

# ESSEX ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

# Weekly Walk Through

# Covid19



20th April 2020

Issue No. 2

We all find ourselves in unrepresented times at the moment.

The EALC is working hard to try and bring you as much information relating to the Coronavirus (Covid 19) as possible. As you are aware this situation is moving very fast and we aim to get you any newly emerging information as soon as practically possible.

The EALC have published Covid19 email updates daily with important information for all Parish and Town Councils in Essex. We have now produced a document of relevant legal information, Council good news stories and some frequently asked questions.

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### Essex Welfare Service

Essex County Council has established the Essex Welfare Services as part of PROVIDE (a health and social care service). Essex Welfare Services has been set up to assist the most vulnerable in the community to allow them to access shopping, medicine and other support.

GP surgeries will be calling, sending out SMS text messages or posting letters to those who are 70 or older or are offered a flu jab due to pre-existing medical conditions. This is because these people are identified as being vulnerable and having to self-isolate for prolonged periods of time and therefore potentially require additional support.

You may potentially receive a call from the National Shielding Helpline on 0333 3050466 – this is NOT a scam. However, the phonenumber is not live and you may receive a message saying they will try again soon.

For more information, or to refer someone to EWS, please [click here](#)



### Government Job Retention Scheme

The government's Job Retention Scheme is available to public sector organisations and the guidance states that "the government expects that the scheme will not be used by many public sector organisations, as the majority of public sector employees are continuing to provide essential public services or contribute to the response to the coronavirus outbreak".

At this point, we should highlight strongly that NALC feels that the government guidance at this point is not clear on whether local councils could reclaim salaries from furloughed employees or not. We will need more detail from the government to clarify this situation. [Find out more about the scheme](#)

For example, where a local council has community facilities that have been closed as a result of COVID-19, there will be no income from these facilities to pay for the caretaker or other staff who run the facilities.

So where local councils have staff who are unable to work in their current roles, where that role is funded from income other than precept, and they are unable to be redeployed to another role to support the response to Coronavirus, the council may wish to consider furloughing those staff with the hope of being able to reclaim a portion of their salaries. But at this stage, NALC could not be certain that the council would be successful in claiming back that salary.

[Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme: step by step guide for employers](#)



### Funerals, Burials and Cremation

Public Health England has now published [guidance for care of the deceased with suspected or confirmed coronavirus](#). The guidance includes advice on maintaining social distancing at funeral services and shielding vulnerable individuals from contact with bodies of those who had confirmed or suspected COVID-19. It outlines that mourners are strongly advised not to take part in any rituals or practices that bring them into close contact with the body of a person who has died from or with symptoms of COVID-19. Faith leaders have been consulted and worked with Public Health England on the guidance.

Crematoria and cemeteries should now be closed to the public, except for funerals or burials. [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) Regulations 2020](#) came in to force on the 26 March and apply to any person who is responsible for a crematorium or burial ground including local authorities and private providers.



### Security of Private and Confidential Items whilst the Council has a Virtual Meeting

*Gary Barker Solicitor at NALC gave this legal advice.*

An important legal issue is dealing with confidential items and information as part of a Parish Council meeting. Whatever software is used we would advise that the confidential part of the meeting should be set up as a separate meeting rather than trying to exclude the press and public from the main meeting. The separate confidential meeting should be protected with facilities such as passwords and use of a waiting room so that potential attendees can be “vetted” and only admit councillors and staff that are entitled to attend.

So in Practice (EALC thoughts on the matter) this will mean having two meetings if you have confidential items. They can run back to back. The summons must specify the time, which can be fixed at a time following the time allowed for the previous meeting.

Remember as a Parish sector council, you are reliant on the Public Bodies (Admission to meetings) Act 1960 to exclude the public and press. The summons and the agenda need to be precise. You can only exclude the public and press for the following reasons.

- Engagement, terms of service, conduct and dismissal of employees;
- Terms of tenders, and proposals and counter proposals in the negotiation of contracts;
- Preparation of cases in legal proceedings;
- The early stages of a dispute.

## Useful Information

### Sources of Advice

The coronavirus situation is fast-moving and there is an increasing amount of misinformation online. We should be using government advice to inform decisions and be checking that advice regularly.

The [government's main source of advice on coronavirus](#) includes information on the social distancing alongside a wide range of other information.

