



# BLAKENEY PARISH COUNCIL

## Coronavirus Contingency & Action Plan

The following plan sets out the contingency measures Blakeney Parish Council will bring into effect as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. The plan aims to ensure the Council will be able to operate its business to the best of its abilities throughout this public health emergency while protecting, as far as is reasonably possible, its members, employees, and volunteers. This plan will be continuously reviewed and updated to take account of the changing status of the pandemic.

No.	Item	Comments	Risk	Actions	Consequences	Updates
1	Parish Council Meetings, including Committees	Meetings take place in a small room with 12 -30 people present. No scope for implementing 'social distancing' measures. Such meetings are not to take place.	High	Cancel monthly Parish Council meetings and Committee meetings until further notice.	Impact on 'democratic decision-making' as Council decisions will have to be delegated or made via email consultation with members of the Council, the latter being the most difficult and time consuming option. (see table below).	Blakeney Parish Council Office (meeting venue) closed from 20 <sup>th</sup> March 2020 until further notice. Emergency extraordinary remote agenda to deal with delegation of power – 24 <sup>th</sup> March 2020.
2	Annual Parish Council Meeting (AGM)	Meetings take place in a small room with 12 – 30 people present. No scope for implementing 'social distancing' measures. Such meetings are not to take place.	High	Postponed AGM scheduled for 5 <sup>th</sup> May 2020.	Statutory requirement for meeting to be held in May, however, Government considering bringing forward legislation to amend this statutory requirement.	Blakeney Parish Council Office (meeting venue) closed from 20 <sup>th</sup> March 2020 until further notice.
3	Annual Parish Meeting	Meeting takes place in a large hall with up to 100 people present, such gatherings are not to take place.	High	Postponed Annual Parish Meeting scheduled for 19 <sup>th</sup> March 2020. Have set a revised date of 28 <sup>th</sup> May 2020.	Statutory requirement for meeting to be held between 1 <sup>st</sup> March and 1 <sup>st</sup> June each year. However, Government considering bringing forward legislation to amend this statutory requirement.	Blakeney Village Hall (meeting venue) closed until further notice, and has no weekday slots available before 1 <sup>st</sup> June. Scout Hut has

						been booked as an alternative venue.
4	Networking Meetings & Forums	Face-to-face meetings, sometimes involving large groups of people.	High/ Med	Members and employees to avoid attending non-essential meetings.	Should not impact on Parish Council business. Networking can be done via email, telephone or by holding virtual meetings, if all participants are able.	This is happening where possible. It is early days.
5	Parish Clerk /RFO (Proper Officer)Work	Works from Parish Office. Attends meetings and operates around the village, (National Trust, car parks, dinghy park, play areas/open spaces, post office/shop/ parish noticeboards, etc).	Med	Cancel meetings. Post will be collected once a week at the most. Items that can be dealt with by email and post shall continue.	Parish Clerk will work from home until further notice.	Work and files taken home, parish office telephone diverted to Clerks mobile. 24 <sup>th</sup> March 2020.
6	Carnser Car Park Attendants	Works outdoors. Unable to work from home due to the nature of the work involved.	High	Stood down on 17 <sup>th</sup> March 2020, more than 14 days (notice) before their appointments were due to commence.	Carnser Car Park not manned.	In line with government guidance all the Parish Council car parks, classed as non-essential have been closed down and locked to discourage visitors. 24 <sup>th</sup> March 2020.
7	Employee Sickness Absence (Clerk)	Possibility of Parish Clerk being unable to carry out normal Council work due to illness or self-isolation.	Low	Ensure employee is aware of sickness absence procedures/ Coronavirus advice.	Works from home (self-isolation not a problem). Short-term absence due to illness would not impact greatly on PC business.	
8	Internal Audit	Internal Auditor unable to carry out audit due to illness or self-isolation.	Med	Consider if audit could be delivered via post/email/file sharing and teleconferencing.	Council's accounts due to be approved by the Council in time to meet the revised deadline of 30 <sup>th</sup> September 2020, and thus internal examination must have been completed ahead of this date.	Government has confirmed the deadline for local government financial audits will be extended to 30 <sup>th</sup> September 2020.

9	External Audit (Approving The AGAR)	Accounts must be approved at a meeting of the Council by no later than 29 <sup>th</sup> June and submitted to auditor by 1 <sup>st</sup> July. May not be possible for a quorate meeting of the Council to be held by the statutory deadlines.	High	If required, contact external auditor (PKF Littlejohn) to arrange extension of time for submission of the AGAR.	A statutory recommendation will be issued to all authorities that fail to submit their documents by 15 <sup>th</sup> September 2020. These are charged at the standard fee rate depending on the authority's expenditure banding, giving rise to a minimum additional fee of £200 plus VAT.	NALC in discussions regarding council audit deadlines. Government has confirmed the deadline for local government financial audits will be extended to 30 <sup>th</sup> September.
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### Democratic & Lawful Decision-Making

