

# Appendix 2: Covid-19: Lockdown March 2020

**Background:** On 16 March 2020, the Prime Minister asked people to avoid non-essential travel and work from home where possible. Schools were soon closed and a formal lockdown was introduced on 23 March, restricting when and why people could leave their homes. Lewes District Council (LDC) staff responded in a phenomenal and impressive manner; supporting residents, businesses and the voluntary sector tirelessly, whilst protecting themselves and their families from the Coronavirus. This is a summary of the lessons learned from that experience. Two things should be noted:

- 1) the emergency response continues for some teams so many of the challenges outlined below are still encountered;
- 2) unlike traditional lessons learned, this note tries to capture the positive as well as some of the more challenging to ensure that these are remembered and referred to should a similar response be needed in the future.

## **Summary of lessons learned:**

### **1. Emergency response:**

- a) The LDC response started up quickly and there was no 'lag' in actions. However, there could have been more preparations for working off-site.

### **2. Staff**

- a) LDC has an extremely flexible, agile, team-spirited and responsive workforce which can be re-directed to deliver tasks beyond their usual work. Moreover, the workforce has a plethora of skills and experience that were re-deployed into different roles.

- b) During an emergency, delivering services to our communities has to dovetail with maintaining our staff's health & wellbeing. LDC's existing agile working policy was a huge help and having consistent messaging from managers is also vital.

- c) Clear and explicit empowerment of staff to ensure timely decision making is essential.

### **3. Communication**

- a) Our external communications worked extremely well. Social media engagement was particularly successful. Using existing websites helped. Internal communication was also good. For consistency, all communication, from the beginning of an emergency, should be led by the communications team with relevant teams supporting (e.g. HR/IT/ finance).

- b) There must be a clear description of the purpose and roles of different groups/ meetings and membership (why certain people are involved) and flow of information and intelligence sharing between the groups. There should be a review of any emergency response groups' membership and clear understanding of why people are invited to join.

- c) Get distribution lists set up quickly to ensure coordination of work and so that communications and activities are known by relevant officers so that the right people are involved in the right activities.

### **4. Partnerships and expertise**

- a) LDC, through existing relationships, worked incredibly effectively with partners and local networks. In many cases we enabled partners to continue to operate. In the future, there needs to be a clear exit strategy and expectations managed around what will be provided and under what circumstances.

### **5. Tools**

- a) The nimbleness provided by having in-house IT, print team, graphic designers etc resulted in fast turn-around of vital resources.

- b) The rapid re-configuration of our IT set-up was impressive. IT support was consistently excellent however further thought needs to be given to an out of hours IT on-call provision (e.g. weekends/nights when staff may need to work).

- c) Managers should ensure that their staff receive emergency response refresher training and that they have the tools to work from home and, where appropriate, off-line tasks which they can complete without LDC laptops/ phones etc.

## LDC Timeline: Covid-19

### 16/3 PM advises against non-essential travel; 20/3 Pubs, cafes, restaurants etc closed & furlough scheme

17/3-20/3:

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- Website update/ phone lines/ additional staff for customers contact (*separate Comms plan*)
- Staffing spreadsheet (redeployment/absence/ personal circs) re-started/ circulated to HoS
- Staff guidance & comms issued (repeat weekly as a minimum)
- HR - fixed term contracts; working hours for all staff etc.
- Managers' script - re staffing/ flexibility etc.
- Finance & costs guidance provided/ cost-codes set up
- IT set up for increased WFH; IT guidance & wiser internet usage issued (prob w/24-7 apps)
- Whatsapp put on all corporate phones
- Waste areas prioritised- bulky waste stopped
- Customer contact: receptions closed/ notice re how to contact us
- N1st staff trained to help at crem
- Vol sector needing assistance identified as an area to investigate. Emergency £ given to food banks
- Local resilience forums (LRF) asked to set up community hubs. Southover house ruled out due to lack of storage space
- Potential issue around office vehicles: extra may need to be hired due to MOT expiry
- Potential need for extra delivery drivers (taxi trade contacted)
- Community info packs issued to Cllrs & printed cards for delivering to residents.

### Lockdown announced by PM 23/3; Coronavirus Act passed 25/3; Police new enforcement powers-26/3

24/3-28/3:

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- Mini call centre created for C-19 calls. Phone message & social media re opening times
- Additional licences (incl webchat) for WFH obtained. Additional soft phones needed.
- Webex trialled, Outlook challenges. Vid-conf options being looked at. 24/7 IT use not pos: data backup
- Enforcement action notices drafted
- T&E food suppliers contacted for foodbank support. Neighbourhood First assisting with delivery of food
- Increase in benefits applications. Staff redeployed to assist.
- Top Desk Guidance being prepared, health & wellbeing info
- Micollab issue resolved by Cavendish
- Staff: essential travel explained, Hub FAQs, school place letters, C1st staff rota for in office; Online courses for staff increased. Staff info re tactical group.
- Public toilets closed. Signage in parks
- Staff redeployed into waste team and CF additional staff for crem admin (new guidance for funerals)
- CA's making welfare calls to tenants. 1st case of C-19 in sheltered accom.
- Housing- non-emergency repairs & visits stopping; Rough Sleepers accommodated
- Hardship funds received. Business rates- more gov't guidance. Daily team mtg- comms to join. Rate relief work done by CoC & teams. FB updated with info for businesses
- 14 day payment terms implemented by finance
- Increase in Cllr comms- incl Facebook live Q&A. Staff redeployed to help in comms. Voluntary sector directory underway.
- FAQs for taxi drivers (licensing team)
- Garden waste collection suspended.
- Teams going out to inspect food premises. Protocols on working with police/ trading standards
- Income losses starting to come through

