



# HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Peel Street, Houghton Regis, Bedfordshire LU5 5EY

Town Mayor: **Cllr T K McMahon** Tel: 01582 708540

Town Clerk: **Clare Evans** E-mail: info@houghtonregis.org.uk

13<sup>th</sup> March 2020

## HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

To: **All Town Councillors**

### Notice of Meeting

You are hereby summoned to the Meeting of the Houghton Regis Town Council to be held at the Council Offices, Peel Street on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020 at 10am.

Clare Evans  
Town Clerk

**\*THIS MEETING MAY BE RECORDED \***

### Coronavirus Precautions

Prior to the meeting please consider whether it is really necessary / appropriate for you to attend the meeting. The council will happily except questions and comments in writing prior to the meeting and will ensure these are presented to the meeting at the appropriate time. Please use the above email address.

If you are attending the meeting, please note that to assist in minimising the risk of the spread of the coronavirus all attendees of the meeting are required to:

1. Use the hand sanitiser provided upon entering the chamber
2. Refrain from any direct contact
3. Avoid close contact and sit at a distance from each other as far as the room allows
4. Do not touch your face
5. Cough and sneeze into your elbow and remove yourself from the meeting if necessary

*This meeting is called as an emergency meeting in response to the threat of the coronavirus. It is called at short notice in accordance with Standing Order 1c and with the approved Scheme of Delegation para 2.2.2.*

### AGENDA

#### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

*\*Phones and other equipment may be used to film, audio record, tweet or blog from this meeting by an individual Council member or a member of the public. No part of the meeting room is exempt from public filming unless the meeting resolves to go into exempt session.*

*The use of images or recordings arising from this is not under the Council's control.*

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Members are reminded that the quorum for a town council meeting is one third of all councillors (five).

If you are unable to attend, please inform the clerk or the Chair prior to the meeting.

## 2. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

In accordance with approved Standing Orders 1(e)-1(l) Members of the public may make representations, ask questions and give evidence at a meeting which they are entitled to attend in respect of the business on the agenda.

The total period of time designated for public participation at a meeting shall not exceed 15 minutes and an individual member of the public shall not speak for more than 3 minutes unless directed by the chairman of the meeting.

## 3. SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

Under the Localism Act 2011 (sections 26-37 and Schedule 4) and in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, Members are required to declare any interests which are not currently entered in the member's register of interests or if he/she has not notified the Monitoring Officer of any such interest.

Members are invited to submit any requests for Dispensations for consideration.

*Members may like to consider whether to hold the discussion on agenda item 4 in private session.*

## 4. CONTINGENCY PLAN IN RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS

In light of the escalating threat from the coronavirus, this report is presented to enable members to consider:

1. The council's position in relation to town council services and operations;
2. Options for support from the council to the local community.

**Recommendation:** To agree the following arrangements due to the threat of the coronavirus:

1. To delegate authority to the Clerk and the Chair of the council to undertake any measures / make any decisions deemed necessary to provide support to the community and to protect the health and wellbeing of councillors and staff based on government and NALC advice;
2. To postpone the Annual Town's Meeting until 21<sup>st</sup> May;
3. To seek to hold the Town Council AGM on 13<sup>th</sup> May as scheduled (pending Government advice at the time) at the Town Council offices. To note that should the AGM not proceed the current arrangements are to continue;
4. To cancel the Easter Egg Hunt on 4<sup>th</sup> April and to distribute the eggs to suitable local organisations and local schools;
5. To cancel the Civic Service on 26<sup>th</sup> April;
6. For the Chair and the Clerk to determine at the end of March / early April whether the VE Day Celebration planned for 8<sup>th</sup> May will proceed, (pending Government advice at the time);
7. To hold the Mayoral Inauguration later in the year;

- 8. To hold the Eco Event later in the year;**
- 9. To liaise with the Youth Council over future meetings;**
- 10. To put on hold the provision of the Pop-up café and to re-launch at a more suitable time.**

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**Date:** 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020

**Title:** CONTINGENCY PLAN IN RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS

**Purpose of the Report:** In light of the escalating threat from the coronavirus, to enable members to consider:

1. The council's position in relation to town council services and operations;
2. Options for support from the council to the local community.

