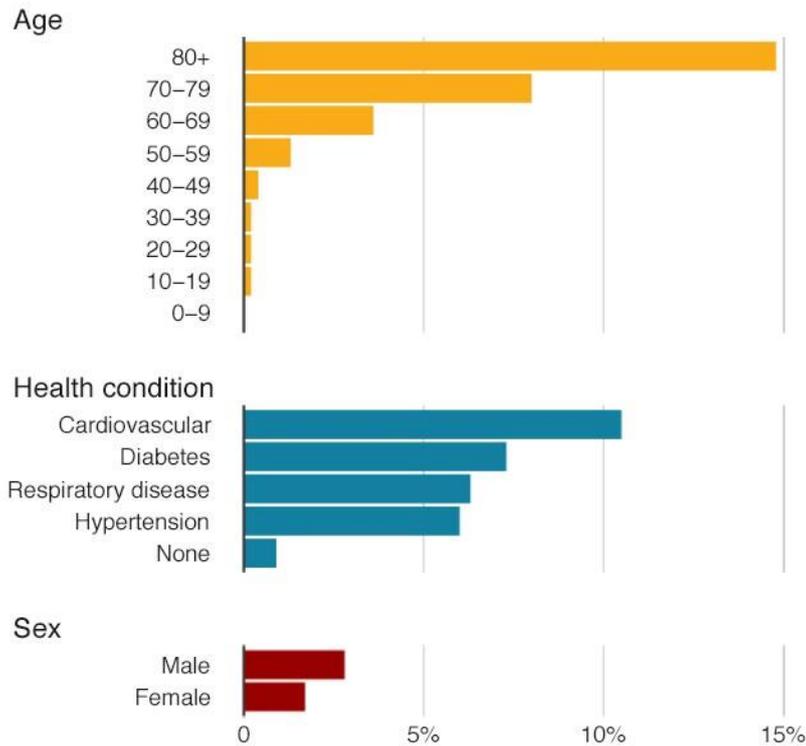
So far, there has been no obvious sign that pregnant women are more likely to be seriously affected

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 serving the Parish Council 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.

3.5 At the time of writing the main risk in the UK is transmission remains close contact with people coming back with the virus from the 4 current outbreak areas China, Italy, Iran or South Korea. However, the Government have now announced that the country will shortly be entering the delay phase, meaning the virus is no longer contained or restricted and spreading within the community.

Death rate varies by age, health and sex

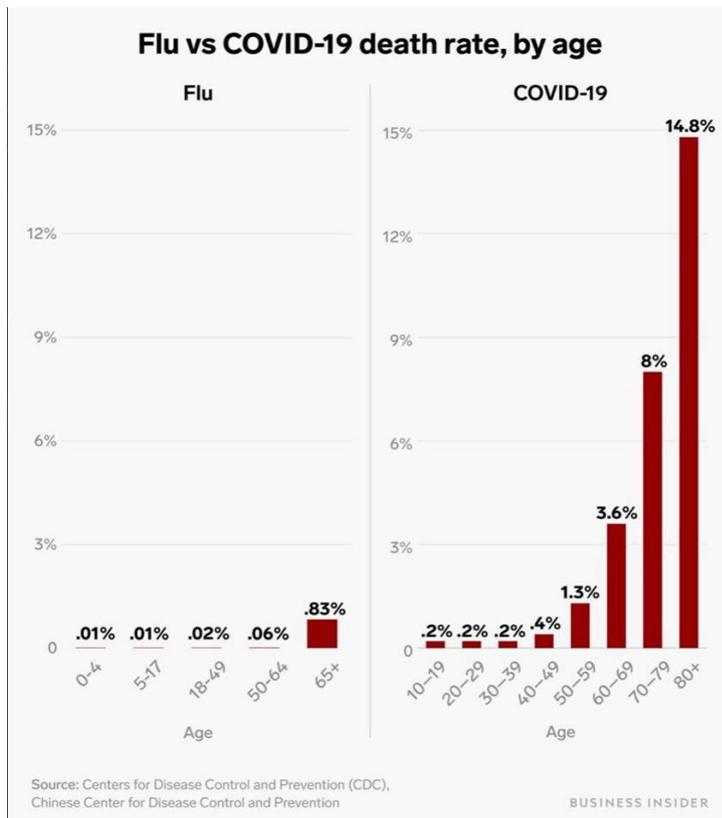
Proportion of deaths among confirmed cases



Source: Chinese Centre for Disease Control & Prevention, 18 Feb 2020



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:



3.6 Unlike flu, there is a much longer incubation period where people can be shedding the virus but not have any symptoms. 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.

