HENLEY-ON-THAMES TOWN COUNCIL

CORONAVIRUS POLICY

Version ID	Description of change	Version sponsor	Policy Owner	Creation date	Approval date	Next review date
0.1	Initial draft	Town Clerk	Full Council	16/03/2020	n/a	n/a
1.0	Minor amendments and addition of action plan	Town Clerk	Full Council	17/03/2020	n/a	Min. every 7 days
1.1	Minor amendments following staff consultation	Town Clerk	Full Council	18/03/2020	n/a	"
1.2	Clause 5.1.13 added	Town Clerk	Full Council	20/03/20	n/a	"
1.3	Clause 5.6.5 added	Town Clerk	Full Council	23/03/20	n/a	"
1.4	Update to Government Guidance, Legal Framework, and clauses 5.1.7, 5.3.2, 5.5.1, 5.6.1, 5.6.4 (removed), 5.7, 5.8.1 (removed), 5.8.4 (removed), 5.10.4, 5.12.1, 5.13.2, 5.14 added	Town Clerk	Full Council	24/03/20	n/a	"
1.5	Addition of clause 5.6.5	Town Clerk	Full Council	24/03/20	n/a	"

Henley-on-Thames Town Council

1. SCOPE OF THE POLICY

1.1 This Policy outlines the Council's approach to contributing towards the national efforts to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus, and protect staff, councillors, and members of the public.

2. KEY FACTS

2.1 The following facts are taken from the World Health Organization and central government, unless otherwise specified (in brackets). These are correct as of the date of publication.

2.2 The COVID-19 virus is primarily spread when one person breathes in droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes usually within 2m of the infected person.

2.3 Infected people, with or without symptoms, may also spread the virus by touching a surface, (Harvard).

2.4 The virus can then remain on the surface for between a few hours or up to several days depending on conditions. The amount of infectious virus on any contaminated surface is likely to have decreased significantly by 72 hours.

2.5 The incubation period is estimated to range between 1-14 days, most commonly around five day.

2.6 Particular at-risk groups include those over 70, or anyone with the following conditions: asthma, COPD, emphysema, bronchitis, chronic heart disease, chronic kidney disease, chronic liver disease, Parkinson's, MND, MS, cerebral palsy, diabetes, spleen problems, a BMI of 40+, pregnant, or a weakened immune system as a result of medical conditions, steroid tablets or chemotherapy.

2.7 Whilst the illness is generally mild in children and young adults, about 1 in every 5 people who catch it require hospital care.

2.8 Initial symptoms include a high temperature and a new, continuous cough (NHS), and shortness of breath (CDC).

2.9 There is currently no evidence that food is a likely source or route of transmission for the virus (EFSA).

2.10 A worst-case scenario is that 80% of the population could be infect with coronavirus, with up to 20% of the workforce off sick during the peak of the epidemic (BBC).

2.11 Handwashing is advised as the best way to protect oneself from infections, above sanitiser gel (PHE).

Henley-on-Thames Town Council

3. CURRENT CENTRAL GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE (AS OF 24/03/20)

Employment

3.1 Follow general advice on preventing the spread of infection.

3.2 If a member of staff becomes unwell after travelling to a specified area (as defined at gov.uk) then specific guidance is available at gov.uk. Otherwise, normal practice should continue.

3.3 For contact with a suspected case in the workplace, no restrictions or special control measures are required while laboratory test results are awaited, as most cases turn out to be negative.

3.4 Where someone with a confirmed case of COVID-19 has recently been to the workplace, closure of the workplace is not recommended. Management should contact Public Health England for advice on cleaning areas and managing staff.

3.5 By law, medical evidence for sickness is not required for the first 7 days. Discretion around the need for medical evidence is advised. Statutory Sick Pay is now available from day 1.

3.6 There is no perceived increase in risk for handling post or freight from a specified area (detailed above).

3.7 All surfaces that a symptomatic infected person has come into contact with must been cleaned using disposable cloths and household detergents. All waste should be double-bagged and marked for storage until test results are received.

3.8 Working from home where possible should be implemented, and travel to work is only advised where the work is necessary.

Social distancing

3.9 The following measures are recommended for all people, but advised especially for those in at risk categories:

a) Avoiding contact with anyone displaying symptoms of COVID-19.
b) Avoiding shaking hands.
c) Avoiding non-essential use of public transport.
d) Avoiding large gatherings.
e) Avoiding gathering in smaller public spaces such as pubs, cinemas, restaurants, etc.
f) Avoiding gatherings with friends and family.
g) Using telephone and online services where possible.

Handwashing and respiratory hygiene

3.10 Washing hands with soap more often, and for at least 20 seconds.

Henley-on-Thames Town Council

3.11 Avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

3.12 Avoid close contact with people who have symptoms.

3.13 Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, throw the tissue in the bin, and wash your hands.

