

Councillors Covid-19 Outbreak Briefing

2 April 2020

Service Update

Revenues and Benefits: Claims for Council Tax Support are higher than normal but we have drafted in additional resource to help us cope. Welfare Support guidance is being given by teams and residents should contact the Council's Benefits Team if they are experiencing difficulties. The DWP has issued 'Trust and Protect' guidance to allow us to relax our rules around signatures and documentary evidence of circumstances.

We have received additional funding to help those working age customers in receipt of Council Tax Support. Up to £150 will be credited to these customers' council tax accounts during April, and amended council tax bills will be issued.

Customer Services: Customer contact is up 44% above average. In response, we have redeployed former Customer Service Advisors back into the Customer Service Team to help and we are asking customers not to contact us unless they really have to. Main topics relate to the waste service and support for businesses.

ERS: We have redeployed several officers from this area, so are down to emergency response in most areas. Reports of non-compliant businesses have subsided, but we continue to monitor.

Development Management: We continue to operate the service, but applications are down to around 25% of normal demand. Site visits obviously remain a challenge. Government has asked us to do what we can to maintain a service for the sake of the longer-term economic health of the UK.

Waste: All household waste services are operating as normal with the exception of the garden waste service which has been suspended. There are some missed collections, due to shortage of crews, which should be resolved with a Saturday collection. Please encourage residents to leave out their receptacles until they are emptied. We will ensure that our website is updated first thing every morning with any waste service changes; and would be grateful if you could signpost residents to this.

Community Support/Resilience

- Through the help hub, we have been dealing with 130 cases of help needed so far. The community wellbeing team is making good progress so far and has been able to help everyone with the support of our community groups and VCS organisations. We are currently able to contact people in need on the day we receive their details. Help is well received.
- We are linking individual volunteers (165 to date) with local support groups and VCS to register directly with them. This approach is addressing safeguarding issues and reduces risk.

- We have developed a robust process for Cirencester with the local COVID 19 CCR group and in partnership with The Churn Project. We are doing the initial triage and already proactively referring people with basic needs to the CCR group and the more complex cases to The Churn or other partner organisations. Ward members have stepped up as volunteer co-ordinators for their Wards.
- We are in regular contact with our VCS partners to co-ordinate efforts and we are developing a grant scheme to offer financial support for their rapidly expanding services. We are also working with partners like GRCC in terms of financial support for our parish/town councils and smaller community groups. We are hoping to provide further details on financial support next week.
- There are weekly virtual Community Safety Partnership Meetings established and chaired by Cllr Forde with key partners to address emerging issues due to Covid19 and the lockdown situation.
- Food banks - information about how to donate to Food Banks can be found here:

<https://northcotswold.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/donate-food/>

<https://cirencester.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/donate-food/>

Business information

The Council has announced how it intends to support businesses across the district and you can read all the detail here:

<https://news.cotswold.gov.uk/news/council-announces-its-help-for-local-businesses-affected-by-coronavirus>

And the business pages, including the form to provide contact information is here:

<https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/business-and-licensing/coronavirus-business-and-licensing/>

The latest information we have on the support available for business was sent out to our contacts earlier this week. We are delighted to have seen big increases in sign-up to this publication Cotswold has 430 subscribers - please encourage sign-up via this link:

<https://cotswold.us19.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=66f35b07c29401898685866be&id=cb401c9a96>

Help for the physical activity sector

A package to help the physical activity sector has been announced which may be of use to sports clubs in the area and details can be found here:

<https://www.leisureopportunities.co.uk/news/195m-package-announced-to-help-physical-activity-sector-through-coronavirus-outbreak/345199>

Coronavirus information Service

The Government has launched a GOV.UK Coronavirus Information service on WhatsApp. The new free to use service aims to provide official, trustworthy and timely information and advice about coronavirus (COVID-19), and will further reduce the burden on NHS services. To use the free GOV.UK Coronavirus Information Service on WhatsApp, simply add 07860 064422 in your phone contacts and then message the word 'hi' in a WhatsApp message to get started.

A set of menu options is then presented which the user can choose from and then be sent relevant guidance from GOV.UK pages as well as links to GOV.UK for further information. For more information, please click here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-coronavirus-information-service-on-whatsapp>

The Cabinet Office has published [Coronavirus outbreak FAQs: what you can and can't do](#). This includes answers to questions such as “can I drive to green spaces?” and “can I go to the park?”

National door drop: This week, the Prime Minister will write to every UK household to urge them to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives. The letter and accompanying leaflet outlines the guidance everyone should follow, along with measures the Government has put in place to fight coronavirus and to support businesses and workers. These will be sent to 30 million households across the UK by the Royal Mail, with both pieces inside the same envelope. It went to print over the weekend, and there will be a staggered delivery due to the large volume between Thursday 2 April and Wednesday 8 April.

The leaflet signposts to alternative formats that are available online at gov.uk/coronavirus

The accessible formats will be available from Thursday 2 April, with translated versions following soon thereafter. These include the following languages/formats:

Languages:

- Polish
- Russian
- Welsh
- Punjab
- Urdu
- Bengali
- Gujarati
- Romanian
- Roma (for the Roma travelling community)

Accessible formats:

- Large print
- Audio
- Easy read
- Braille
- BSL (video)

Renting

Non-statutory guidance for landlords, tenants and local authorities in the private and social rented sectors in the context of coronavirus was published on Gov.uk over last weekend. This guidance provides advice to landlords and tenants on the provisions in the Coronavirus Act 2020, and further advice for landlords, tenants and local authorities more broadly about their rights and responsibilities during the coronavirus outbreak.

The guidance is available to read at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-and-renting-guidance-for-landlords-tenants-and-local-authorities>

Housing/homelessness

Anyone sleeping rough in the District has been offered accommodation. Officers from the housing/homelessness team will continue to work with them. A County Homelessness Cell has been established in Gloucestershire.

Domestic abuse

The Home Office has published [advice and guidance for those who are experiencing or feel at risk of domestic abuse](#) during the outbreak.

We are extremely concerned about the rise in DA during the lockdown and the ability of those experiencing abuse to access help as our options are now extremely limited. The Community Safety Partnership have this as a special item on their agenda this week and we will update you on the outcome of that.

Meanwhile, please note that GDASS continue to operate at email: support@gdass.org.uk

Web: gdass.org.uk

Twitter: @gdass

and we are recommending use of the Hollie Guard app too as far as is possible. hollieguard.com or download the app.

Gloucestershire County Council

GCC has:

- [launched a campaign](#) to recruit to crucial care roles in the county
- gone live with a hub for information and advice for [looking after your health and wellbeing](#)
- produced a series of FAQs for Parents, Key Workers and Early Years Providers, which is available via the County Council's Community Hub web page <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/gloucestershires-community-help-hub/schools-and-key-workers/>

Website Information

Our website and social media channels have all the latest information concerning how we are operating in the midst of this emergency situation. We encourage you to follow them and check the website regularly.

Website: www.cotswold.gov.uk

Twitter: [@CotswoldDC](https://twitter.com/CotswoldDC)

Facebook: [@CotswoldDC](https://www.facebook.com/CotswoldDC)

Contact Reminder

If you need to contact the council we have set up two ways to do this and this will ensure your request is managed appropriately. Obviously we are dealing with a major global emergency so we will prioritise service requests.

Tel: 01285 623005

Email: councillor.contact@cotswold.gov.uk