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, it is thought that 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 asymptomatic staff, Councillors or members of the public having contracted the virus and subsequently attending Council activities and thereby transmitting the virus to others.

4.0 LSWA PC cannot determine or control what people do away from the workplace.

4.1 Current position

~~As of 9am on 10th March 2020, 26,261 people have been tested in the UK, of which 25,888 were confirmed negative and 373 were confirmed as positive. Six patients who tested positive for COVID-19 have died. There are currently five confirmed cases to date of COVID19 in the West Midlands area with two confirmed cases in hospital in Stafford and three confirmed cases in New Cross Hospital, Wolverhampton.~~

As of 9am on 15 March 2020, 40,279 people have been tested in the UK, of which 38,907 were confirmed negative and 1,37 were confirmed as positive. 35 patients who tested positive for COVID-19 have died.

A daily bulletin can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>

There is a 24 hour delay before details of the locations of the confirmed cases are released by Public Health England The bulletins are monitored daily by the Parish Clerk as the risks will increase once more cases start to be confirmed within the local community.

Although the Dept of Health and Social Care, Public Health England and the NHS are leading on the UK response to the outbreak, the Parish 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.

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 Staffordshire and Wolverhampton is infected.

There are currently 6 cases in Staffordshire and 8 cases in Wolverhampton

5.0 PEOPLE AT RISK

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

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 to LSWA PC office staff - currently high owing to working in office space leased at a public location at South Staffordshire Council.

There are hand sanitiser push-button dispense units provided at various points at South Staffordshire Council and antibacterial wipes for surfaces in LSWA PC office. Toilets have turn taps, soap dispensers and disposable towel dispensers.

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– staff advised not to meet in small confined rooms, to ensure they are 2m away and limit contact time to no more than 15 minutes. Members of the public are asked to hand sanitise as they enter and leave the building, SSC have posters instructing this in the building .

5.2. Grounds Maintenance and litter operatives

Less at risk owing to outdoor working and being a home based employee. Main risks are from approaches by members of the public, particularly at the play areas and direct contact with play equipment etc recently touched by members of the public. Also contamination from places visited for council business e.g. petrol hoses and when visiting suppliers (B & Q, Arco etc).

5.4. 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

In particular MoP attending Council events such as meetings

6.0 MEASURES

The measures adopted will be defined by whether the Government is still working to contain the virus or 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 Parish Clerk has purchased a small amount of supplies in order to ensure the Council is equipped to deal with the initial outbreak. Under the current trend it is unlikely that more sanitisers will be available therefore office staff are encouraged to use the sanitizers provided by South Staffordshire Council before entering the office. The Parish Council does not have a budget for this so will use any funds allocated to the expense card. Should any further and significant costs arise due to the current outbreak an extra ordinary meeting of the Parish Council will be called to consider further. An additional expected cost aside from sanitizers, at this point, is for a laptop for the Assistant Clerk so that the Assistant Clerk can also work from home to ensure business continuity

There is a document which outlines the devolved powers to the Clerk and it is accepted that that given the situation it is appropriate to ensure business continuity by incurring expenditure that is required to continue the work of all staff members. To support this is point 4.1 of the Financial regulation states

Expenditure on revenue items may be authorised up to the amounts included for that class of expenditure in the approved budget. This authority is to be determined by:

- *the council for all items over £5,000;*
- *the Parish Council Manager in conjunction with the Chairman for items below £5000; or*
- *the Parish Council Manager for any items below £500 providing there is sufficient budgetary provision, with the exception of regularly occurring payments such as salaries, in which case expenditure to the budgetary provision is permitted.*