3.14 Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

4. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Under the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has a legal obligation to hold certain statutory meetings (such as the Annual Meeting of the Town Council (Mayor Making)). However, guidance is that in the current circumstances, a legal challenge to any council not holding an annual meeting as per the regulations is unlikely to be successful.

4.2 Attendance of meetings must in person, and voting may only be by those members attending the meeting. However, it is understood that MHCLG are looking to bring forward legislation to allow Council meetings to be held virtually (Gov.uk).

4.3 The Council has an obligation to submit its accounts to the external auditor. MHCLG has announced that this deadline has been extended to 30th September, but the external auditor has confirmed that this is not extended to parish and town councils.

4.4 The Council also has a duty of care towards its staff and service users.

5. POLICY STATEMENT

5.1 Staff welfare

5.1.1 All staff will be advised of central government advice to employees, and regularly updated as the situation progress. Staff also have an obligation to keep themselves informed.

5.1.2 The Council shall provide all necessary hand washing / sanitising facilities.

5.1.3 All meetings with external contacts shall be carried out remotely where possible.

5.1.4 Any essential face-to-face meetings with external contacts shall follow rules given on social distancing:

- Maximising distance between attendees
- No hand shaking
- Limited transfer of objects between people (e.g. no refreshments served)

Henley-on-Thames Town Council

5.1.5 Staff shall, insofar as possible, work only from their own desks. Anyone using any staff member's desk, laptop, keyboard, etc, shall clean down the equipment after use.

5.1.6 Staff shall ensure the wash their hands after any cash handling.

5.1.7 Staff shall be encouraged to work from home where operationally possible. Staff not carrying out essential tasks shall also be told to stay at home.

5.1.8 Staff shall limit any potential transmission of infections through hard surfaces, (such as not doing tea and coffee rounds).

5.1.9 Cleaning of staff communal spaces, including offices, kitchen, and toilets, especially frequently-used surfaces such as door handles and office equipment, shall be the highest priority.

5.1.10 Members of senior management will identify any workers in the higher-risk categories outlined by central government, and the Council shall, as a minimum standard, follow all central government recommendations as set out for all staff in according to their risk category.

5.1.11 All staff shall be required to observe central government recommendations relating to preventing the spread of infection in the workplace. Breaches may be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the Staff Handbook.

5.1.12 The Council's leave and absence policies, including sickness absence, time off for dependents, and bereavement leave, may be relaxed at the discretion of the Town Clerk.

5.1.13 However, staff required to self-isolate for 8 days or more and unable to work from home shall be required to provide proof of advice using the central government online service.

5.1.14 Town Hall parking spaces allocation shall not change. However, if members of staff that would usually use the spaces are working from home, these spaces can be allocated to other staff on an ad hoc basis.

5.1.15 All staff shall be responsible for any approved visitors they invite into the building, and ensuring they follow handwashing procedures, confirm they don't have coronavirus symptoms, and

5.2 Council meetings

5.2.1 The Council shall endeavour to abide by all legislation governing meetings required by statute (Annual Town Meeting, and Annual Meeting of the Town Council (Mayor-Making). These may be postponed or, in the case of the ATM, held online.

Henley-on-Thames Town Council

5.2.2 Other council, committee, sub-committee, and working group meetings will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, and will only take place where matters cannot either be deferred or dealt with under delegated authority.

5.2.3 Where essential meetings do take place, the following measures will be taken:

- No refreshments will be served at any meeting
- All attendees shall follow social distancing recommendations
- The meeting room shall be arranged so as to allow the maximum distance between participants
- All frequently-used hard surfaces (e.g. door handles) shall be cleaned as late as possible before and as soon as possible after the meeting.

5.2.4 Where councillors are unable to attend the meeting due to advice that they self-isolate, normal rules for the appointment of substitutes shall apply.

5.2.5 In circumstances where it is not possible for a quorate meeting to be convened, or for that meeting to be politically-balanced, the meeting shall be cancelled.

5.3 Information Centre

5.3.1 The Council shall close the Information Centre for all tourist information, and also for walk-in appointments for Council services.

5.3.2 The Council shall provide remote telephone and email support to residents for Council services as far as possible.

5.3.3 Any essential in-person appointments shall be arranged and assessed on a case-by-case basis.

5.3.4 Information Centre staff shall ensure they follow strict handwashing procedures after each appointment, especially after any cash handling.

5.4 Council events

5.4.1 All non-statutory Council-run events shall be postponed where possible, or otherwise cancelled. These include the Town Medal awards, Mayoral Dinner, and VE Day commemorations.