Local authorities are required to hold meetings to make decisions. Given that these are exceptional times (a declared 'pandemic' should meet the test for this), all Parish Councils must cancel their usual meetings and these need to be replaced with alternative decision-making processes. The lawful way to do this is that a decision that would otherwise have been on the agenda for a committee or Council is now made by an Officer. The law permits a Council to delegate decision-making and discharge of statutory powers/functions (including "power to spend") to a Council Officer such as a Parish Clerk/RFO. In such cases, the Officer performs these functions on the Council's behalf but legal responsibility always remains with the Council. Although there are certain matters that the law states cannot be delegated and must be discharged by a meeting of the Full Council, delegation can remove the requirement to convene a Full Council Meeting whilst still enabling essential functions to be undertaken lawfully. (It was not possible to arrange an extra ordinary meeting, with the 3 clear days' notice and be quorate before the announcement from government came that we were not to have gatherings of people/meetings, and hence the following table shows the steps taken by Blakeney Parish Council)

**Remote Extraordinary Emergency Meeting of Blakeney Parish Council – 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020** – Just 3 items on the agenda, as tabled below, all replies to be received by members by 8pm on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Agenda was sent to each member by email.

Proposal/Recommendation	Members Response	Action
<b>Item no. 1 – Declarations of Interest</b>	10 Members responded – No interests	No further action
<b>Item no. 2 – Covid 19 Response Fund</b>	10 Members responded – Yes BPC to sign up	Clerk will action
<b>Item no. 3 – Delegate Power</b> – As per the recommendations of the National Association of Local Councils and Society of Local Council Clerks (all emailed in the past few days) as follows: BPC to review its scheme of delegation to ensure it is fit for purpose and	Rosemary Thew (Chairman) – <b>Agreed</b>  I have seen all the replies, so far, to this message and Jenny and I have spoken. The reason this is being put in place is so that council business can be conducted efficiently. That would not happen if we have to take account of 11 councillors' views whether it be by email or telephone. The	With 8 members in favor of the proposal/recommendation (2 against, and 1 non reply), this is considered

would ensure minimal disruption to the work of the council whilst Councillors are not able to attend meetings and committees. *With immediate effect, until further notice, the Clerk to the Council (Proper Officer/RFO) is to be given delegated power, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, to act on behalf of the Parish Council.* Key points will include but are not limited to; minimising risk to the Parish Council, including financial, operating council's services safely and remotely, communication with fellow Councillors, essential and non-essential tasks during this difficult time.

logistics and delays would create an impossible workload for Tracey, Jenny and me. Jenny and I have agreed that, if we are faced with a sensitive or contentious issue, we will consult. Otherwise, your agreement to delegate to us means that we will deal with more routine issues using our own judgment. Rosemary.

Jenny Girling (Vice Chairman) – **Agreed**

Samantha Arlow – **Agreed**

Jane Armstrong – **Objects** - (Two replies, both copied below; this being the first.)

Sorry, I don't feel I can respond to this with a one-word answer and hope, as this is effectively a remote meeting and not just a ballot that we're holding, that everyone's happy for me to expand somewhat: I fully understand that there is a need to review delegated powers to ensure that the council can continue running. Further, it seems reasonable that power should be delegated from the Council to the Clerk, the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman. However, I think the points made by Edward and Alban (which I fully support) should be part of the proposal. I would suggest the following example wording for the proposal (based on the SLCC article and on Edward's and Alban's comments). "BPC to extend its scheme of delegation of Council decisions to enable the Council to fulfil its responsibilities to its residents during the period of restricted activity declared by the Government in response to the Covid-19 virus. In the case of decisions requiring immediate or urgent action the Council delegates the power to act to the Clerk working with the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman. Less urgent decisions to be made with full council consultation via email or phone. Councillors to be kept fully informed by email of any decisions taken." Jane.

*Second reply as copied below.*

Dear All, I'd like to clarify, further to my earlier email that I have to vote against Proposal 3 on tonight's agenda. Rosemary's email expanded on the proposal by explaining that the group comprising Tracey, Rosemary and Jenny will deal with routine decisions using their own judgement

to be a consultation of all members of the Parish Council, and the decision of each individual has been recorded here for transparency.

**Action: Delegated authority to the Clerk/RFO (Proper Officer) in consultation with the Chairman & Vice-Chairman with immediate effect.**

**Weekly reports for updating purposes will be sent to all members by the Clerk. Chairman & Vice-Chairman will contact other Cllrs as per their agreed statement.**

and will only consult other members of the council in the event of "sensitive or contentious" matters. I feel very strongly that it is not appropriate for Councillors to delegate the power for *all decisions* to the Clerk in consultation with two Councillors and for this delegation to be open ended. I would like to suggest again, that an alternative wording for the proposal is considered. This would still delegate the power to act for urgent matters but would allow regular matters to be dealt with by the whole council - perhaps not in the usual way - but at least with all members being able to have a say. To echo what Alban has said, this is a very difficult time and we shouldn't rush into anything. Do we really have to settle this decision by 8pm tonight? Please speak up! Jane.

Alban Donohoe – **Objects** – (Two replies, both copied below, this being the first.)