Such authority is to be evidenced by a minute or by an authorisation slip duly signed by the PCM, and where necessary also by the appropriate

- All staff instructed to use sanitisers at all times whilst in the LSWA PC office and to disinfect hands before returning to their desks.
- Correct hand washing and infection control videos shown to all staff
- Pack of antibacterial alcohol wipes per member of staff for surface decontamination of phone/keyboard etc.
- Box of tissues per person
- All staff will be offered the use of single use gloves to carry out duties

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

- 2 x Table top hand gel dispensers for events/meetings
- Large drum of alcohol wipes for decontamination of surfaces prior to/after event

- The meeting room is provided by an external source and it is assumed that the source also has a relevant protocol in place

6.1.3. Other measures

- Councillors are to provide their own mug for meeting purposes, staff are encouraged to bring bottles/mugs from home during this period.
- Masks –there is a limited supply of both surgical masks (to limit release of infected droplets by infected people). The general agreement is that when cases start to be confirmed in the local region, they would prefer members of the public and Councillors visiting the office/meeting rooms to wear surgical masks for the duration.
- South Staffs Council will keep regular updates in their position and the phases entered of their business continuity plan to ensure the safety of those in the building.
- Should anyone from LSWA PC be affected by COVID-19 the Parish Clerk (or relevant person in her absence) should email the Business Hub Manager of k.riley@sstaffs.gov.uk
- In addition should office employees move to working from home the business hub manager will need to be notified of this change

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. LSWA PC has a very limited supply of hand gel and will rely on staff and visitors to sanitise their hands before entering the office. Once alcohol wipes have been used will substitute with 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. Any stock will be kept in a flammable cabinet with records..

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. This will be considered at the next Parish Council meeting 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 LSWA PC with reasonable justification in order to qualify for full pay.

It is important that all staff and Councillors inform the Parish Clerk if they are ordered to self-isolate or feel ill as this will impact the risk assessments.

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 apply to the office staff as all other members of staff work from home on a permanent basis. Grounds Maintenance employees can continue to carry out their duties outdoors with much lower risk.

- 1) The Parish Clerk is working on updating all homeworking policies.
- 2) The Council has purchased an additional laptop (cost £225) and arranged for citrix to be added to the laptop and ensured all portable machines are insured under an all risks policy.

N.B.. Most insurers including the Council's insurers are not covering business interruption costs owing to coronavirus. This is because at the time policies were taken out, coronavirus was not a recognised notifiable disease on the Government list

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. Working group meetings are held in the small room at

Lapley and Wheaton Aston Village hall, as this space is enclosed there is a greater risk to using this room than the main hall or kitchen area. 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 meetings and the Annual Parish Meeting will take place in Lapley and Wheaton Aston Village hall 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 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

Council events will need to be evaluated in light of any confirmed cases within the community. As hand sanitiser is in short supply, and the Council only has limited stocks, future planned events may need to be cancelled if there are insufficient supplier or staff to support the event.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i **(i) To approve the Risk Assessment**
- ii **(ii) To recommend ratification of the purchase of infection control supplies by the Parish 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, paid for on the FX debit card and money taken from reserves. (Full list of purchases to be supplied to the Parish Council)**
- iii **(iii) To recommend ratification of the purchase of a laptop etc for working from home by the Clerk under Financial Regulation 4.1 with the capital expenditure for the laptops being taken from the reserve for office equipment**
- iv **(iv) That implementation of Working from Home will be the decision of the Parish Clerk (with input from the Chairman) and reflect the risk to staff of community spread once the first cases are confirmed in the local region**

BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANNING

Clerk will continue to work on a full business continuity plan.

As previously agreed there is a threefold action in place should the Clerk and Assistant clerk fall ill for a prolonged period of time.

RECOMMENDATION

To discuss what practical measures need to be taken in respect of business continuity including whether it is necessary to temporarily suspend any Financial regulations or Standing Orders and nominate substitutes for the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Council as part of the delegation of authority to the Clerk in order to ensure certain matters can continue

NOTE

This is a working document and will continually update in the current circumstances. Any amendments will be noted below:

Updated policy in RED on 15.3.2020

