

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Briefing for Breckland Council elected members (22 April 2021)

Purpose of the note: To ensure members are aware of the plans that are being put in place to ensure that Breckland is prepared, as far as possible, to respond to the impact of coronavirus.

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1. Recent Government advice/action

NEW: New global partnership launched to fight future pandemics

The Government will [launch a new Pandemic Preparedness Partnership](#) (PPP) to save lives from future diseases and prevent another global pandemic. The PPP will advise the UK G7 Presidency on how to slash the time to develop and deploy high quality vaccines for new diseases from 300 to 100 days, backed by additional funding to support CEPI's work on global vaccine supply. It will be chaired by the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser Sir Patrick Vallance.

NEW: 10 million people receive second dose of COVID-19 vaccine

The latest [vaccination milestone](#) means almost 1 in 5 adults have received both vaccines. People urged to take up their second doses to maximise protection.

NEW: 9 in 10 pharmacies now offering free, rapid coronavirus (COVID-19) tests

Nine in ten pharmacies across England are now [distributing free rapid lateral flow tests](#) for people to collect and use at home. Rapid, regular testing is now available to everyone in England and the new 'Pharmacy Collect' service provides an additional route to regular testing, making it as easy as possible for people without COVID-19 symptoms to access testing twice a week.

NEW: India added to red list as cases of new variant rise

India has been added to England's red list to protect the country against a new variant of coronavirus (COVID-19) and against other existing variants. The [situation in India has deteriorated](#) with an extremely rapid rise in cases detected throughout April, which is accelerating. Over the last week, local rates have almost doubled, increasing to 111 cases detected per 100,000 per week – higher than any other point in the outbreak. Despite the current travel measures, there is a high volume of travel between India and the UK, and there has already been 103 cases of the variant under Investigation (VUI) in the UK.

NEW: UK aid and Unilever reach one billion people with global hygiene campaign to tackle Covid-19

One billion people in developing countries have now been reached with advice, hygiene products and access to handwashing facilities in a [campaign launched](#) between the UK government and British business Unilever to reduce the spread of Covid-19.

NEW: New advice issued on COVID-19 vaccination for pregnant women

The independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has advised that [pregnant women should be offered the COVID-19 vaccine](#) at the same time as the rest of the population, based on their age and clinical risk group. There have been no specific safety concerns identified with any brand of coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccines in relation to pregnancy.

NEW: UK health ministers' statement on JCVI advice

The JCVI has published its final [advice for phase 2 of the COVID-19 vaccination programme](#), setting out that the most effective way to minimise hospitalisations and deaths is to continue to prioritise people by age. In line with its interim advice, the JCVI has recommended an age-based approach with adults aged 18 to 49 prioritised in descending age order as follows: all those aged 40 to 49 years; all those aged 30 to 39 years; all those aged 18 to 29 years.

The latest government and Health information and advice can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

2. Supporting businesses and employees

REMINDER: Business support remains available

If you know a business that needs support please ask them to engage via our [website](#) or by emailing us: regeneration@breckland.gov.uk.

We have now issued almost £50m in financial support since the start of the pandemic and want to make sure every business in Breckland that needs help, gets help – so please do flag any known issues to us.

UPDATED: Restart Grants

We have been able to pay businesses who meet the national eligibility for “Restart” Grants and have issued almost £6.5m of grant monies. As with recent grant schemes, we are making payments automatically based on previously held data wherever possible, so most companies do not need to ‘apply’.

The amount of money a business can receive is based on nationally set criteria, which looks at both the type of business they run, and the rateable value of their premises (only businesses in rateable premises are eligible under this scheme, although this does include those in receipt of 100% rate relief):

Category	Eligible businesses include	Grants Available (based on RV)		
		<£15k	£15–51k	51k>
Non-essential retail	Retailers whose products are not necessary to the health and well-being of the public	£2,667	£4,000	£6,000
Hospitality & leisure	Hospitality, accommodation, leisure, personal care and gym business	£8,000	£12,000	£18,000

Businesses who have not previously received support will also be able to engage via our single web form, and we will match against eligibility via: <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/article/16267/Covid-19-Business-Grant>

UPDATED: Additional Restrictions Grants – Breckland’s discretionary policy.

Based on the gaps left from the LRSG (Closed) policy we continue our complementary set of support using Breckland’s discretionary resource. Under this approach, any business can apply if they are ineligible for LRSG (Closed) and struggling.