5.4.2 All booked bands due to play at the Mill Meadows bandstand shall be cancelled.

5.4.3 Where tickets for Council-run events have been bought, refunds shall be offered.

5.5 Markets

Henley-on-Thames Town Council

5.5.1 Market traders selling essential items such as food and gorceries shall be permitted to continue to trade, until any such time as central government prohibits such activities.

5.5.2 Market traders not wishing to attend, or unable to attend, shall not be charged.

5.5.3 Market traders selling food and drink shall be required to provide a risk assessment demonstrating that all reasonable action has been taken to minimize the risk of infection.

5.6 Outside spaces

5.6.1 The Council shall maintain a minimum level of service to its outside spaces, to ensure the health and safety of the public.

5.6.2 Parks staff shall be required to observe all central government social distancing recommendations when interacting with other staff or members of the public.

5.6.3 The Parks Manager shall ensure that thorough cleaning of the Parks depot and parks equipment is carried out, in accordance with any central government guidance.

5.6.4 Where possible, the Council shall close and lock its playgrounds and public toilets. Where there are no gates / doors, the Council shall display signage advising the public not to use the facilities.

5.6.5 As central government have stated that all non-essential travel should be avoided, the Council shall not enforce any overstaying of Council moorings.

5.7 Hires of Council facilities

5.7.1 All hires of Council facilities, except markets (as detailed above) shall be cancelled.

5.7.2 the Council shall waive any cancellation fees.

5.7.3 The Council will endeavour to accommodate any postponed events.

5.8 Facilities management

5.8.1 The cleaning of all Council facilities, especially the Town Hall, King's Arms Barn, and Old Fire Station Gallery, shall prioritize all high-risk areas of infection, such as door handles, toilets, and kitchen areas.

5.8.2 All reasonable precautions, such as use of PPE, shall be taken to ensure the risk of infection to cleaning and caretaking staff is minimized to a high standard.

5.8.3 All deliveries shall be left by the Town Hall entrance, and all external contractors shall be required to wash their hands on entering the building, confirm that they are displaying no

Henley-on-Thames Town Council

symptoms of coronavirus, and the member of staff shall be responsible for ensuring they follow agreed social distancing measures.

5.8.4 Clear signage to staff, councillors, and visitors regarding social distancing and hygiene shall be prominently positioned at Council facilities.

5.9 Community support

5.9.1 The Council recognizes that this is a worrying time for the public, especially for the more vulnerable members of the community.

5.9.2 The Council shall provide all possible assistance to the emergency services, central government, other local authorities, and charities, in any efforts to address the ongoing crisis. This will include free use of Council facilities, and assistance in communicating any guidance or initiatives to improve community safety.

5.9.3 The Council shall provide support to the community in signposting them to get the correct advice on the situation as it progresses.

5.10 Finance and insurance

5.10.1 The Council shall ensure that this policy is reviewed by its insurers and human resources consultants to ensure it adequately protects by the Council and its staff.

5.10.2 The Council shall take ongoing advice from its investment managers to ensure that its funds are adequately protected during a potentially volatile financial period.

5.10.3 The Council will endeavour to meet all audit deadlines, taking advice from its internal and external auditors, and requesting deadline extensions where required.

5.10.4 The Council will consider any hardship requests from tenants on a case-by-case basis, taking into account government legislation on commercial tenancies during the crisis.

5.10.5 The Council shall carry out a financial impact assessment to assess the impact of this policy and the coronavirus crisis.

5.11 Bus service

5.11.1 The Council shall follow the advice and example of the operator of the Henley Town Bus Service, Reading Buses, regarding the ongoing operation of the 151, 152, and 153 bus services.

5.12 On-street parking enforcement

5.12.1 The Council shall seek permission from Oxfordshire County Council to suspend the renewal of resident parking permits and the enforcement of on-street parking restrictions.

Henley-on-Thames Town Council

5.13 Cemetery

5.13.1 The Council shall continue to permit burials in the Fairmile cemetery, and shall ensure all funeral directors carry out risk assessments.

5.13.2 The Council shall not permit any use of its chapel facilities.

5.14 Allotments

5.14.1 The Council shall continue to permit the tending of allotments as a safe way of practicing social distancing and taking exercising, unless otherwise advised.

5.15 Action plan

5.15.1 The Town Clerk in consultation with the senior management team shall put in place an action plan to ensure this policy is adhered to.

6. POLICY REVIEW

6.1 As the situation is currently evolving, authority shall be delegated to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Mayor and Chair of the Finance Strategy and Management Committee, to vary this policy in response to central government and professional guidance.