**Contact Officer:** Clare Evans, Town Clerk

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## 1. RECOMMENDATION

To agree the following arrangements due to the threat of the coronavirus:

1. To delegate authority to the Clerk and the Chair of the council to undertake any measures / make any decisions deemed necessary to provide support to the community and to protect the health and wellbeing of councillors and staff based on government and NALC advice;
2. To postpone the Annual Town's Meeting until 21<sup>st</sup> May;
3. To seek to hold the Town Council AGM on 13<sup>th</sup> May as scheduled (pending Government advice at the time) at the Town Council offices. To note that should the AGM not proceed the current arrangements are to continue;
4. To cancel the Easter Egg Hunt on 4<sup>th</sup> April and to distribute the eggs to suitable local organisations and local schools;
5. To cancel the Civic Service on 26<sup>th</sup> April;
6. For the Chair and the Clerk to determine at the end of March / early April whether the VE Day Celebration planned for 8<sup>th</sup> May will proceed, (pending Government advice at the time);
7. To hold the Mayoral Inauguration later in the year;
8. To hold the Eco Event later in the year;
9. To liaise with the Youth Council over future meetings;
10. To put on hold the provision of the Pop-up café and to re-launch at a more suitable time.

## 2. BACKGROUND

The town council operates at the grass routes of local democracy. Many of the council's services are discretionary, however they contribute to the quality of life of local residents. This report is provided to enable the council to be in a position to:

1. Respond to the escalating threat of coronavirus
2. Protect as far as possible the health and wellbeing of members and officers
3. Ensure that legal and legislative requirements are met as far as possible

### **3. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

As we are all aware this is an emerging and unprecedented situation. The council are requested to be mindful that government and public advice needs to be followed and that staff and councillor availability may not be consistent over the next few months. This will have an impact on council operations and services. There will be a period of re-mobilisation as when the environment returns to normal.

Officers are monitoring and responding to government advice as this emerges. At present measures are being put in place to minimise risk such as handwashing and sanitisation facilities, reduced face to face meetings and contingency planning.

Due to the fluidity of the situation it is not possible to write this report to cover every scenario. As such members are requested to endorse the position that the council will follow government and NALC advice. To enable the council to effectively respond to this advice members are requested to delegate authority to the Clerk<sup>1</sup> and the Chair<sup>2</sup> of the council to undertake any measures / make any decisions deemed necessary to provide support to the community and to protect the health and wellbeing of members and staff. These decisions may include but are not limited to:

- Home working for staff
- Closure of the town council reception
- Cancellation / postponement of council meetings
- Cancellation / postponement of events
- Suspension of sports bookings – please note that cricket and bowls sports bookings have been suspended until end of April, this will be kept under review
- Cancellation of chamber bookings by outside bodies
- Disruption to administration duties including cemetery administration, routine website and social media updates etc

Decisions will be made based on government advice and on the basis of the risk posed. Members will be updated by email and the community will be kept informed through the website and social media.

The public will be able to communicate with the council by telephone (landlines will be re-directed to officer's mobiles) and by email and social media.

Whilst updates and advice to residents will be provided through the council's website and social media, there are also opportunities to more proactively help the community.

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<sup>1</sup> In the absence of the clerk, the Corporate Services Manager / Democratic Services Manager / Head of Grounds

<sup>2</sup> In the absence of the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor

Officers will be linking in with other local support organisations to offer direct support. Councillors may like to offer their services as well. The nature of the assistance is not known at present, but it may involve telephone befriending, prescription collection, shopping etc.

#### **4. SPECIFIC ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

Section 3 is intended to enable the council to effectively and responsibly respond to the emerging situation. Members are however requested to consider the following specifics:

##### Annual Town's Meeting<sup>3</sup>

This is a statutory meeting to be held between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 1<sup>st</sup> June. The 2020 meeting is scheduled to be held on 6<sup>th</sup> April. The agenda typically includes a presentation from each Committee Chair followed by public questions. Members may like to consider retaining this date but limiting the agenda to public questions only to reduce the risk through a shorter time period or to hold the meeting towards the end of May (21<sup>st</sup> May) when hopefully the threat from the virus is reduced.

##### Town Council AGM<sup>4</sup>

This is a statutory meeting to be held in May. The 2020 meeting is scheduled to be held on 13<sup>th</sup> May. Government advice will be followed at the time, however should it be directed that public meetings are not held due to the risk of the coronavirus Members are advised that the current arrangements will continue, specifically the current Mayor and Deputy Mayor will remain in post and approved policies will remain in effect, committee etc membership will remain as existing as will membership on outside organisations. The Town Council AGM will be held as soon as permitted. Members will find below consideration of the Mayoral Inauguration it is suggested that this be held later in the year. As such members are requested to confirm the venue for the Town Council AGM. Given the uncertainty over the date of this meeting it is suggested that it be held at the Council Offices.