We have reviewed our available funding against current applications and have extended this support to provide additional monies to all recipients to cover businesses through to restrictions lifting in the current roadmap. Eligibility and awards are grouped into four categories for the period 5 January - 15 February (with newly applied top ups shown in brackets):

- Businesses with high fixed property costs, who are forced to close (i.e. B&Bs) - £1,334 (topped up with £2,664)
- Businesses with high fixed property costs, who can still open but are struggling (i.e. supply chain, manufacturers) £1,000 (topped up with £2,001)
- Businesses with low / no fixed property costs, who are forced to close (i.e. regular market traders, hairdressers renting space) - £1,000 (topped up with £2,001)
- Businesses with low / no fixed property costs, who can still open but are struggling – (i.e. self-employed, open market traders) £667 (topped up with £1,335)

Any business can apply via: <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/article/16267/Covid-19-Business-Grant>

Current awards from Breckland now over £2.5m, supporting over 1,250 businesses.

UPDATED: Support for High Streets & Business Support through the reopening period.

The Prime Minister has confirmed the national roadmap out of restrictions is on track, and our “Spring Back” Programme is fully operation to support. Breckland businesses now able to access a further £2m of support which includes:

- **Shop Front Improvement Scheme** – investing in the biggest ever “Spring Clean” across the District. Any businesses based in Breckland’s primary shopping areas, or any customer facing business, will be able to get financial support for improvements and enhancements to their shop frontage – from a lick of paint through to a replacement frontage. Claims of £10,000 received to date.
- **Covid Safe and Adaptions Grants** – helping businesses shoulder the burden of trading in a Covid-safe way and meet the challenges of serving under restrictions. Grants of up to £5k will be available to invest in safety; or change business practices. From extra PPE and screens, through to a new marquee or outdoor seating. Claims of £45,000 received to date.
- **Covid Safe Scheme** – helping customers easily see the efforts businesses are making to ensure Covid safety, with a simple accreditation scheme delivered by Breckland Public Protection
- **Continued Investment in Shopper Safety** – with new and replacement hand sanitiser stations in all busy shopping areas, and friendly Covid Support Officers helping assure safety 6 days a week
- **Expanded Enjoy Discover Explore Campaign** – promoting and highlighting the local shopping and leisure offer across Breckland, with branding now bespoke to each Market Town
- **Digital Breckland** – building on the highly successful scheme – Breckland Digital High Streets – enabling any Breckland-based business to get support for their digital offer, with grants towards making key digital changes from a new payment system, through to search engine optimisation. Claims of £74,000 received to date.
- **Expanded enterprise and start-up scheme** – having already created 10 new businesses since Christmas, we are looking to grow the pipeline of new innovative businesses further. With finance and advice for new entrepreneurs looking to start-up locally. Claims of £39,000 received.

- **Support grants for businesses outside of national schemes** –As part of commitment that no business in need goes unsupported, Breckland’s discretionary scheme extends grants to any Breckland-based-business ineligible under national schemes – including self-employed, market traders and mobile traders.

Information and applications can be found at: <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/businesssupport>

This programme was designed based on over 500 individual businesses input, and we are activity reviewing plans and programmes all the time. Should Members identify any issues they think we could be supporting, please let us know at: regeneration@breckland.gov.uk

UPDATED: Growth Programme

- **Town Delivery Plans – the ‘Future Breckland’ Project** - The Project is now live following appointment of a lead delivery partner. For it to more easily resonate with different audiences, the project will now be working under a new title ‘Future Breckland: Thriving People & Places’. The next stage of activity is information gathering and planning, with the first major piece of work due to focus on Dereham. Further details will be made on the project [website](#). Any questions can be addressed to the Project Team on tdps@breckland.gov.uk
- **Snetterton Power & Masterplanning** – we have recently achieved planning consent for the new substation and presently await a firm price from UKPN for the construction cost.
- **Thetford HIF** – the design stage has now concluded, and we are starting to receive Balfour Beatty’s commercial offer and have commenced a detailed review.

3. Community Support

NEW: First Breckland businesses receive Covid Safe Scheme accreditation

A number of businesses across Breckland have been recognised by Breckland Council for putting in place stringent measures that protect staff and customers from the spread of coronavirus. Our Covid Support Officers have recently been carrying out visits to high street shops and businesses to check their compliance with the latest national guidance. These include providing hand sanitiser, installing screens, wearing masks, encouraging social distancing, and putting in place one-way systems.