6.2 This policy will be reviewed regularly, and at least every 7 days.

Henley-on-Thames Town Council

Coronavirus Policy Action Plan

TOPIC	ACTION	WHO	DONE
Staff welfare			
Regularly updated with government advice	Sign up to gov.uk for updates and circulate to staff	Office Manager	YES
Provide handwashing / sanitizing facilities	Attempt to source further, ongoing supplies	Office Manager	ONGOING
External meetings carried out remotely where possible	Contact all planned meetings to rearrange	All staff	ONGOING
Face-to-face meetings to follow social distancing rules	Staff to communicate these to attendees	All staff	ONGOING
Staff to stay at own desks	Clean down other desks / equipment when using Cleaning materials to be kept on hand in office	All staff Office Manager	ONGOING
Staff encouraged to work from home where possible	Arrange for VPNs to be set-up Investigate team working software options Staff to confirm home working with line manager	Office Manager Office Manager All staff	YES ONGOING
All staff not carrying out essential tasks shall be required to not attend work	Staff to be informed SMT to identify lists of essential taks	Town Clerk SMT	YES
Limit potential transmission through hard surfaces	Staff not to offer to do tea / coffee rounds Handwashing after all cash handling	All staff	ONGOING ONGOING
Cleaning of office areas and frequently-touched surfaces to be prioritized	New rota drawn up for cleaning and caretaking staff	T&C Manager	YES
Staff in higher-risk categories to be identified	SMT to notify of staff that meet criteria in 2.6 Higher-risk staff to be given tailored information	SMT Town Clerk	YES YES
Observe government recommendations on preventing the spread of infection	All staff to observe	All staff	ONGOING
Leave and absence policies to be relaxed at discretion of Town Clerk	Staff to direct queries to line manager and Town Clerk Clarify sick leave arrangements with staff	All staff Town Clerk	ONGOING YES
Council meetings			

Henley-on-Thames Town Council

Annual Town Meeting	ATM to be held 'online'	Office Manager	YES
Annual Meeting of the Town Council (Mayor-Making)	To be postponed	Mayor's PA	YES
Council and committee / sub-committee meetings	To be cancelled other than for urgent business (in consultation with chair of the committee) Cancellations to be advertised	SMT	ONGOING
Essential council / committee meetings	Measures to be taken to mitigate chances of infection	Town Sergeant	ONGOING
Information Centre			
To be closed for all walk-ins	To be advertised Notice on door	T&C Manager IC Manager	YES YES
In-person appointments	Arranged on case-by-case basis	IC Manager and T&C Manager	ONGOING
Council events			
Town Medal awards	To be postponed	Mayor's PA	YES
Mayoral Dinner	To be cancelled	Mayor's PA	YES
VE Day commemorations	HTC facilitated public events to be cancelled	T&C Manager	YES
Markets			
Only market traders selling essential food and grocery items to be permitted still to trade Traders not attending shall not be charged Market traders selling food and drink required to provide coronavirus risk assessment	Inform market traders and receive risk assessments	Office Manager	YES / ONGOING
Outside spaces			
Staff to observe social distancing recommendations	Inform all staff	Parks Manager	ONGOING
Cleaning of parks depot / equip.	Ensure it is carried out thoroughly and regularly	Parks Manager	ONGOING
Cleaning tasks and general activities	Carry our risk assessment for parks staff cleaning Review external contractor cleaning programme	Parks Manager	

Henley-on-Thames Town Council

Playgrounds	Lock gates and erect signage to prevent usage	Parks Manager	YES
Hire of Council facilities			
Private events	To be cancelled	T&C Manager	YES
Public events	To be cancelled	T&C Manager	YES
Facilities management			
Signage	Signs about hygiene and infection control to be posted	Town Sergeant Parks Manager	YES
Cleaning	High-risk areas (e.g. door handles) to be prioritized Precautions taken to minimize risk to cleaning staff	T&C Manager	YES
Community support			
Information signposting	Training to be given to Information Centre staff	T&C Manager	YES
Community support initiatives	To investigate ways the Town Council can actively contribute towards efforts to mitigate the crisis	T&C Manager Town Clerk	ONGOING
Finance and insurance			
Employer's liability	Review policy with HR consultants	Town Clerk	YES
Public and employer's liability cover	Review policy with insurers	Accountant	YES
Investment security	Seek advice from investment managers	Accountant	ONGOING
Internal and external audits	Liaise with auditors as needed regarding deadlines	Accountant	YES
Bus service			
Continuity of service	Seek advice from bus operator	Town Clerk	YES
Parking enforcement			
Continuity of enforcement	Seek guidance on on-going enforcement from OCC	T&C Manager	YES
Burials			

Henley-on-Thames Town Council

Burial attendance	Ensure funeral directors carry out risk assessments	Cemetery Administrator	YES
Chapel	To be closed	Cemetery Administrator	YES
Communication			
Press releases	Draft and forward to press outlets	Town Clerk	YES
Internal communications	Send copy of policy and action plan to staff and members	Town Clerk	YES
Website and social media	Post information on changes on website and social media	Town Clerk	YES