



# LEIGHTON-LINSLADE TOWN COUNCIL

## Council

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**Date:** 27th July 2020

**Title:** COVID-19 Task Force

**Purpose of the Report:** To receive a report regarding the COVID-19 Task Force and to consider the recommendations contained herein.

**Contact Officers:** Mark Saccoccio, Town Clerk.

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<b>Corporate Objective/s</b>		
<b>Implications:</b>		
<b>Financial</b>	Yes	In accordance with the resolution made by Council at its Extraordinary Meeting held 20 <sup>th</sup> March 2020 that the Town Council continue to support the following expenditure that will be reviewed at its meeting to be held 25 <sup>th</sup> January 2021:  Van rental at £400 per month (albeit need is reviewed monthly) Mobile Phone £15.00 per month (not yet started) Miscellaneous expenditure up to a maximum of £100 per month to be met from the Community Safety Earmarked Reserve which at 9 <sup>th</sup> July 2020 stood at £44,211
<b>Risk management</b>		
<b>Operational/service delivery</b>	Yes	The project will require ad-hoc Town Council administrative as well as financial support
<b>Legal/compliance</b>		

## 1. RECOMMENDATION

Should members be minded, the recommendation is;

- 1.1 That the Town Council continues to provide ad-hoc support in accordance with the resolution made at Extraordinary Council Meeting held 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and that this be reviewed by Council at its meeting to be held 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

## 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At the Parish Meeting held 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020, a request was made by the Leighton-Linslade Helpers that the Town Council should support the volunteers in their ambition to help the most vulnerable in the parish. Subject to a formal Town Council resolution, the Mayor and Leader of the Council offered “in principle support” to the Helpers.
- 2.2 At the Extraordinary Council meeting held 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020, Council resolved that:
- (i) **The Town Council records support for its resources being used to support the work of the Leighton-Linslade COVID-19 Task Force as directed by Central Bedfordshire Council emergency services.**
  - (ii) **The Town Council supports, in principle, the use of the Community Safety earmarked reserve for expenditure related to the COVID-19 community response.**

### Establishing the Task Force

- 2.3 On 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020, an inception meeting was held at the White House. Attendees included Leighton Linslade Helpers (formed to run errands for those forced to self-isolate), Hockliffe Street Baptist Church, Leighton-Linslade Homeless Service, Residents (offering a varied skills base including Silver Command- Bedfordshire Local Emergency Volunteer Executive who represents Central Bedfordshire Council interests on the ground), Police and Town Council. It was agreed that the collective would be known as the COVID-19 Task Force. At the inception meeting, the Group agreed that its primary purpose was to meet the needs of the community in whatever capacity it reasonably could regardless of the request received. In essence, the community was providing help and support to the community.

### Responding to Requests for Help

- 2.4 Requests for help come in various ways: either direct to the Task Force or the preferred route via Central Bedfordshire Council. The latter affords Central Bedfordshire Council (in its social caring and emergency response capacity) the ability to ascertain the level of need and which agency is best placed to support individual circumstance. Should it be decided that the matter can be dealt with at a more local level, then the request will be made directly to the Task Force. During the first weeks of the pandemic, 2 flyers were produced whose purpose was to raise awareness of the group’s existence and its aims and objectives. These were delivered to homes across the parish. The flyers set out the need for the parish to contact Central Bedfordshire Council for any help or support needed in the first instance.
- 2.5 At the local level, requests for help are received and managed by a team of volunteers based at the depot facility – depot now provided by Central Bedfordshire Council. Based on the information supplied, a decision is then

made as to which Task Force discipline is best qualified to offer the required support. For example:

- i) Food Parcels for the most vulnerable as well as prescriptions falls within the responsibility of Leighton Linslade Helpers. The supply of food to support this function as well as similar volunteer organisations beyond the Parish is led by the Leighton Linslade Homeless Service
- ii) The provision of personal shopping is led by the Business Delivery team who liaise directly with local businesses in providing this service
- iii) Counselling/calling falls to the Leighton Baptist Church Team who provide this activity
- iv) Should the request be complex and require agency input, the request will be directed up to Central Bedfordshire Council to deal with
- v) The Task Force dealing with whatever request is made by the community including help in sourcing white goods should an individual in need be found wanting

2.6 From inception, there was variance in what the community wanted in the way of support. Those forced to self-isolate because of underlying medical conditions and/or age requiring immediate support were identified as most vulnerable and needed immediate triage assistance. For this group, their needs are being met from donations or food provided by Central Bedfordshire Council. Those who made a lifestyle choice to have food delivered to the doorstep at their own personal financial expense were also recognised albeit are managed in a different way as set out below

<b>Food Parcels provided by</b>	<b>Business Delivery Service provided by</b>
Leighton Linslade Helpers were hugely supported by Leighton Linslade Homeless Service, certain supermarkets, community organisations and the public themselves.	Local Businesses to include market traders
Responded to direct requests of help from the public as well as from Central Bedfordshire Council and other statutory social care providers.	Requests made to the business liaison volunteer who would arrange the delivery of food which would be paid for by the individual either in advance or on receipt
<b>Prescriptions</b>	
For prescriptions, there was no single point of contact initially with a number of individuals taking responsibility. This was not ideal for many reasons. In time, all individual lists of responsibility were consolidated into one list held by the Task Force. This allowed a core of volunteers to collect and deliver thereby reducing destination duplication.	

