

## GUIDANCE NOTE: Covid-19 Practical Steps for Clerks

This applies to parish, town and community councils in England and Wales.

### 1. Be informed

The most up to date and accurate source of information is the Public Health England website <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england>. Information on the emerging situation is updated at 2pm every day and there is also a useful blog post that summarises Covid-19 <https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/23/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-what-you-need-to-know/>

### 2. Be prepared

It is likely that Government will pass emergency legislation to support the prevention of the spread of Covid-19. This may include restricting people's activity and travel; increasing the number of people who are asked to "self-isolate", preventing groupings of people for meetings and events. As yet, we do not know what form this will take. This doesn't stop Clerks from preparing.

Make sure all staff, councillors and visitors have access to handwashing facilities. Have a ready supply of tissues.

Think about your Council's activities in the context of a "lockdown". In Italy restrictions have been put in place until 3rd April. If the same happened in the UK what must/can your Council still do? Paying staff and suppliers, keeping facilities running, pausing projects, cancelling events are the obvious things. For each Clerk their responsibilities will vary and the actions needed will vary. Make a list of your priorities and plan for how you will mitigate the risk/deliver the essentials.

Check your scheme of delegation – does it help you to ensure the Council continues running? Does your Council need to pass a resolution establishing a suitable delegation to the Clerk to keep things going? Suitable wording for the agenda might be "to consider extending the delegation of Council decisions to the Clerk during any period of restricted activity declared by the Government in respect of the Covid-19 virus. Such delegation to enable the Council to fulfil its responsibilities to its residents". This has a wide-ranging scope and should be amended to suit your Council's activities and what must be done during a period of lockdown.

Who did you pay this time last year? It's likely the same things will be due and think about how you will get the payments made. Trickier in smaller councils that only pay by cheque. Can you get the payments pre-prepared? Can you set up online banking (with the appropriate controls!)

Ordinary meetings – does the Council really have to meet? Many councillors are older and therefore at more risk. Sorting out your delegation can overcome this problem. As yet there is no provision for councils to meet "virtually". The SLCC understands that our colleagues at NALC have raised this with Government as part of the solution to managing these issues.

If you have to meet then follow these simple steps

Keep your distance such as maintaining at least one metre distance between participants in essential meetings

Increase your levels of hygiene management including keeping hands clean and coughing and sneezing into tissues which are immediately disposed of promote awareness of Government guidance on management of symptoms and self-isolation where recommended

Statutory meetings – the Annual Parish Meeting and Annual Meeting of Council. These could be affected in a "lockdown" situation as the 1972 Act specifies when these must be held. The SLCC's view is that this should be considered on a risk basis taking into account the latest guidance from Public Health England at the relevant time and any new legislation.

Pragmatically any decree issued by the Government is likely to supercede the 1972 Act – either implicitly or through regulations issued by MHCLG.

The Annual Parish Meeting must be held between 1st March and 1st June giving 7 clear days notice – this gives a good window to hold the meeting.

The Annual Meeting of Council – if it is an election year and the election is postponed the order postponing it will assist with the date for the Annual Meeting. If you are not in an election year – our advice is plan it for as late as possible.

A model pandemic plan (from the CIPD) has been added to the Advice Library and as the situation evolves the SLCC will update its advice.