

HIGH CONSEQUENCE INFECTIOUS DISEASE POLICY

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1. Introduction

2. As there is no immunity to this novel virus, it is estimated that up to 80% of the UK population will become infected at some point during the course of the outbreak which is expected to last at least 4 months in the UK. According to the Government's action plan up to 20% of the Council's staff/Councillors may be infected during the peak of the outbreak.
3. All people with even the mildest symptoms themselves or within their families are now being requested to self-isolate for a period of 14 days.

The Government isolation guidance changes almost daily and is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>

Obviously the whole of Colehill will be impacted by this pandemic. Community resilience and cohesion, including looking after those in self-isolation particularly the elderly, will be an important focus for the Parish Council and its staff going forwards. A Covid-19 Working Party will be set up to deal with this.

With the potential impact on Council staff, Members, contractors and suppliers, effective continuity planning will therefore be key to maintaining Council services and corporate decision-making capabilities in order for the Council to continue to function.

3.1 Colehill Parish Council actively seeks to protect the Councillors, Volunteers and Staff working for and on behalf of the council and its activities. As such, and following any current Public Health England (PHE) and government guidelines, the following policy applies to any High Consequence Infectious Disease (HCID) as defined by PHE

3.2 This policy sets out the general principles and approach that the Parish Council will follow in respect of an HCID outbreak in the United Kingdom with an imminent threat of infection in the Parish of Colehill.

4. Scope of the policy

4.1. The main areas of concern for Colehill Parish Council with respect to HCIDs are:

- Remaining an effective council
- Safety & Health of Councillors, Contractors, Staff, Volunteers and Members of Public.

5. Activation of the policy

5.1. This policy is considered to be activated, when

- There is an active outbreak of a HCID in the United Kingdom with an imminent threat of infection in the Parish of Colehill **and**
- At least 3 councillors have requested its activation to the Chairman, and subsequently notified the Clerk in writing by email, or the Chairman plus 2 councillors have requested its activation to the Clerk in writing by email, or its activation is resolved in a meeting of the Colehill Parish Council.

OR

- The government of the United Kingdom suspends all public meetings.

6. Deactivation of the policy

6.1. This policy is considered to be deactivated, when

- the imminent threat of infection in the Parish of Colehill has passed **and**
- A minimum of 6 councillors plus the Clerk or the Clerk have requested public meetings be recommenced **and**
- The government of the United Kingdom has reinstated all public meetings.

7. Definition of High Consequence Infectious Disease

7.1. A HCID is defined as

- acute infectious disease
- typically has a high case-fatality rate
- may not have effective prophylaxis or treatment
- often difficult to recognise and detect rapidly
- ability to spread in the community and within healthcare settings
- requires an enhanced individual, population and system response to ensure it is managed effectively, efficiently and safely

7.2. The current list of HCIDs as defined on www.gov.uk (19/03/2020)

| Contact HCID | Airborne HCID |
|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Argentine haemorrhagic fever (Junin virus) | Andes virus infection (hantavirus) |
| Bolivian haemorrhagic fever (Machupo virus) | Avian influenza A H7N9 and H5N1 |
| Crimean Congo haemorrhagic fever (CCHF) | Avian influenza A H5N6 and H7N7 |
| Ebola virus disease (EVD) | Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) |
| Lassa fever | Monkeypox |
| Lujo virus disease | Nipah virus infection |
| Marburg virus disease (MVD) | Pneumonic plague (<i>Yersinia pestis</i>) |
| Severe fever with thrombocytopenia syndrome (SFTS) | Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)* |
| | Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) |

At any such time as a new disease is classified as a HCID, it shall be treated as if it were in the list above and this policy shall apply.

8. Matters relating to staff – The Clerk

8.1. Colehill Parish Council has no official offices, as such the only employee, the Clerk, works from home. The public may only visit the Clerk by appointment. During any active outbreak of a HCID in the UK, no appointments will be permitted. The clerk will not come into contact with the public during working hours at his/her 1st normal place of work.

8.2. The Betty Webster Committee Room, or any other public location used for Parish Council meetings, is the 2nd normal place of work for the Clerk.

8.3. In the event of a HCID outbreak the National Joint Council for local government services (NJC) will issue guidance for employers which the council will follow. A summary of the most recent guidance during the COVID-19 outbreak of 2020 is detailed below

8.3.1. Employees who are sick or unfit for work need to focus on their recovery.

- 8.3.2. As per Part 2 Para 10.9 of the 'Green Book', if an employee is fit for work but decides, or is instructed, to self-isolate, their absence should not be recorded as sickness absence. We would expect all options for flexible working to be explored with the employee. As they are 'well' at this stage they should stay on normal full pay for the duration of the self-isolation period until such time as they are confirmed to have contracted any such HCID, at which point they transfer to sickness absence leave and the usual provisions of the sickness scheme will apply.
- 8.3.3. In circumstances where an employee decides to self-isolate without instruction from the authorities it is not unreasonable for the employer to ask for some evidence why that decision has been taken by the employee. However, it will probably not be possible in all cases for an employee to produce any evidence, so employers will need to use their discretion when trying to establish the facts behind the employee's decision to self-isolate
- 8.3.4. If an employee is caring for someone who has or may have coronavirus, this period of absence should also be regarded as self-isolation. Given the employee may then have been in direct contact with the virus we would expect only working from home arrangements to be then considered for the duration of the incubation period. Employers should keep in touch to support the employee.
- 8.3.5. Following any school closures, employers should be fully supportive of employees with childcare responsibilities and consider flexible working arrangements, including adapting working patterns to care for children or dependants or taking time off, whether this is special leave, annual leave or flexible working.

