

## Coronavirus

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

#### Issue No.5: Wednesday 22 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. Annual Return** – The external auditor for all parish and town councils and parish meetings in Northamptonshire is PKF Littlejohn. Today and tomorrow PKF is sending out by email revised instructions on the audit timetable and process for 2020. If you haven't received yours by Friday, it might have gone astray. Look in your spam traps and if you still can't find it email [SBA@pkf-littlejohn.com](mailto:SBA@pkf-littlejohn.com) to alert PKF that their email didn't make it through. Every year, PKF sets a deadline by which the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) has to be submitted. This is a deadline set by PKF and may be different to the statutory deadline. The deadline that PKF has chosen for this year is **31 July 2020**. Most councils are now using virtual meetings, so should have no problem complying with the deadline. If your council is not using virtual meetings, and any ongoing lockdown means that physical meetings are not permitted by 31 July 2020, then you will need to write to PKF (email address above) to request an extension. Extensions may be granted in four-week blocks, but all AGARs must be submitted by 13 November 2020. Please note that the submission deadline that PKF has chosen (31 July 2020) is different to the statutory submission deadline (31 August 2020) which you may read in general guidance. This is to encourage councils to submit their AGARs as soon as possible to give PKF the maximum time to process them. If you have any questions at all about the end of year process and timetable, please contact PKF directly or Northants CALC and we will be delighted to help.
- 2. Annual Meeting of the Council** – The recently published virtual meeting regulations remove the requirement for parish and town councils to hold an annual meeting of the council (where the chairman and other officer holders are elected). The regulations did so to be helpful and to provide flexibility; councils are still able to hold annual meetings (virtually) if they choose to do so. If a council can meet virtually, there doesn't appear to be any rationale for not holding an annual meeting. If your council thinks differently, please let Northants CALC know.
- 3. Cemeteries & Churchyards** – The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick MP, said at the weekend that he wanted cemeteries and churchyards to remain open and that further guidance on funerals would be published. The guidance was published on Sunday and you can read all the latest about it on the web site of the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) at <https://bit.ly/2Kv2J1X>.
- 4. Co-options** – The regulations postponing the 2020 local elections also postponed bye-elections and other types of poll (e.g. Neighbourhood Planning referendums). The regulations were silent on co-options, leading to a difference of opinion as to how they should be treated. Northants CALC's view is that casual vacancies should be notified in the usual way and, assuming no bye-election is demanded, the vacancy should be filled by co-option as soon as reasonably practicable (including at a virtual meeting). Some of the district and borough councils in the county are not sure about this and have sought guidance from the Association of Election Administrators (AEA), which in turn is seeking guidance from the Electoral Commission and Cabinet Office. Northants CALC is pressing hard for clarification to be issued soon.
- 5. Financial Impact** – Thank you to the councils that have completed the financial impact survey organised by NALC (see Briefing No.4), which will help build an evidence base for government support to parish and town councils. The survey closes this Friday, so if your council has suffered any financial impact please submit your response by then: <https://bit.ly/2yYaoU1>.