

## Coronavirus

### A briefing note for parish and town councils in Northamptonshire

#### Issue No.2: Wednesday 1 April 2020

This weekly briefing rounds up all the latest information of interest to parish and town councils on Coronavirus, the impact on council business, and the community response.

- 1. Virtual Meetings** – Northants CALC has seen and commented on a draft of *The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020*. We understand that the regulations will be made either this week or next. The regulations make provision for holding all council meetings virtually, on a platform such as Zoom. They also cancel the requirement to hold an annual meeting in 2020. The draft contains a “sunset clause”, meaning all of its provisions fall automatically as of the local elections on 6 May 2021. As soon as the regulations are made, we will issue detailed guidance to all member councils.
- 2. Community Response** – Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) is co-ordinating the community response, in partnership with all the district and borough councils. Individuals and groups of volunteers have been asked to sign up (see [www.northantscalc.com/coronavirus](http://www.northantscalc.com/coronavirus)) and now NCC has launched a helpline for ANYONE in the county needing help. Community groups, including those led by parish and town councils can use the number instead of using a local number, which needs to be manned. The Community Resilience Service will co-ordinate requests for help in conjunction with the district and borough councils, mapping those requests by area and linking them up with local community groups, volunteers and voluntary organisations who have pledged their support. The number is **0300 126 1000 (option 5)** and individuals can also email [nccg.communityresilience.covid19@nhs.net](mailto:nccg.communityresilience.covid19@nhs.net) to ask for help.
- 3. Grass cutting** – This has been the question of the week: should we mow, or shouldn't we? I can confirm that there is no legislation or government guidance on this topic specifically. It comes down to whether the mowing is “essential” and whether it can be carried out in accordance with general guidance, e.g. on social distancing. Councils are advised to carry out a risk assessment, probably in conjunction with the mowing contractor, and make a joint decision. It may not need to be all or nothing. For example, safety splays on highways could be mown, whereas an unused area of a churchyard could be left to grow long this year to be trimmed in the autumn. If any guidance does emanate from government, we will circulate it.
- 4. Funding for Groups** – The Northamptonshire Community Foundation (NCF) has launched a Coronavirus Response and Recovery Fund. It is open now for applications up to £3,000. NCF aims to make BACS payments quickly once the application is approved without recourse to a contract, although it will expect some basic due diligence from new and emerging groups. Please visit the NCF web site at <https://bit.ly/3aBIHzs> to complete a short online application.
- 5. Northants CALC Annual Membership Invoices** – These will go out as planned this week with a “pay by” date of 31 May 2020. If your council can pay by then, we would be very grateful. If it can't, don't worry, we won't be sending round the bailiffs! We completely understand.
- 6. NALC Web Site** – Check out the National Association of Local Councils web page at <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/coronavirus> for all sorts of useful resources, including the first draft of *Coronavirus Case Studies* highlighting good ideas from around the country.
- 7. And Finally** – One pioneering parish council in South Northamptonshire has experimented with the use of Virtual Reality headsets for allowing remote attendance at council meetings. See [www.northantscalc.com](http://www.northantscalc.com) for details.