

Hampshire County Council Public Health update Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Briefing for County Councillors



This briefing will focus on today's announcements by the Government including those on Veterans' Services, business rates, shielding the most vulnerable and prison visits. The briefing will also provide an update local issues including Members' meetings and highway services.

Members are kindly reminded to direct any coronavirus related queries and comments to the new dedicated inbox - coronavirus.memberqueries@hants.gov.uk

[View in browser](#)

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National context

Government's daily press conference

The Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Adviser joined the Prime Minister at today's press conference. The Prime Minister commended the 405,000 people who have responded to yesterday's call for NHS volunteers. The Prime Minister reminded viewers of the core policy to: 'Stay Home, Protect the NHS, Save Lives'.

Parliament recess

There is a [motion on the order paper](#) calling for the House to rise tonight, almost a week earlier than planned, and enter recess until 21 April.

Coronavirus legislation

The emergency [legislation](#) has today cleared the House of Lords without amendment and will now become law.

Government communication

The Government has [launched](#) a GOV.UK Coronavirus Information service on WhatsApp. The free service aims to provide information and advice about coronavirus (COVID-19), and further reduce the burden on NHS services.

To use service, simply add 07860 064422 in your phone contacts and then message the word 'hi' in a WhatsApp message to get started.

Supporting vulnerable and high-risk people

MHCLG last night circulated the much anticipated guidance for local authorities and Local Resilience Forums on the Local Support System to 'shield' c.1.5m most medically vulnerable. It sets out a three-fold offer of food, medicines and social contact, to support those who are shielding themselves, but do not have a support network that they can rely on.

Changes to Veterans UK services

The Government has made [further changes](#) to the Veterans UK services including: temporarily removing the telephone helpline, cancelling planned medical examinations and suspending face to face meetings. All Armed Forces Pensions War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme regular payments will continue to be made as usual.

Business rates

The Treasury has [announced](#) that some of the exclusions for business rates relief have been removed, so that retail, leisure, and hospitality properties that have closed as a result of the Covid-19 restriction measures will now also be eligible for the relief. Guidance for local authorities on the application of the holiday will be published by MHCLG shortly and the Government has confirmed that local authorities will be fully compensated.

MOT exemptions

The Government has [announced](#) that vehicles which would usually require an MOT test will be exempt from needing a test for 6 months from 30 March 2020. Practical driving tests and annual testing for lorries, buses and coaches have been suspended for up to 3 months.

Prison visits cancelled

The Ministry of Justice has [instructed](#) that all prison visits are temporarily cancelled in order to comply with social distancing rules. Prisons across the estate are to receive 900 secure phone handsets to allow continued contact between prisoners and their families.

Business closures

The Government has published [guidance](#) on the further businesses and premises expected to close. This guidance states that hotels, hostels and B&Bs are amongst the services which must now close. However, where hotels, hostels, and B&Bs are providing rooms to support homeless people and other vulnerable people, through arrangements with local authorities and other public bodies, they should remain open. Online retail is still open and encouraged. Postal and delivery service will run as normal.

EU funding

The [European Commission has initiated](#) an EU COVID-19 package to support all EU Member States. This, in effect, releases existing funds held at EU level and relaxes rules to provide more flexibility on how current EU funding allocation can be used in each Member State. The UK Government is eligible to participate in this package, but it is not yet known if it intends to do so.

Arts Council England funding

Arts Council England is making [£160m of emergency funding](#) available to help arts organisations and workers affected by coronavirus.

Local context

Members' meetings

Members received an email from the Chief Executive yesterday evening (24) to confirm the temporary protocol for Members' meetings during the coronavirus crisis. It has been agreed with the Leader and Cabinet to implement interim arrangements for Members' meetings and decision-making until the end of June 2020. This will involve all strategic and policy related decisions being deferred until July. Regular updates that would have normally been received by Committees, Panels and Cabinet will be circulated electronically. The remaining, business critical, operational decisions that are needed will be taken by Chief Officers, under existing delegated powers, strictly in consultation with relevant Executive Lead Members and reports published in advance to ensure transparency. For further details, the protocol can be found in the covid-19 updates section of the [Members' Portal](#).

Highways maintenance

All highways maintenance resources will be directed to emergency and safety related work during the Coronavirus outbreak, rather than ongoing maintenance. This message is communicated on the County Council's [website](#).

Additional links

- Hampshire County Council webpages on coronavirus (including links to press releases): <https://www.hants.gov.uk/socialcareandhealth/coronavirus>
- Latest information on coronavirus: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
- NHS information on coronavirus: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
- Q&A from Public Health England on coronavirus: <https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/23/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-what-you-need-to-know/>
- Guidance for local government: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-government>
- County Councils Network (CCN) coronavirus information pages: <https://www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk/coronavirus-information-for-local-authorities/>
- Local Government Association (LGA) councillor guidance: <https://www.local.gov.uk/covid-19-outbreak-councillor-guidance>