



# **Ammanford Town Council**

## **Business Continuity Plan – COVID 19**

### **Policy & Procedure**

Adopted: 4<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Signed: 

(Chair)

## **BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN – COVID- 19**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This Business Continuity Plan has been prepared for Ammanford Town Council with reference to its Officers, Councillors, volunteers, services and activities.

1.2 Ammanford Town Council actively seeks to protect the Officers, Councillors and volunteers working for and on behalf of the Council and its activities. All volunteers will have valid DBS checks/documentation.

1.3 This document sets out the general principles and approach that the Council will follow and undertake in relation to COVID-19.

### **2. SCOPE OF THIS PLAN**

2.1 The main areas of concern for Ammanford Town Council in relation to COVID-19 are:

- Ensuring the health and safety of all Council Officers, Councillors, volunteers and members of the public participating in Council activities.
- Maintaining effective and lawful decision-making processes.
- The continuing operation of essential services and contractual obligations.
- Supporting our community in any way possible during this period.

### **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 The Coronavirus disease was confirmed to have spread to the United Kingdom (UK) on 31st January 2020. On 11th March 2020, the WHO categorised the outbreak as a pandemic and then subsequently stated on 14th March 2020 that Europe is now the centre of the pandemic. As of the 12th March 2020, the UK has classified the risk as high.

3.3 On 3rd March 2020, the government published its Coronavirus Action Plan and subsequently, The Health Protection (Coronavirus Regulations) 2020 have been put into place to reduce the risk of further human-to-human transmission in the UK by keeping individuals in isolation where public health professionals believe there is a reasonable risk an individual may have the virus.

3.4 On Monday 16th March 2020 the Government issued new more stringent isolation guidance as follows:

- Avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). These symptoms include high temperature and/or new continuous cough.
- If you live alone and have a high temperature or a new and continuous cough you should self-isolate for seven days.
- If you live in a household with others and have a high temperature or a new and continuous cough, both yourself and all others in your household should stay isolated together for 14 days.
- Everyone, including if you are not displaying symptoms yourself and live in a household where no one is displaying symptoms should stop all unnecessary contact with others and all unnecessary travel.
- Avoid non-essential use of public transport, varying your travel times to avoid rush hour, when possible.
- Work from home, where possible. Your employer should support you to do this.
- Avoid venues such as pubs, clubs, theatres and restaurants.
- Pay particular attention to the advice if you are over 70, pregnant and have underlying health problems and to significantly limit face-to-face interaction with friends and family if possible.
- People in at-risk groups are asked to stay home for 12 weeks.

3.5 The virus is now spreading quickly in the community and the Government will be making self-isolation measures mandatory to protect the over 70's and other 'at risk' groups from being infected, whilst controlling the rate of infection in low risk groups who have mild symptoms but on recovery be available for work and no further danger to infecting the 'at risk' groups (developing herd immunity).

#### 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 Government strategy and prioritise the shielding of all 'at risk' groups.

#### 4.3 TOWN COUNCIL OFFICE CONTINUITY

4.3.1 The Town Council office is situated at the Town Hall located on Iscennen Road Ammanford and is accessible to public where Officers do have contact with members of the public. Member(s) of staff managing the Town Council Office also have contact with visitors. Office staff do have close family members who are in the 'at risk' groups. It is essential therefore that contact with the public is prevented as far as possible when the office is occupied by staff or councillors.

4.3.2 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 potentially be forwarded to the mobile telephone of the appropriate officer or a message left with alternative

telephone numbers. Information will be placed on the Council's website, social media and at the notice board located outside the Town Hall.

4.3.3 The Town Clerk will be responsible for the overall control of assets, services and functions. In the absence of the Town Clerk, this will be undertaken by the available nominated staff. Nominated staff refers to the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Chairperson of the Finance Committee and Chairperson of Personnel

4.3.4 In accordance with Standing Orders and this Scheme of Delegation, the Council shall function under the Town Clerk's delegated powers.

4.3.5 The Town Clerk shall authorise payments in accordance with Financial Regulations and provide financial information/accounts control sheets to all members and committees (where possible) and operate within the Council's agreed budget.

4.3.6 The Town Clerk will take emergency action/authorise spending as indicated in this Scheme of Delegation and report this to a relevant councillor including:

- Mayor/Deputy Mayor of the Council
- Chairperson of Council Committee

and report back actions taken in due course to the relevant Committee/Full Council meeting.

4.3.7 The Town Clerk will hold the cheque book for the Town Council current account. This will be held in a secure location.

4.3.8 The Town Council shall operate PAYE, pension, salary payments as normal using existing software (access permitting).

4.3.9 The Town Clerk will provide regular updates and reports on activities and decisions to the Council, as is practicable to do so in the circumstances. All communication will be by email and telephone as and when required.

