

STOKE FERRY PARISH COUNCIL

Coronavirus Contingency & Action Plan

The following plan sets out the contingency measures Stoke Ferry 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	Meetings take place in a small room with 10-30 people present. No scope for implementing 'social distancing' measures.	High	Cancel monthly Parish Council 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 (see table below).	All meetings will be held via Zoom virtually until further notice. The Coronavirus Bill is in place until 7 May 2021. However any decisions that cannot wait until the next meeting will be determined by the Chair and Clerk and taken by email and ratified at the next full Council meeting.
2	Annual Parish Council Meeting	Meetings take place in a small room with 10-30 people present. No scope for implementing 'social distancing' measures.	High	Cancel Annual Parish Council Meeting scheduled for 11 th May 2020.	Statutory requirement for meeting to be held in May. However, Government considering bringing forward legislation to amend this statutory requirement.	This was cancelled and next held May 2021.

3	Annual Parish Meeting	Meetings take place in a small room with 10-30 people present. No scope for implementing 'social distancing' measures.	High	Cancel Annual Parish Meeting scheduled for 11 th May 2020.	Statutory requirement for meeting to be held between 1 st March and 1 st June each year. However, Government considering bringing forward legislation to amend this statutory requirement.	This was cancelled and next held May 2021.
4	Networking Meetings & Forums	Face-to-face meetings, sometimes involving large groups of people.	Med	Members and employees not allowed to attend.	Should not impact on Parish Council business. Networking can be done via email, telephone or by holding virtual meetings.	No further action required.
5	Parish Clerk's Work	Works from home. Attends meetings. Runs errands (post office/bank/shop/parish noticeboard, etc.).	Low	Cancel meetings. Minimise errands by purchasing stamps/stationery online.	Parish Clerk works primarily from home, so the situation should not impact greatly on her ability to do her work.	Stationery and postage to be ordered online. Post is ordered via online Royal Mail service.
6	Contractor Grounds Maintenance Work	Works outdoors. Unable to work from home due to the nature of the work involved.	Med	Contractor responsible for health and safety risk assessment. Provide advice, re: social distancing.	This is responsibility of the contractor	No further action required.
7	Employee Appraisal Meetings (Oct 2020)	Difficult to implement 'social distancing' measures as meetings held in a small room or social setting.	Med	Postpone meetings or hold virtual meetings if situation doesn't improve by autumn.	Will have little impact, providing employees are encouraged to raise any concerns/urgent matters to be discussed in the meantime.	No further action required.
8	Member Sickness Absence	Possibility of members being unable to carry out normal Council duties due to illness or self-isolation.	Med	Promote Government advice on staying safe and healthy during the pandemic.	Absence of individual members would not impact on Council business, but multiple absences may leave Council in quorate.	No further action at this time as risk is low due to Clerk being able to remain indoors with only shopping once a week. There are no visitors to their home other than husband working who is a lower risk worker.

9	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.	As above.
10	Employee Sickness Absence (Grounds Maintenance Contractor)	Possibility of Litter Picker being unable to carry out normal Council work due to illness or self-isolation.	Low	Contractor is responsible for employee awareness of sickness absence procedures/ Coronavirus advice.	Absence due to illness or self-isolation may impact on the grass being cut; though it is believed the numbers of contractors who attend is no greater than 2 and low risk	No further action required.
11	Internal Audit	Possibility of Internal Auditor being unable to carry out audit due to illness or self-isolation.	Low	Consider if audit could be delivered via post/email/files sharing and teleconferencing.	Council's accounts due to be examined/audited in April. This must be done before accounts are approved by the Council.	Clerk arranged with Internal Auditor to do via online file sharing. Resolved.
12	External Audit (Approving The AGAR)	Accounts must be approved at a meeting of the Council by no later than 29 th June and submitted to auditor by 1 st 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 th September. 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.	Deadlines for AGAR has been extended however the Clerk will continue to work on the AGAR to resolve as soon as possible. AGAR sent resolved.

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), most Parish Councils will 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.

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	<p>It is essential that the Council continues to pay its staff, suppliers and contractors throughout the pandemic as far as is reasonably possible, but cheques cannot be signed if Councillors/the Clerk are ill or self-isolating and payments cannot be approved as normal if meetings are cancelled.</p>	<p>All payments are made by cheque, signed by two members of the Council.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>RFO to draw up a list of payments at the end of 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. List to be circulated by email to all members of the Council for approval. Payments to be actioned via online banking mechanism due to the higher risk category of the council authorised signatories, and the final list of payments made together with any relevant invoices will be submitted to the next available meeting of the Council (see Financial Regulations, which explains the RFO's delegated authority).</p>
2	Planning Applications	<p>The consultation period for planning applications is 21 days, meaning not all applications can be considered at meetings of the Full Council.</p>	<p>Planning Protocol in place, which sets out how the Parish Council considers planning matters on which it is consulted by a Planning Authority.</p>	<p>All planning applications to be decided in accordance with Option 2 of the Council's Planning Protocol, whereby the Council's response will be delegated to the Parish Clerk acting on the outcome of an email consultation with Parish Councillors (with the exception that it will not be possible for an extraordinary meeting to be requested to further discuss the application, unless this is an informal virtual meeting).</p>
3	Annual Budget	<p>Draft SPC budget for 2020/2021 due to be reviewed and amended based on the 2019/2020 year-end position.</p>	<p>RFO would normally review and revise the draft budget based on the year-end position and present the amended budget for approval at a meeting of the Full Council.</p>	<p>RFO to review and revise the draft budget based on the year-end position. RFO to circulate the amended budget to all members of the Council and to ask the Council to approve the amended budget via an email consultation. Final approved budget to be published on the Council's website and Council's decision to be noted at the next available meeting of the Council.</p>
4	Election Of Chairman	<p>Annual Parish Council Meeting due to be postponed.</p>	<p>Would normally take place at Annual Parish Council Meeting.</p>	<p>Chairman to continue in office until such time as the Annual Parish Council Meeting may be held and his successor elected.</p>
5	Election Of Vice-Chairman	<p>Annual Parish Council Meeting due to be postponed.</p>	<p>Would normally take place at Annual Parish Council Meeting.</p>	<p>Vice-Chairman to continue in office until such time as the Annual Parish Council Meeting may be held and his successor elected.</p>

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 all members of the Council and to ask the Council to approve items via an email consultation. 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 to all members of the Council and to ask the Council to make a decision about the items via an email consultation.
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 to circulate relevant items to all members of the Council via email. Councillors to provide email updates.
9	Decisions Delegated	Decisions are made within meetings.	These are achieved by making decisions within meetings and recorded in minutes at that time.	Clerk will be provided delegated powers through the scheme of delegation. The Clerk is to keep a list of all decisions made to be presented for ratification at the next possible Council meeting.

For all items listed in the table above, should Stoke Ferry Parish Council become inquorate due to member illness and so unable to make a decision within the necessary timeframe, then the 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. 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 Stoke Ferry.

Adopted by Stoke Ferry Parish Council on 31 March 2020
Revised 14 April 2020 – Approved on 14 April 2020
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