



BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN

Approved: Full Council – 18th March 2020

Updated: Full Council – 26th January 2022

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Business Continuity Plan has been prepared for Billingham Town Council with reference to its Officers, Councillors, volunteers, services and activities.
- 1.2 Billingham Town Council actively seeks to protect the Officers, Councillors and volunteers working for and on behalf of the Council and its activities.
- 1.3 This document sets out the general principles and approach that the Council will follow and undertake in relation to COVID-19 and supersedes any previous related plans.

2. SCOPE OF THIS PLAN

- 2.1 The main areas of concern for Billingham Town Council in relations to COVID-19 are:
 - Ensuring the health and safety of all Council Officers, Councillors, volunteers and members of the public;
 - Maintaining effective and lawful decision-making processes; and
 - The continuing operation of essential services and contractual obligations.

3. BACKGROUND - COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

- 3.1 A pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan, China was first reported to the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 31st December 2019. It was later classified as a new disease: COVID-19. The outbreak was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30th January 2020.
- 3.2 In December 2021, the Government announced that England had moved to Plan B in response to the Omicron variant. This means:
 - Face coverings are required by law in most indoor settings;
 - Office workers who can work from home should do so; and
 - Certain venues and events will be required by law to check that all visitors aged 18 or over are fully vaccinated, have proof of a negative test in the last 48 hours, or have an exemption.

Plan B measures will end on 26th January 2022.
- 3.3 Anyone with COVID-19 symptoms or a positive test result should stay at home and self-isolate immediately. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you should arrange to take a PCR test as soon as possible, even if you've had one or more doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. Government guidance should be followed at all times.

4. MEASURES

- 4.1 A significant proportion of Officers and Councillors are either in 'at risk' groups themselves or have close family members they either live with or care for, that are.

- 4.2 The Town Council cannot control what people do in their personal time and how they choose to respect (or not) the guidance being issued, or indeed, take additional steps to limit their exposure. However, the Town Council's measures should reflect the current Government guidance.

5. COUNCIL OFFICE CONTINUITY

- 5.1 The Town Council office is situated within the Library and Customer Service centre in Billingham Town Centre. Whilst access to the office is by keypad system, this is a public building and Officers do have contact with members of the public. Office staff do have close family members who are in the 'at risk' groups.
- 5.2 In the event of closure, all office staff have the appropriate equipment to work from home. All calls to the Town Council office number can be answered by the Vevo softphone software installed on all laptops. Information will be placed on the Council's website, social media and at the office in the Library.
- 5.3 The Town Clerk is responsible for the overall control of assets, services and functions. In the absence of the Town Clerk, this will be undertaken by the Deputy Town Clerk.

6. TEMPORARY SCHEME OF DELEGATION

- 6.1 This temporary scheme of delegation authorises the Proper Officer of the Council to act within delegated authority in the specific circumstances detailed within the job description, from the period starting 26th January 2022 to remove the need to meet in person if COVID-19 restrictions are in place, the Council feels it is not safe to do so, or until virtual meetings are declared lawful. At the first ordinary meeting of the Full Council, this temporary scheme of delegation will be reviewed.

6.2 Finances – as Responsible Financial Officer

- To take action on any issue of such urgency, that it cannot wait until the next ordinary meeting. If circumstances permit, the Town Clerk will be expected to consult the Chairman of the Council and the Chairman of the Finance & General Purposes committee, and take their views into account;
- To incur expenditure on behalf of the Council, which is necessary to carry out any repair, replacement or other work which is of such urgency that it must be done at once, whether or not there is any budgetary provision for the expenditure, subject to the limit of £2000. Consultation must take place with the Chairman of the Council and the Chairman of the Finance & General Purposes committee beforehand;
- Where the costs incurred would exceed £2000, to obtain agreement from the Chairman of the Council, Chairman of the Finance & General Purposes committee for the additional expenditure up to £5000, and thereafter, to obtain agreement from a majority of the Council;

- The Town Clerk will hold the debit cards for the main Town Council and the Café accounts. These will be held in a secure location. Zurich insurance has been informed and advised that this is acceptable.
- The Town Council shall operate PAYE, pension, salary payments as normal using Xero software.

6.3 General Matters – The Proper Officer is authorised:

- To sign, or where appropriate, have sealed on behalf of the Town Council any orders or documents necessary to give effect to any of the matters contained in reports or in any resolution passed by the Council;
- To alter the date or time of any Council meeting, but before doing so, consult the relevant Chairman about the need for the change and about convenient alternative dates and times;
- To decide arrangements for the opening and closure of the Town Council office in consultation with members of the Staffing Sub-Committee;
- To manage all day to day matters for the Council's current services;
- To manage, monitor and review the Council's internal control procedures.

6.4 Delegated Powers regarding Planning Applications

- All planning applications will be circulated to all members via email. Members of the Planning & Services committee will consider these applications and the Deputy Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman of the Planning & Services Committee, will compile all of the comments received as a result of these considerations and submit a response to the local planning authority in the usual way, but noting the submission under this Scheme of Delegation;
- If a contentious planning application is received, the Deputy Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman of the Planning & Services committee, will arrange an advertised, informal meeting via zoom with full access for members of the public to attend. No decisions will be made at a virtual meeting.

6.5 Delegation – Limitations

- All decisions taken under delegated authority will be in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and the Temporary Scheme of Delegation, and where applicable, any other rules/regulations and legislation, and relevant Council policies;
- All decisions will be reported to the first appropriate Council meeting;
- The Council may delegate the power to make individual decisions on individual items to the Proper Officer/Responsible Financial Officer as and when appropriate.

6.6 Objectivity and Integrity in Decision Making

- The Proper Officer shall maintain a professional detachment from specific views expressed by individual members of the Council or in the community;
- The Proper Officer will respect the legal framework and democratic processes within which councils operate and advise the Council accordingly;

- The Proper Officer will exercise discretion and neutrality and will carry out independent assessments of problems and solutions using professional, objective consideration.

7. CAFÉ IN THE PARK

- 7.1 The café will continue to operate as normal following Government guidelines. The health and safety of all staff and customers is the Council's main priority, therefore, preventative measures will be taken to maintain a clean and safe environment for all.
- 7.2 In the event of closure (as per Government guidelines):
- All perishable food will be donated to Billingham Food Bank. Products that can be frozen, will be done so. All stock kept to a minimum;
 - Stockton Borough Council Surveillance Centre will be made aware of any closure. The building will be kept alarmed and the shutters closed at all times;
 - The Town Clerk, the Chairman of the Council and a member of the café staff will hold the keys to the cafe and the adjoining Annexe. These will be kept in a secure location. In the event of closure, regular checks on the inside of the building will be carried out by two members of staff or one member of staff and a Councillor.

This Plan will be reviewed at the next ordinary Full Council meeting.