Those that have put in place significant measures and committed to closely following the guidelines are being granted ‘Covid Safe Scheme’ accreditation. We launched the initiative to highlight businesses that are going above and beyond to stop the spread of covid-19 and to give people confidence that they can choose to shop local and remain safe.

Businesses that receive accreditation are being given a window sticker to display to customers and are being added to a roll of honour on the council’s website. People can see a list of businesses which have been assessed and received the accreditation on our website and via our social media promotion. Businesses can also put themselves forward for a free assessment via our website: www.breckland.gov.uk/covid-safe-scheme

UPDATED: Dereham to host asymptomatic testing programme

The asymptomatic testing programme will be offered in Dereham next, after it concludes in Swaffham on 24 April. It has already been delivered in Watton, Thetford and Attleborough.

The team will be offering tests at Morrisons supermarket's car park in Dereham offering tests over 10 days:

- Tuesday, 27 April & 4 May: 8am - 8pm
- Wednesday, 28 April & 5 May: 8am - 8pm
- Thursday, 29 April & 6 May: 8am - 8pm
- Friday, 30 April & 7 May: 8am - 8pm
- Saturday, 1 May & 8 May: 8am - 8pm

To make tests as accessible as possible, people will be able to walk-up without an appointment. Alternatively, people can choose to book an appointment slot at www.norfolk.gov.uk/rapidtesting

Around 1 in 3 people have coronavirus without displaying any symptoms so asymptomatic testing will help identify more positive cases and ensure those who are infected isolate and stop spreading the virus.

REMINDER: Self isolation Support available

People required to self-isolate can access practical, social, or emotional support to do so from Breckland Council or its partners.

The new Self-isolation Support Operating model focuses on:

- Financial support for people on low incomes who are unable to work from home and will lose income through self-isolating.
- Practical, social, and emotional support for those who need it, organised by councils and community groups.
- Targeted enforcement of breaches of the legal requirement to self-isolate, as well as council enforcement against employers who pressure their employees to break self-isolation when they are required to do so.
- Communications to improve awareness of when people need to self-isolate, how long for, what this involves, its importance in stopping the spread of the virus, the support available and the consequences of breaking the rules.

Members can still make direct referrals for residents in need of support by emailing communitysupport@breckland.gov.uk

REMINDER: Inspiring Communities support

Our £1m Inspiring Communities support is available for vulnerable people across the district. The programme focuses on helping people impacted by county lines drug and people trafficking, poor mental health, loneliness and isolation, and domestic abuse.

For more information on the services available, please visit our website <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/community-wellbeing>

4. Breckland service updates

UPDATED: Frontline services

The vast majority of the services that we provide continue where the service is essential, subject to risk assessments and latest guidance issued to staff. You can see an overview of our [service updates on our website](#).

NEW: Leisure centres reopen to the public

Breckland Council's leisure centres in Dereham and Thetford opened on 12 April in line with national guidance. Usage of the centres since reopening has been very positive. The current latest guidance does not allow group exercise to take place indoors, however the Thetford centre is currently running a very small amount of group exercise classes outside.

The Thetford centre suffered a power cut towards the end of 19 April which has continued on 20 April. As a result, there will be a delay in the pool being reopened once power is restored, due to a need to refilter the pool water. Updates are being posted on our social media pages.

NEW: Covid Support Officers providing a visible presence

Our Covid Support Officers have continued to work across the district to provide reassurance to residents and support to businesses, particularly in light of restrictions easing. Footfall in the district has understandably increased in all areas due to restrictions easing and non-essential shops opening. The recent activity has included:

- Attending Gt Ellingham Primary School to assist the headteacher in marshalling at the gates and encouraging parents to socially distance. The feedback from the officers was positive and there were no major issues or concerns.
- As Hairdressers and barbers reopened, officers have been visiting these premises to check on them due to the high numbers of customers expected. Barbers were extremely busy and as they were operating walk-ins there were large queues. Our Covid Support Officers engaged with these businesses to ensure safe procedures were in place. There have been some premises not complying to the rules regarding mask wearing, social distancing etc and so the officers have engaged with the business owners to remind them of the rules and to advise ways in which they can operate more safely. The team has since returned to these premises and positive changes have been made. The team will continue to monitor the situation as part of their regular patrols.
- The team has carried out joint patrols with the Police which has helped raise visibility and profile while engaging with businesses and members of the public. The team will be conducting further patrols in the forthcoming week, including in Thetford and Attleborough.

Breckland Council
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