If you would like to keep up-to-date with the government information as it comes out then you can [sign up to their COVID-19 response bulletin](#)

[Public Health England \(PHE\)](#) has FAQs that will be updated regularly



You may find the advice from [ACAS](#) useful in considering any employment-related matters that may impact your local council

### Volunteer shopping card

ASDA have proudly launched a dedicated volunteer shopping card to help vulnerable customers and those who are self-isolating and unable to go into store. Customers can buy these shopping cards online, top up and give to their family member, friend or NHS volunteer to pay for their shopping without the need to use cash or bankcards, essential for reducing risk to our self-isolating customers.

These shopping cards can be bought at [www.asda.com/volunteercard](http://www.asda.com/volunteercard) and we would be grateful if you could [notify any constituents or local volunteer groups](#) in your area who might benefit.

### NALC Dedicated Coronavirus Web Page

This page has been created to provide local (Parish and Town) councils with information related to the coronavirus



### NALC Pay Scales

Please note we have not yet received the new pay scales from NALC. As soon as this information is provided we will distribute this as soon as possible.

## Useful Information

### EALC CONTACT

All staff are now remote working from home and can be contacted directly through email.

The phone is being diverted to a mobile, which will enable you to contact Pearl Willcox directly for urgent matters. Pearl will then be able to direct all matters to the responsible staff member. Please note the mobile number: 07495 915 912

#### Staff Members:

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### COVID-19 UPDATES

Don't forget all the COVID-19 Updates can be found on the EALC website.

Web address: <http://www.ealc.gov.uk/covid-19-updates/>

## Essex Coronavirus Action Urgent Food Bank Appeal

Urgent foodbank fundraising page has been set up by Essex County Council due to an increase of people requesting help.

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/ecafoodbankappeal>



Every donation will be held in a bank account in the name of the Essex Association Of Local Councils, in trust on behalf of Essex County Council, ready for direct distribution to local food banks across the county.



**Essex County Council**



These are unprecedented times for all of us and I know you are all very busy at the moment but there are so many things our wonderful communities are doing to support each other, I thought you might want to share some of those things to give inspiration and confidence to others. Please email me with examples and photos when you get the chance. [danielle.frost@ealc.gov.uk](mailto:danielle.frost@ealc.gov.uk)

If you or any of your residents are experiencing any barriers to getting initiatives up and running please let me know and we at EALC will do all we can to alleviate those barriers.

Below are a few general points of information I thought you could add (if you haven't already) to your websites, Facebook pages and ask all your councillors to share to the community groups they belong to. Local Councils are by their very nature filled with leaders in their communities, the information you provide will support and enthuse your residents and hopefully support their mental health and their wellbeing at this very difficult and strange time.

I have also added some useful links and ideas which may help your residents fill the long hours but please get in touch with me if you or any of your residents are doing something you want to share.

**Danielle Frost**  
**Health and Wellbeing Officer**

### **IMPORTANT MESSAGE PLEASE SHARE**

If you are an organiser of a local volunteering group could you please take the time to complete the form on the link below. This will allow Essex Coronavirus Action Group to direct people in your neighbourhood to the right place and offer support to you as group leaders.

<http://eca-info.org/forms>

## **Council Good News Stories**

It is very encouraging to hear how communities have pulled together in so many ways during these times.

### **Little Waltham Parish Council**



The Parish Council is small with only 1 employee. However it has set up a new Facebook page in just the last week which has been extremely well received by residents as a source of trusted information. As well as providing links to sites such as the NHS and Gov.uk I have signposted to information about activities and online library loans.

It has also been possible to highlight sources of practical support such as a greengrocer who has been selling as a pop up shop outside the White Hart pub in the middle of the village and has been a valued source of fresh fruit and veg for a predominantly elderly community.

I have also been liaising with the Channels residents association to highlight contact points for practical support and also providing information about the Essex Corona virus action group.

Suzanne Walker  
Clerk to Little Waltham Parish Council

### **South Hanningfield Parish Council**

Myself and two Councillors, we have secured the services of 30 volunteers within our Parish (we cover 3 wards), who have already helped 12 older residents with provision items and collection of medications.

I have today been inundated with phone calls from residents who have booked in our services for next week. I even have volunteers who are taking dogs for a walk. The village shop, which is within the adjoining parish, have agreed to make up essential grocery package items for £20 and £30 and one of the village halls is allowing us to store frozen ready meals in the halls kitchen. Once a volunteer has been assigned to an elderly resident, they are then their first point of contact. All initial calls are made through myself.

I am overwhelmed with the offers of help I have received to date. It is great to see all of the community working together during these difficult times.

Julie Moule  
Clerk to the Council



### Stebbing Parish Council

In Stebbing we had a meeting involving members from the Parish Council and the church. We created a dedicated email address and have used the Parish Council phone number. We advertised on next door the village social media site for volunteers to do shopping, collect prescriptions, or to chat on the phone with someone who is on their own etc and had over 60 responses in the first couple of days.