#### 4.4 COUNCIL SERVICES

Council Services & Business Continuity:

- a. Collection of rubbish – currently undertaken by Carmarthenshire County Council (CCC) will continue as normal until otherwise informed and in adherence with CCC policies
- b. Public toilets – continue as normal until otherwise informed in line with government guidelines
- c. Grounds maintenance – currently the responsibility of Carmarthenshire County Council as part of SLA agreement between Ammanford Town Council and Carmarthenshire County Council will continue as normal until otherwise informed.

- d. Budget Management and Payments – continue as normal or in compliance with Carmarthenshire County Council and in conjunction with Audit Wales

## **5. SALARIES, WAGES, SICK LEAVE AND ANNUAL LEAVE**

5.1 The National Joint Council has issued guidance on the response by Employers to paid absence from work owing to coronavirus COVID- 19 in accordance with the Green Book terms and conditions. Staff will continue to receive their salaries/wages subject to their contract and Green Book for:

- Self-isolation
- Illness
- Working from home

Reference also to ACAS Guide ‘Coronavirus: Advice for Employers and Employees’.

### **5.2 SELF ISOLATION**

5.2.1 Currently, NHS advice states that anyone displaying coronavirus symptoms should stay at home for 7 days. If you live with other people, they should stay at home for 14 days from the day the first person got symptoms. Use the NHS call line 111 online coronavirus service if you cannot feel you cannot cope with your symptoms at home, your condition gets worse or your symptoms do not get better after 7 days. Only call 111 if you cannot get help online. Any period of self-isolation will be treated as absence with full pay but not as sickness absence.

5.2.2 Employees who are actually ill will be treated as off sick in accordance with guidelines. However, employees cannot just unilaterally decide to self-isolate without providing the Town Council with reasonable justification in order to qualify for full pay.

5.2.3 It is important that all staff and Councillors inform the Town Clerk if they are ordered to self-isolate or feel ill.

5.2.4 Any annual leave booked over any period of self-isolation, illness or working from home will carry over in accordance with Green Book and ACAS guidance. It has been decided by The Government that there will be a carry-over period of annual leave to the end of 2021.

## **6. MEETINGS**

6.1 All Town Council meetings, committee meetings, sub-committees will be suspended where it has become necessary to close the Council office. There will be a dispensation of 6 month attendance rule for this period.

6.2 Councillors are asked to continue to carry out their duties from home as far as practicable.

6.3 The National Association of Local Councils and One Voice Wales are engaging with a variety of Government agencies as a matter of urgency on a range of issues with a view to obtaining clarity on legal responsibilities affecting community councils. These include:

- Councils being able to use their discretion on deadlines for Freedom of Information requests.
- The deadline for local government financial audits to be retained however some flexibility to be allowed by the auditors.
- Bringing forward legislation to remove the requirement for Annual Council meetings to take place in person.
- Bringing forward legislation to allow Council Committee meetings to be held virtually for a temporary period.

#### 6.4 ANNUAL MEETING

6.4.1 The Town Council must hold an Annual Meeting every year which, because this is not an election year, must be held in May. (Local Government Act 1972 Sch 12 para 7 (1) (2).

6.4.2 There is only one statutory item of business and that is the election of the Chairman. However, normally the Annual Meeting also elects Committees etc as stated in Standing Orders. Standing Orders also states that the Chairman, Vice Chairman and those of Committees hold office until the next Annual Meeting, so until that meeting occurs, then the current positions remain.

6.4.3 Other statutory requirements applicable to the Town Council Sector may be suspended by the Government in an emergency situation however there has not been any decision from Government to date.

### 7. **EVENTS/ACTIVITIES**

7.1 The Government is now discouraging social gatherings including visits to pubs, clubs, restaurants etc. The Town Council's planned events including any councillor surgeries will all be cancelled.

### 8. **COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE**

The key message here is that the Town Council will do all that it reasonably can to support the community of Ammanford Town Council – and in particular qualifying organisations in need of supports during this period. The Clerk and key Councillors/Members being Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Chairperson of Finance Committee and Chairperson of Personnel Committee will communicate key messages with local organisations via social media, website and telephone. The Clerk will support and co-ordinate all activity as planned by the Council. It is imperative that the Clerk is informed of all activities.