9. Public Meetings

It is a requirement of the Local Government Act 1972, that council business shall be conducted at public meetings of the council and any committees. All Meetings shall be open to the public and the press unless their presence is prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted or for other special reasons. (Public Bodies Admissions to Meetings Act [1960]) Furthermore, current legislation means that any decisions must be made by a quorate meeting of Councillors present (3 for Committee, 6 for Council) and voting in the room by show of hands. (i.e. not by videolink or email) - this may be relaxed in the coming weeks for a temporary period.)

- 9.1. Councillors and other Volunteers can choose to not attend public meetings. As an officer of the council, the Clerk cannot choose to not attend meetings.
- 9.2. Due to the nature of local government and considering the Councillors and Members of Public who attend meetings, there is high percentage of attendees who would be considered "high risk" with respect to all of the HCIDs listed in Section 7.2. As such, to protect the health of all attendees, public meetings are suspended during the active period of this policy with the **exception** of the Annual Parish Meeting already scheduled to take place on Tuesday 24th March at 7pm, unless directed otherwise. This is likely to be the case until mid-end of the summer.

10. Delegated Authority

The law¹ permits a Council to delegate decision-making and discharge of statutory powers/functions (including “power to spend”) to the following

- i. A Committee, (who may further delegate to a sub-committee) but not a Working Party)
 - ii. A Council Officer (Clerk, RFO) (see below)
 - iii. Another Local Authority
- b) N.B. Authority to make decisions cannot be delegated to an individual Councillor or Councillors. However they may be consulted by the Clerk before a decision is made/actions are taken by the Clerk.**
- c) The Clerk as Proper Officer /RFO is therefore the only individual in law who can act on behalf of the Council and lead the administration of all the Council’s activities. Some obligations are statutory whilst others are determined by the Council as part of the Clerk’s job description. These delegated powers therefore arise as the everyday duties of the Proper Officer and Responsible Finance Officer, including management of all staff, services and finances.

- 10.1. To allow the council to operate on a minimum requirement basis, the following items are delegated for the duration of the activation of this policy.
 - 10.1.1. Planning applications, will be dealt with under delegated powers by the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Highways, Plans and Environment committee or the Council Chairman in connection with the Clerk.
 - 10.1.1.1. all standard recurring payments will be paid by the RFO at the appropriate time to prevent any late charges, such as salaries, printing costs, stationery and IT services etc.
 - 10.1.1.2. non recurring payments, such as one-off costs or expenses to be authorised by a minimum of the Clerk and one other Councillor prior to payment.
 - 10.1.1.3. All payments will be formally authorised by the full council at the next full council meeting.
 - 10.1.1.4. If necessary, Bank reconciliations and the accounts will be reviewed and authorised by the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and also the Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes committee where possible.
 - 10.1.1.5. Where this policy is activated over the end of the financial year, the RFO will prepare the end of year accounts in accordance with normal procedures and circulate to all of the councillors. The accounts will be accepted by resolution at the next full council meeting unless further information and direction is received from central government.
 - 10.1.2. In the absence of Council and committee meetings until such time as the policy is deactivated – any urgent decisions shall be taken by the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Clerk, particularly in relation to the current climate.

11. Approval of Annual Accounts/Annual Return

All local Councils are required under s168 of the LGA (1972) to submit an annual financial return to the Secretary of State showing income and expenditure.

¹ 1.Local Government Act (1972) s101

The Local Audit and Accountability Act (2014), Local Audit (Smaller Authorities) Regulations and the Accounts and Audit Regulations (2015) detail the procedure required. As a Category 2 authority with expenditure over £25k but below £6.5m, Colehill Parish Council is obliged to complete an Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) and submit this to the External Auditor (PKF Littlejohn) by their deadline of 1st July. The law also requires there to be a 30 day public rights inspection period of the accounts to include the first 10 days in July

Given the Government's most recent announcement it is likely that pending emergency legislation will delay the date for submission to 30th September

11.1.1. If the Clerk is unable to work due to illness, the Chairman will access the email correspondence and action anything urgent in conjunction with the vice-Chairman. If the Clerk's illness coincides with the AGAR return needing to be carried out, Colehill Parish Council would look at other options for getting the end of year accounts completed possibly by using a locum Clerk.

