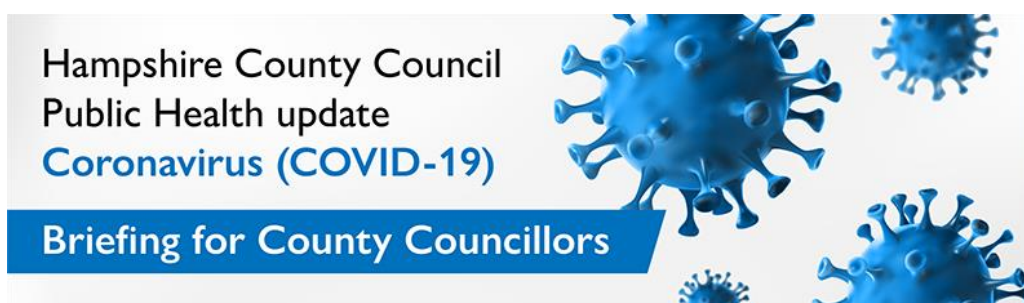




This briefing focuses on the announcements made at today's press conference and includes government updates and information on local government finance, council tax, testing, school closures, Universal Credit and telecommunications infrastructure.

The briefing also provides an update on local issues including a special focus on social care, including support for care staff, the community, care homes and independent providers. Information and updates are also included on libraries, trading standards and school meals for vulnerable and key worker children.

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](#)

Edition No. 29

16 April 2020

National context

Government's daily press conference

The press conference was chaired by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Dominic Raab.

The Government reported the latest coronavirus figures – 327,608 people have been tested, of whom 103,093 have tested positive. There have been 13,729 deaths in hospitals.

Also announced was the extension of UK's coronavirus lockdown by at least three more weeks. Although there have been indications that the social distancing measures in place are proving successful, government advisers suggest the evidence is "mixed and inconsistent", and in some settings infections are increasing. It was highlighted that relaxing any measures currently in place would risk damage to both public health and the economy.

Five points were highlighted that would influence decisions on relaxing social distancing including: ensuring the NHS can cope; evidence showing a sustained and consistent fall in death rates; reliable data showing the rate of infection is decreasing to manageable levels; confidence in the range of operational challenges and finally, confidence that any adjustments would not risk a second peak.

The slides and datasets to accompany today's coronavirus press conference are available to [view online](#).

Local government finance

The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government [announced](#) that councils will be allowed to defer £2.6 billion in business rates payments to central government. Furthermore, £850 million in adult and children's social care grants will be paid up front this month, rather than monthly in April, May and June.

Council Tax

The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government has [written](#) to local authorities providing a brief Q&A note on the technical implementation of the £500 million hardship fund.

Social care

A new [collection page has been created](#) which brings together coronavirus guidance published for the social care sector and other relevant guidance.

Digital Social Care have [launched](#) a free helpline to support adult social care providers with the rapid uptake in technology necessitated by coronavirus.

The helpline is available Monday-Friday, from 9am-5pm on 0208 133 3430 or help@digitalsocialcare.co.uk.

Testing

The Department of Health and Social Care has [published](#) new guidance on coronavirus testing for critical workers who are self-isolating.

School closures

The Department for Education has [updated](#) the guidance for parents and carers about the closure of schools and other educational settings to include a new section for admissions.

The House of Commons Library has [published](#) an insight which examines the impact of school closures on the education of children and young people in England with special educational needs (SEN).

Early Years and childcare

The Government has [updated](#) the guidance for local authorities, early years settings and childminders about childcare provision during the coronavirus pandemic.

GCSE and A level grading

Ofqual have [launched a consultation](#) seeking views on a number of features of the exceptional arrangements for awarding GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2020. They propose to apply the same arrangements to Extended Project Qualifications and the Advanced Extension Award.

Universal Credit

The Department for Work and Pensions has [announced](#) that people applying for Universal Credit will be able to use their existing Government Gateway account to confirm their identity to speed up their claim. The Department is acting to streamline processes where possible after receiving more than 1.4 million claims since 16 March.