We then leafleted every house in the Parish with the details of where to contact should people need help due to either their age or if they were self isolating. One member of the group is doing the co-ordination of putting volunteers in touch with people needing assistance.

Greg King  
Clerk to the Council



### Danbury Parish Council

Following the update from Danbury Parish Council in the last issue please see below their new dedicated Danbury Coronavirus Volunteer Group website.

<https://www.danburycorona.com/>

We are a group of volunteers set up to help residents in a time of crisis with the support of local organisations and businesses. In the short time available local people have risen to the challenge and we now have a very successful community volunteering group.

The website includes information:

- For Residents
- For Volunteers
- Important Links
- Local Delivery Services
- Health & Wellbeing
- About us page

### Heybridge Parish Council

Heybridge Parish Council leaflet dropped a public notice to all residents looking for volunteers to help other residents during the crisis. This also helped to highlight the more vulnerable residents within our community that need prescriptions collected or food parcels.

Plantation Hall is now closed to the public but every other day I ensure there are recycling sacks left outside for members of the public to help themselves to.

I have also been added to the Maldon District COVID19 Community Response programme as the Coordinator for Heybridge. This response programme is in connection with MDC, Maldon and District CVS offices and other partners to coordinate a community hub style of assistance to help distribute food and supplies to local people and to assist key workers. This programme is run via a central database and is ensuring all the needs of our communities are met.

Amanda Hilton  
Clerk to the Council

### The Salings Parish Council

This is a joint venture between the Parish Council and the Church Parochial Church Council

If you are self-isolating, we can help  
Do you need help with any of the following:-

1. Picking up Shopping
2. Posting Mail
3. A friendly Phone Call
4. Urgent Supplies
5. Medication Collected



Contact the Clerk and she will arrange someone to help. If you would like to help, please send your details to The Clerk.

All Names and Addresses will be kept on Record for the duration of this emergency, then destroyed.

Cathy Carlie  
Clerk to the Council

### Stock Parish Council

Three of the nine councillors on Stock Parish Council have set up and administer a group called Stock's Little Helpers. We are fully supported by the Council as a whole. Via a Whatsapp group of over 30 volunteers we collect prescriptions, groceries, and call people who are isolating if they simply need a chat.

We identified our vulnerable parishioners by means of a leaflet produced by the council which explained some of the health advice around socially isolating, and also gave three phone numbers to call in case any help was needed. This was distributed by means of volunteers gathered via Facebook.

Our concerns were that the vulnerable group may not have the knowledge or means to access information distributed online, and indeed the leaflet has been frequently been cited as the reason we have been contacted. We are trying to keep records of our activities which number three to four deliveries a day, and one parishioner who gets a daily phone call. There are others who get check ins by text or phone if we are a bit worried about them.

Councillor Maggie O'Connor



## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. Outside workers

**Should outside workers continue to work?** Which we discussed some examples eg litter pickers vs grounds maintenance for parks that remain open. And ultimately it's not possible to issue national guidance beyond what government has produced. Again its helpful where county associations are sharing the advice/guidance they are giving.

*Contractors working in Parishes – Response from Gary Barker NALC Legal Team*

This situation may be covered by the legal concepts of **frustration or Force Majeur**.

- Frustration applies where something happens to stop the contract being performed. It usually applies in circumstances such as when goods that have been sold are destroyed, e.g. by fire, before being delivered.
- It is possible that the courts will decide that the government's rules on coronavirus count as frustration of contracts but we are in new territory.
- **Force Majeur applies** when there is something that intervenes to prevent the contract being performed.
- This is sometimes described as an Act of God.
- The government's rules seems to fit this but normally Force Majeur needs to be specified in the contract however, again, it is possible that the courts will accept Force Majeur in circumstances where it was not specifically agreed by the parties.
- Response for Parish Councils

The best answer for Parish Councils in these circumstances is to notify the contractor that in their opinion the coronavirus rules make it impossible for the work to continue. It would be sensible to notify the contractor that the Parish Council will suspend the contract and reactivate it when the current emergency is over. That way the contractor will not lose out as the work that they cannot do at the moment will be available for them after the restrictions have been lifted.

Thus if a one year contract has run for eight months it will resume for a further four months after the emergency.

### 2. Purchasing Power Local Councils for the vulnerable

**Do councils have power to purchase groceries for individuals?**

Only under GPC, but we discussed how Councils were donating to local groups and other initiatives.