During the unprecedented circumstances at this time, communities are at risk of significant financial hardship. As a local Council we should be at the forefront of

efforts to alleviate the symptoms of financial hardship due to self-isolation as per Government guidelines. Therefore, we are allocating funds from the events budget, the amounts donated to be agreed by the Town Clerk and delegated Councillors/Members being Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Chairperson of Finance Committee and Chairperson of Personnel Committee to qualifying organisations in need of support

**All spending will be under delegated responsibility to the Town Clerk, with consultation with the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Chairperson of the Finance Committee and Chairperson of the Personnel Committee up to the sum £5000 with a majority decision of other councillors over this sum.**

Other initiatives under consideration by the Council include the following:

- Opportunity to appoint sessional workers. Sessional workers are to have valid DBS Certification/Checks in place and where relevant to include Child Protection approved certification in place. Hopefully this role will be taken up by volunteers in the first instance.
- Use of Town Hall as a food hamper and essential items drop off and distribution point. This would consist of drop off at the front door, collection at the rear car park. No contact with public needed through the use of volunteer drivers expressing willingness to support on social media and possibly in conjunction with Meals on Wheels volunteers (where applicable).
- Raising of funds from local companies (if applicable) to support, in order of priority:
  1. Purchase and supply of food and other essential items to vulnerable/in-need groups. This will supplement any initiatives by Carmarthenshire CC and will not be invoked until there is clarity on support provided by other agencies unless there is extreme need.
  2. Costs for volunteer expenses (to be agreed), PPE and other associated costs.
  3. Longer term investment into a community asset.
- Collaborative Working with other Town and Community Councils in the valley.
- Application for grants to be submitted under approved criteria and to include Business Plans with overall consent required for grant applications to be submitted under the following criteria:
  1. Evidence of need is established.
  2. Match funding is either not needed or covered by current/agreed budgets.
  3. Delivery is within the capacity of and/or other staff members/volunteers.

## 9. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

9.1 The Town Council will be acting on information and guidance available from the following sources to which all Officers, Councillors and members of the public will be signposted.

### Coronavirus - UK Government Response

<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

### **General Information to the Public**

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>

### **Guidance for Non-Clinical Settings - Employers and Businesses**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>

### **NHS Overview, Symptoms and Advice**

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

### **Government Action Plan**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan>

### **Government Advice for Self-Isolation at Home**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>

### **Getting Workplace Ready**

[https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7\\_6](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7_6)

### **NALC Advice (as at 17th March 2020)**

[https://www.nalc.gov.uk/coronavirus?utm\\_source=Members&utm\\_campaign=e9eb3bfbe8-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_06\\_08\\_03\\_15\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_206970988f-e9eb3bfbe8-351646253&mc\\_cid=e9eb3bfbe8&mc\\_eid=f2e2181307](https://www.nalc.gov.uk/coronavirus?utm_source=Members&utm_campaign=e9eb3bfbe8-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_06_08_03_15_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_206970988f-e9eb3bfbe8-351646253&mc_cid=e9eb3bfbe8&mc_eid=f2e2181307)

### **ACAS ADVICE**

<https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus>

Carmarthenshire County Council <http://newsroom.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/2020/02/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/#.Xnixsci7TIU>

Hywel Dda University Health Board <https://phw.nhs.wales/news/public-health-wales-statement-on-novel-coronavirus-outbreak/>

Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service [http://www.mawwfire.gov.uk/English/Newsroom/News/Pages/Coronavirus-\(COVID-19\)-Statement.aspx](http://www.mawwfire.gov.uk/English/Newsroom/News/Pages/Coronavirus-(COVID-19)-Statement.aspx)



Natural Resources Wales <https://naturalresources.wales/about-us/news-and-events/statements/our-response-to-the-coronavirus-pandemic/?lang=en>

Dyfed Powys Police

Dyfed-Powys Police and Crime Commissioner <http://www.dyfedpowys-pcc.org.uk/en/news/press-releases/covid-19/>

University of Wales Trinity Saint David <https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/coronavirus/>

Coleg Sir Gâr – as per above

Department for Work and Pensions <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

National Probation Service <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

Welsh Government <https://gov.wales/coronavirus>

Brecon Beacon National Park Authority <https://www.beacons-mpa.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services <http://www.cavs.org.uk/category/covid-19/>

This Business Continuity Plan may be subject to change without notice in the light of Government advice.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is **recommended** that

- 1. The Council adopts this emergency procedure and implements the Delegation Scheme until further notice. Members will remain in regular contact.**
- 2. The Council allows all office-based staff to work from home from Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March.**
- 3. Specific Authority be provided to the Town Clerk to comply with this Scheme of Delegated Authority.**
- 4. To cancel all of the current meetings and deal with any urgent issues by delegation to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the relevant Councillors.**
- 5. To wait for further Government/One Voice Wales advice regarding the holding of Council meetings including the use of MSTeams/Skype as an on-line meeting.**
- 6. To approve the use of funds from the Council Events budget to help with needy causes to an agreed limit e.g. Ammanford Foodbank**
- 7. To review this policy as required, depending on changing circumstances and Government guidance.**