Community health services

NHS England has published the [Community Health Services Standard Operating Procedure \(SOP\)](#). The guidance aims to support community services as they respond to coronavirus and includes a range of resources, information and guidance for teams on developing operating responses for home visits and in healthcare settings, virtual triage and assessments. The SOP should be used in conjunction with the [discharge guidance](#) and [COVID-19 prioritisation](#) within community services document.

Construction

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Alok Sharma, has [written](#) to the UK's construction sector to thank them for continuing make a valued and critical contribution to the resilience of the UK.

The Construction Leadership Council has [published](#) site operating procedures to protect the construction workforce during the coronavirus pandemic.

Deaths in March

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has [published](#) an analysis of all deaths that occurred in England and Wales in March, registered up to 6 April, where coronavirus was involved. There are breakdowns by age and sex and the causes of death mentioned on the death certificate.

Fraud

The National Crime Agency is [warning](#) the public to be vigilant as criminals adapt their tactics in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. The [Take five to stop fraud](#) national campaign offers advice to help people to protect themselves from preventable financial fraud. Information, advice and resources are also available on the [Friends Against Scams website](#).

Misinformation

Social media platform, Facebook, today [announced](#) that its users will soon be told whether they may have seen online posts containing misinformation regarding the coronavirus pandemic. The company has said that it has so far labelled 40 million Facebook posts with warnings that the content may be false.

Telecommunications infrastructure

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is concerned that there continues to be arson attacks on mobile telephone mast sites and other telecommunications infrastructure. Much of this has been fuelled by misinformation linking coronavirus to the 5G network. DCMS asks that any incidents of damage and suspicious behaviour are reported to the police immediately.

'Hybrid' House of Commons

A ['hybrid' House model](#) has been developed and has been chosen as an achievable first step towards a virtual Parliament by the House authorities. The new measures require agreement by MPs when they return from the Easter recess on 21 April.

Local context

Supporting vulnerable residents

Positive feedback from residents indicates that the new arrangements to provide urgent help to Hampshire's most vulnerable residents are working effectively. Any resident in need of urgent support during the coronavirus pandemic can contact Hampshire's dedicated helpline – HantsHelp4Vulnerable. Individuals are then triaged depending on need.

Those with more complex, social care needs are directed to the County Council's specialist support team, whilst others requiring urgent access to food, basic supplies, medication and social contact are referred to one of Hampshire's district-based Local Response Centres.

Based in the heart of Hampshire's communities, the Local Response Centres bring together local council and voluntary sector professionals with volunteers to coordinate support at a neighbourhood level. They are working closely with local supermarkets and charities, including foodbanks.

The County Council is also proactively contacting residents identified as 'extremely vulnerable' to ensure they receive any urgent support they require. These arrangements are kept under continuous review, with changes being made on an ongoing basis to respond to the developing situation.

Hampshire County Council Care Homes

As a large provider of residential and nursing homes the County Council is seeing the impact of Covid-19 in several of its settings, which have a total capacity to support 1,100 people. Of its sixteen residential and nursing care homes, staff absence has been challenging at times over the last few weeks, but with resourcing and staffing capacity tracked daily, the County Council has been able to flex and mobilise additional support where required.

Nursing is the most challenging area with a higher number of deaths than during the pre-COVID period. As testing has not been routinely undertaken for people in community settings, although suspected, these deaths cannot be confirmed as being directly attributable to the virus.

Close family visitors continue to be welcomed in the homes for those residents who are at end of life. Strict protocols are in place to ensure appropriate hygiene precautions are always taken.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

A lot of effort is being made to source adequate supplies of PPE and while this has been extremely difficult at times, County Council care homes have been able to operate within the required guidance from Public Health England, which has evolved as the pandemic has progressed. The Local Resilience Forum (LRF) is now involved in sourcing supplies – including some deliveries from the national stockpile and quantities of the County Council's own direct deliveries are coming through, helping to mitigate the earlier difficulties. It is important to note that the demands upon PPE supplies will continue to increase. Pro-active work is being undertaken to source supplies, for internal needs, as well as those of the wider care sector in Hampshire (where individual homes / providers are unable to obtain deliveries through their own usual supply chains). The County Council is also acting on behalf of the LRF to create a central emergency stockpile that can be called upon, at cost, by partners.