12. In respect of Financial Regulation 10.3, it is accepted that in these unprecedented circumstances, there may be insufficient suppliers available to obtain 3 or more quotations for a specific transaction. Therefore, provided that at least 3 suppliers have been approached to quote, an order may be placed on best value terms available at the time without the requirement for 3 or more responses.

12.1.1. In cases of extreme risk to the delivery of Council services, Financial Regulation 4.7 permits the clerk to authorise revenue expenditure on behalf of the Council which in the clerk's judgement it is necessary to carry out. Such expenditure includes repair, replacement or other work, whether or not there is any budgetary provision for the expenditure. During the operational period this shall be subject to an increased limit of £15,000 for a single transaction. The Clerk shall report such action to the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Council and Chairman and Vice Chairman of Finance & General Purposes Committee as soon as possible and to the Council as soon as practicable thereafter. In practice, it is likely that the Clerk will keep in touch with Councillors should this look like something that would need to be implemented.

Responses to other communications. The Clerk will circulate at the earliest opportunity, any communication from any 3rd Parties which would normally be presented at a meeting for consideration by the council. The clerk will circulate the summary response to the full council prior to responding to the 3rd Party.

Casual Vacancy

The Council has advertised a casual vacancy. If an election is not called by 10 electors by 31st March, the vacancy will be filled by co-option. As the government has already suspended the May elections until 2021, it is reasonable to assume any by-election would also not take place until then for the same reasons. If no election is called and the vacancy is to be filled by co-option, the earliest this could happen would be once the policy is deactivated and the invitation to co-opt has to be advertised for 3 weeks in compliance with the Parish Council's co-option procedure.

Website Compliance

There is a statutory requirement to ensure the website meets the government's accessibility requirements by 30th September 2020. In practice there is no reason this cannot continue as Colehill Parish Council have already instructed Wimborne Business Systems to undertake the work in readiness.

(a) Play Areas/Litter Picks/BMX track

There is low risk to staff from these activities providing that precautions are taken when touching play equipment and they do not engage with the general public for more than 15mins at 2m distance. In the event that play areas cannot be inspected weekly they will be closed until inspections can resume.

Oliver's Park Field

Completion of the purchase of Oliver's Park field and Churchmoor Copse is due to take place imminently. Should this happen whilst this policy is activated, then the Clerk and Chairman will investigate maintenance contracts to cut the grass. We should however be aware that Contractors may be suffering from staff shortages and it may not be possible to get 3 quotes. If that is the case the Chairman and Clerk have the authority to exercise their best judgement to engage a Contractor to carry out any works deemed necessary.

13. Communications All communications with members of the public including queries as to procedure should be answered through the Clerk and members should respectfully refrain from communicating on Social Media during this time in a Council capacity.

14. Central and Local Government/NALC Guidelines Central and Local Government/NALC guidelines can change very quickly in a period of crisis and the Council's response in terms of things not covered in this policy should be left flexible and be able to take into account changes in legislation and where necessary public mood.

15. Review of the policy

15.1.1. This policy was approved by the Parish Council at its meeting on 19th March 2020 and will be reviewed annually

15.1.2.

Signed:

Zoe Caddy

Appendix 2 - Financial Regulations to be suspended/amended

FR 4.1.

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];
- a duly delegated committee of the council for items over [£500]; or
- the Clerk, in conjunction with Chairman of Council or Chairman of the appropriate committee, for any items below [£500].

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

Contracts may not be disaggregated to avoid controls imposed by these regulations.

FR4.5

In cases of extreme risk to the delivery of Council services, the clerk may authorise revenue expenditure on behalf of the Council which in the clerk's judgement it is necessary to carry out. Such expenditure includes repair, replacement or other work, whether or not there is any budgetary provision for the expenditure, subject to a limit of £2500 for a single transaction. The Clerk shall report such action to the chairman as soon as possible and to the Council as soon as practicable thereafter.

Proposal - This limit shall be raised to £10,000

FR 6.4 Cheques or orders for payment drawn on the bank account in accordance with the schedule as presented to council or committee shall be signed by two members of council and countersigned by the Clerk, in accordance with a resolution instructing that payment. If a member who is also a bank signatory has declared a disclosable pecuniary interest, or has any other interest, in the matter in respect of which the payment is being made, that Councillor shall be required to consider Standing Orders, and thereby determine whether it is appropriate and / or permissible to be a signatory to the transaction in question.

Proposal – if there is no feasible alternative due to Councillors self-isolating, the Clerk and one other Councillor is able to sign cheques. Barclays bank are happy with this.

FR 10.3.

All members and officers are responsible for obtaining value for money at all times. An officer issuing an official order shall ensure, as far as reasonable and practicable, that the best available terms are obtained in respect of each transaction, usually by obtaining three or more quotations or estimates from appropriate suppliers, subject to any *de minimis* provisions in Regulation 11.1 below.