##### Council Events

The organisation and planning of events take place sometime before the event is held. Depending on the event invitations are sent out, contracts entered into, purchases made, and orders placed. At the time of writing the government have not directed that large scale events should be cancelled. However, the council will incur costs if events are cancelled at the last minute. Officers have already been instructed to resist placing orders for goods and services as far as possible for events taking place over the next few months.

4<sup>th</sup> April Easter Egg Hunt – this event has largely been organised and associated costs have already been incurred.

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<sup>3</sup> Local Government Act 1972, Sch 12, para 14

<sup>4</sup> Local Government Act 1972, Sch 15, para 2

Options – continue take measures to reduce risk (hold outside, more collection tables) or distribute eggs to local schools and organisations. It is thought likely that the event will not be well supported by the community as people make the choice to isolate. As such it is suggested that the decision be made to distribute the eggs to suitable local organisations and local schools.

26<sup>th</sup> April Civic Service – invitations have already been sent out and organisational arrangements put in place. At the time of writing 2 other town's Civic Services have been cancelled. It is suggested that the Council cancels the Civic Service.

8<sup>th</sup> May VE Day Celebration - the preparations are in hand for this event however, costs have not yet been incurred. Given that this event is 6 weeks away it is suggested that the Chair and the Clerk determine at the end of March / early April whether this event will be held, based on government advice.

13<sup>th</sup> May Mayoral Inauguration – this event takes place after the Council's AGM. The preparations are in hand for this event however, costs have not yet been incurred. It is suggested that this event be held later in the year.

15<sup>th</sup> May Eco Event – preparation work has not yet been undertaken. It is suggested that this event be held later in the year.

#### Ongoing Youth Services

##### Youth council

The youth council typically meet every 2 weeks and in addition attend council and outside events. With fewer events, if any to attend, the need for the youth council to meet is reduced. It is however important to keep members of the youth council engaged to ensure continuity of the group. It is suggested that the youth council be contacted to seek their thoughts on interim ways of meeting and liaising with each other.

##### Pop up café

The current service provider is due to complete their contract week commencing 30<sup>th</sup> March. Measures are currently being put in place to continue the delivery on an in-house basis. It is suggested that this provision be put on hold for the time being and relaunched at a more suitable time. This would enable council officers to concentrate on issues arising from the threat of the coronavirus.

## 5. COUNCIL VISION

The proposed action supports the Aspirations of Council's Vision;

A1 To develop and enhance **partnerships** between HRTC, stakeholders, partners, community groups and residents

A2 To effectively and proactively **represent** our community

A5 To ensure the **council** is fit for purpose and efficient in its delivery of services

The proposed action supports the Objectives of Council's Vision;

4. Our Community



## 6. IMPLICATIONS

### **Corporate Implications**

The report recommends substantial delegated authority to the Clerk and the Chair of the Council. Whilst this is not in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation or other strategic council policies, it is felt necessary to seek this delegation to enable the council to effectively operate in these difficult and uncertain times. Please note that where possible decisions will be postponed until a suitable meeting can be held.

### **Legal Implications**

The report has highlighted the legal requirements of the Annual Town's meeting and the Council's AGM. It is intended that the council will work towards meeting these obligations. However, government advice / direction will be followed.

### **Financial Implications**

Measures have already been put in place to minimise the financial impact of events being cancelled or postponed.

### **Risk Implications**

The implications of the coronavirus are significant for the council in terms of:

- Service delivery
- Staff and member capacity

A communications plan is being developed to keep local residents informed and updated. This will also help to reduce reputational risk.

The measures suggested are to minimise the risk to health and safety.

### **Equalities Implications**

Houghton Regis Town Council has a duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

This project / issue does not discriminate.

### **Press Contact**

The communications plan will be used to shape communications to the press, via the website and social media.

## 7. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

This has been a difficult report to prepare. It is written at an uncertain time in an unprecedented environment. The report is intended to enable the council to continue to function as effectively as possible and to support the community of Houghton Regis.

## 8. APPENDICES

None