Agree with a proviso that all essential tasks and decisions are made with full council agreement and Councillors to be kept informed by email or phone. Alban

*Second reply as copied below.*

Hi Tracey, Rosemary and Jenny, I think that there has perhaps been a slight misunderstanding on my vote. I would only be in agreement with No:3 if the proviso were in place, as per Jane's and Edward's replies, otherwise I would have to vote no. In view of this I'm not sure that makes a majority of Councillors. I feel we need to have further discussions and not make a hasty decision. This is a very difficult time for us all, and we shouldn't rush into anything. Is the 8pm deadline a government directive? If not this gives us time to make the right choices. KR - Alban

Shirley Everett – **Agreed** with item no 3 as per the agenda.

Barry Girling – **Agreed** with item no. 3 as per the agenda.

Edward Hackford – **Agreed** plus comments. (Two replies, both copied below, this being the first.)

	<p>Councillors to be kept informed by email, and views asked where possible, to ensure democratic consensus on issues.</p> <p><i>Second reply as copied below.</i></p> <p>Needless to say, I have sympathy with Janes views.</p> <p>Nigel Sutcliffe – <b>Agreed</b> with item no. 3 as per the agenda.</p> <p>Jess Tutt – <b>Agreed</b> with item no. 3 as per the agenda.</p> <p>Iain Wolfe – Did not respond</p>	

At all times, the Officer must comply with Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, though these may be amended or suspended by a decision of Full Council. To ensure the decision-making process remains inclusive of Council members, the Officer is advised to seek the views of all members of the Council where appropriate.

No.	Item	Comments	Current Arrangements	Amended Arrangements
1	Payments	It is essential that the Council continues to pay its staff, suppliers and contractors throughout the pandemic as far as is reasonably possible.	95% of payments are made by Bacs. The RFO prepares a schedule of payments requiring authorisation and presents this schedule (together with the relevant invoices) to the Council alongside the agenda for the next Council meeting. Payments are authorised by a resolution of the Council at a meeting of the Full Council.	RFO to draw up a list of payments as would be considered each month, primarily payments arising as the result of a continuing contract, statutory duty, or obligation (see Financial Regulations). List to include, as a minimum, payee details and reasons for payment. The amounts due will be added to the list as soon as they are known (staff wages, pension and tax payments, for example, vary from month to month). Payments to be authorised and posted by the RFO once checked against invoices (posted or scanned and emailed to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman) and determined to be correct, and the final list of payments made together with any relevant invoices will be submitted to the next available meeting of the Council (see item Financial Regulations, which explains the RFO's delegated authority).

2	Planning Applications	The consultation period for planning applications is 21 days, meaning not all applications can be considered at meetings of the Full Council.	Planning Protocol in place, which sets out how the Parish Council considers planning matters on which it is consulted by a Planning Authority.	All planning applications to be decided in accordance with the agreed delegated power, whereby the Council's response will be delegated to the Parish Clerk acting on the outcome of an email consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman.
3	Annual Budget	BPC budget for 2020/2021 may be reviewed due to a change in projected income.	RFO may review and revise the budget based on the year-end position and projection for 2020/21 based on current circumstances and present the amended budget for approval under delegated powers.	RFO will consult with Chairman and Vice-Chairman as to essential and non-essential expenditure in order to monitor the budget under the current circumstances, as our main source of income is Car Park revenue which has ceased for the foreseeable future.
4	Election Of Chairman	Annual Parish Council Meeting due to be postponed.	Would normally take place at Annual Parish Council Meeting.	Chairman to continue in office until such time as the Annual Parish Council Meeting may be held.
5	Election Of Vice-Chairman	Annual Parish Council Meeting due to be postponed.	Would normally take place at Annual Parish Council Meeting.	Vice-Chairman to continue in office until such time as the Annual Parish Council Meeting may be held.
6	Items To Be Approved Or Signed	Could include letters, draft contracts, bank reconciliations, etc.	Would normally be approved and/or signed at a meeting of the Council.	Clerk to circulate items to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council and to ask for approval of items via an email. Items to be signed electronically or via the post where original signature is needed.
7	Items For Decision Or Response	Could include quotes, consultations, or general correspondence.	Would normally be discussed/response agreed at meeting of the Council.	Clerk to circulate items the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council and to ask for a decision about the items via an email.
8	Updates & Information	Could include monthly budget monitoring, VAT reclaims, planning decisions, councillor and clerk updates.	Would normally be presented for information, noted and/or discussed at a meeting of the Council.	Clerk will circulate a weekly update for note, to all members of the Council via email.

For all items listed in the table above, Blakeney Parish Council agrees to delegate the decision-making described above and any relevant discharge of statutory powers and functions (including "power to spend") to the Parish Clerk/RFO in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman. Such delegation will be limited to any period of restricted activity declared by the Government in respect of the Coronavirus pandemic, and this delegation will be undertaken only as an emergency measure, to enable the Parish Council to operate its business and fulfil its responsibilities to the residents of Blakeney.

**Adopted by Blakeney Parish Council on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2020**