**30/3-3/4**

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- Staff redeployed to help voluntary sector (3VA) & matching volunteers to roles
- C-19 line launched (comms); Online form for C-19 help. Contact centre needing more staff. CAs rota
- Revised IVR message and start of business queue. TIC staff helping with calls
- Probs w/ C-19 phone line when dialling from land-line (ITBAU investigating)
- Risk assessments/ safe systems of work completed
- More PPE & hand sanitiser received.
- Business rates scheme – preparing project plan approx. 2 – 3 weeks before can roll out scheme – waiting for software suppliers
- Working with partners to see if can assist businesses where they pay themselves dividends.
- Businesses being re-directed by CoC to revenue team. Website guidance updated and callers re-directed
- ILO number given for out of hours calls.
- LDC & EBC tourism website – portal for businesses re: moving from restaurant to takeaway.
- Possible homeless hub arrangements needed
- SRF stepping up to do multi-agency handling. C-19 testing for relevant staff
- C-19 landing page on website
- ESCC have given parking concessions
- Easter handling of call still TBC but good response from staff
- Further comms re waste etc. over Easter

**6/4- 9/4**

**Easter weekend 10/4-13/4**

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- Remote committee meetings to be held via video conf- request to start these soon. Looking at Webex CMT trialling Webex as well. MS Teams chosen for virtual meetings (starting with planning/ licensing)
- Probs with C-19 contact number. Online ok- most requests : food parcels/ medication/ befriending
- SRF and Army food supplies for parcels.
- SMF will cover staff redeployment – to ensure business critical service areas are fully resourced
- Crematorium – preparing for increased demand in coming weeks. NF staff covering technicians due to staff shortages. Discussions about rolling out shift work/rotas, may need to tap into other resources
- LDC waste – HWRS to support with fly-tipping needs. Waste comms being dealt with
- Foodbank – food parcel deliveries increased. 2 members of staff doing transfers. Pos need more drivers
- Lewes business grants – majority of data capture forms have been finalised and branding work completed. Go live scheduled for 9 April & letters to be dispatched. Staffing tbc. Payment plans to be tested
- Businesses- starting to sell off-licence and asked to apply for licence.
- Phone support from Civica/ Cavendish for Easter weekend in place
- Further staff comms – pre Easter weekend. CMT visiting office buildings over Easter weekend
- Request for ideas for staff wfh
- Working with probation office – offenders being released early. Linking with DWP re benefits
- Staff deployed to help manage volunteers for 3VA
- Business Portal caused 400 calls as well as large number of web chats due to technical issues.
- Waste services over Easter in place. Staff wfh helping with data transfer

14/4-17/4 (UK peak)

- Bonfire & homelessness info provided to Members
- Business grants – huge amounts processed over weekend.
- W360 issues. Team and Civica in process of resolving.
- Advice on meals on wheels, food boxes etc to be given to CF team
- Staff: Focus on work that can be done from home (eg data cleansing; W360). Working with managers to ID staff at home not fully utilised or unable to WFH b/c their job is not suitable or due to technology
- Homelessness – issues with social distancing and getting them to stay in hotels
- Public conveniences – lots of queries about opening them. Possibly one or two could be opened with a permanent attendant.
- Low stock on soft phones, no mobile phone 10 laptops in stock. Team looking to obtain stock. Increase in no of IT help calls from 100 (normally) to 400.
- Letter from Lewes cabinet will go out to all residents. Tel number for Covid 19 in this letter.
- Refuse sites – Las come under pressure to reopen refuse sites (tips) across the region. The decision is that they are to remain closed in line with government advice
- Reviewing foodbank distribution capacity due to high volumes. 3VA possibly co-ordinating additional drivers to assist with foodbank distribution.
- PPE equipment still in short supply in Sussex, waiting for online ordering system (clipper system)
- Keyworker testing due to commence. SRF -would like a snap shot of public facing keyworkers who are self-isolating but are currently well
- Members briefing which will include the information regarding demand on services

20-24/4

- Defra keen on reopening waste sites
- Post-lockdown: Managers to focus on new ways/ what their services will look like
- HF, NF and EF have all received PPE. Not all orders delivered , need to look at the next 6 months to ensure we are prepared with regards to PPE provision
- Testing - Commenced at the AMEX and referral details with us shortly
- SRF RAG status is amber - means we are carrying out essential services and currently coping
- County setting up own hub. Their stock of food parcels will go to them by the end of the week
- Information posters being printed and given to businesses that are experiencing social distancing issues (to put in their windows to reiterate the rules), i.e. for food takeaway / food shops.
- Microsoft Teams will be used for all Council meetings and they are factoring in the ability for people to speak, to engage and to mute people in the meeting
- Taxi licence changes nearly completed. Looking at issues occurring with W360 to try and get the Covid form back up on- line as it is useful for reporting. New form for customer advisors being worked on so they can update their records when customers call in.
- Starting to look at things we are doing now that in future we will be able to switch off, but be able to switch back on if there is another Covid spike
- Countywide homelessness meeting - 82 rough sleepers and now down to 19 rough sleepers. Awaiting guidance around prison leavers and who is responsible for them.
- Sheltered Accommodation in Ringmer (person in bungalow) is the only case of Covid-19 in our housing stock that we are aware of.