Supporting independent providers

Support for the market which comprises some 750 service providers and 500 care homes across Hampshire, is critical at this time. This includes regular communication and support for securing supplies of PPE where needed, including deliveries from the County Council's stock and the LRF's emergency supplies.

Regular dialogue is being maintained with industry bodies such as Hampshire Care Association, the Care Quality Commission and NHS colleagues responsible for overseeing the health needs of residents in care homes across the county. Additionally, the County Council is working closely with care homes supporting residents funded by the County Council to ensure their financial position remains strong and their cash-flow is maintained.

The County Council's Care Governance, Safeguarding and Care Management functions remain fully functioning to support the market. There have been recent occasions where those providers at risk of failing in their ability to care for residents have been supported – through provision of emergency staffing and also calling upon other providers to provide mutual aid. The care sector and the County Council's services remain fully committed to supporting vulnerable residents through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Support in the community

Community services have so far seen less impact from Covid-19. Staffing absence numbers are relatively low in the reablement service which supports over 500 people who require care in their own homes. The County Council has, along with NHS community partners, been able to affect significant reductions across all acute

hospitals – in anticipation of acute bedded care for people with Covid-19. Positively acute hospitals are currently operating at approximately 60% capacity and the County Council will work with NHS partners to ensure that community-based services remain resilient and where necessary, can appropriately draw upon NHS support into community settings.

The County Council is keen for urgent testing to be introduced for social care staff and are awaiting confirmation of the arrangements across Hampshire. Whilst there are plans for one testing site in the south east of the county, a range of testing locations is being sought. It is also hoped that more innovative testing arrangements will be deployed – such as care home / home delivered and collections of testing kits - to enable a care home workforce, which frequently has limited access to vehicles, to be fully supported.

Support for care staff

This is a particularly challenging time for all those working in adult social care. Ensuring the right support is in place for staff is the County Council's absolute priority, and a range of initiatives have been introduced to support the workforce with both their physical, as well as their mental wellbeing. This will continue long- term.

The County Council are immensely proud of its staff and those across the wider sector who deserve significant recognition for the compassion and care they are providing at this most difficult of times.

Legionnaire's disease

Hampshire County Council's Property Services team is [advising](#) owners of public, private and community buildings currently closed due to the coronavirus outbreak on steps to take to reduce the risk of legionella being present when they reopen. Additionally, detailed [guidance](#) and [Approved Codes of Practice](#) on managing water systems and the risk of legionella, have been published by the Health and Safety Executive.

Hampshire Libraries

The County Council is [encouraging](#) more people to join the library and discover the variety of digital content and services available. The Library Service is using social media to continue engaging with customers and to provide fun and engaging activities for all ages online during the coronavirus pandemic.

Free digital resources are on offer from Hampshire Libraries, for more information visit the [Library Service webpages](#). Membership is free to anyone who lives, works or studies in the county.

School meals

Hampshire County Council's catering service, HC3S, continues to work alongside colleagues in schools to ensure that vulnerable and key worker children receive nutritious meals during the coronavirus pandemic. From 30 March to 10 April, over 51,000 meals were delivered to schools across Hampshire. [Press release](#) published online.

HC3S is also sharing recipes and tips online to help residents make the most of their food at home. The recipes are listed on [HC3S's webpages](#) and on [HC3S Education Catering](#) Facebook page.

Trading standards

Hampshire County Council's Trading Standards team is [encouraging residents](#) to only use approved tradespeople for essential house repairs during the Coronavirus pandemic. Residents can use [Buy with Confidence](#) – a directory of approved and insured tradespeople.

Maritime industry

Solent LEP in collaboration with Maritime UK have developed a short [survey](#) to better understand the current needs of the maritime industry and how businesses in the sector may access government support.

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>