- 2.7 The organisational structure for the Task Force whilst flat has one identified lead. The purpose of the lead is to provide overall direction as well as liaison with external agencies including Community Action Bedfordshire (CAB), Community Service Volunteers (CVS), Central Bedfordshire Council (in its various statutory capacities) and BLEVEC. They manage volunteers as well as tasking priorities. In support of the Task Force is a Silver BLEVEC Commander who as a local resident is keen to do whatever he reasonably can for the parish. As Silver Command, the individual sits on both this group as well as the Central Bedfordshire Group where strategic decisions are taken and information on a need to know basis cascaded down to the local Task Force Group. Updates are provided to the Task Force by way of Skype meetings often called when considered appropriate by the Lead and Silver Command Representative. It should be noted that the Lead Volunteer has in their own right been appointed a BLEVEC Commander.
- 2.8 To support its work, the Task Force created a website page <https://www.leightonlinladehelpers.org.uk/> that together with latest information, also provided free advertising to local businesses. In addition, its Facebook page has a reach of more than 3000 residents. Both the website and Facebook page are administered by the volunteers with the activity being run out of its hub that is the depot. As of 4<sup>th</sup> June for example, the Covid-19 Task Force button (hosted on the Town Council's website) was the most visited page other than the Town Council's own homepage.

#### Town Council Involvement

- 2.8 As set out at paragraph 2.2, the Town Council resolved to support the function of the Task Force by making available its resources and financial support if necessary. It should be made clear that a no point has the Town Council been involved in leading the Task Force or indeed in decision making. This always has been left to the Task Force. Any activities requiring a financial transaction have been made between the Town Council and the service supplier directly. At no time has any money been given by the Town Council directly to the Task Force (given that the Group is neither constituted nor in possession of a bank account at present). To date, the support the Town Council has provided is set out below.

Table A

Request	Town Council Response	Financial Cost to the Council
Emergency Volunteer ID	100 x Emergency Volunteer ID Cards with Signature Strip produced.	£248.00
Emergency Volunteer t-shirts	100 x Emergency Volunteer t-shirts.	£585.00
The provision of administrative support in	Town Clerk provides this function by arranging	Zero

the smooth running of meetings	meetings and chairing.	
The provision of office stationery and support	Minimal office supplies in the form of printer toner, pens, paper and ad-hoc photocopying offered.	Met from existing Town Council stationery supplies
Secure premises for the storage of food stuffs	Linslade Memorial was made available but only used for a few days. Following a short period in a secure store, the operations has moved to a fit for purpose facility which is being offered at no cost to the Task Force	Zero
The use of a vehicle to help with the transport of goods	Provided a town council liveried vehicle which has now been exchanged for a hire vehicle as agreed by Council on 1 <sup>st</sup> June 2020. A fuel card has also been offered.	£400 per month and to be reviewed on a rolling monthly basis The costs of fuel usage are offset by the reduction in town council vehicle usage
Social Media Posts	The Town Council continues to create and post on social media key messages about the Task Force and the work it is undertaking and how it can provide help to those who need it	Zero
The creation of a flyer to be provided to each and every house within the parish The creation of a second flyer	The Town Council supported its creation and sourced funding for both flyers	Zero with the cost of both flyers met by third party businesses
Personal liability insurance	The volunteers are covered within the Town Council's existing insurance policy	Zero
Means to communicate between volunteers	Provided walkie talkies that would otherwise have been used by the market team. A mobile phone has also been loaned to the Group given that at the moment, it is not required as the	Zero

	town council is one staff member down.	
Awareness raising with the local community as to the role and purpose of the Task Force	Information update in the Bee Local Magazine	£560
Help with data entry for those receiving support from the Task Force	Being done by a colleague on a voluntary basis	Zero
<b>Total</b>		<b>£2,193</b>

2.9 The attached appendix provides information on the work of the Task Force to date. As the statistics show, the demand for listening and counselling services is increasing whilst the demand for food and prescription services continues albeit at reducing levels. To date, the Task Force has responded to over 3,600 requests for help.

#### Next Steps

- 2.10 Whilst the demands for local need may subtly change as national and personal circumstances change, it is highly likely that the demand for help will remain for many months to come. Based on the current situation and demonstrable local need, providing on-going Town Council support to the Task Force could be justified should Members be minded. As illustrated within table A, the level of support the Town Council has provided is relatively modest with the biggest investment being in Officer time. Any requests involving future purchases will be considered on a case by case basis by the Town Clerk in consultation with the Leader.
- 2.11 Should Members agree, potential on-going support could be qualified on the grounds that it be reviewed regularly and in accordance with a timescale agreed by Members as set out at Recommendation 1.1. On balance, the present arrangement is considered to be working well in the common interests of the community.
- 2.12 The future direction of the volunteer Task force Group is a matter for the individuals to decide. As volunteers, they have personal responsibilities and will have to decide what level of ongoing future support they may wish to offer to the community.
- 2.13 Statutory organisations and service providers will play a considerable part in offering support to the Group as it matures. Presently, the Task Force is operated on charitable donations (not financial) and the well-meaning of the volunteers who give freely of their time and personal resources. In the coming months and subject to it meeting the necessary criteria, there is no reason why those individual groups that form part of the Task Force could not apply for a Town Council funding should it decide it is appropriate to do so. Based on the existing town council model, those groups who wish to apply for funding can:-

- i) Apply for general grant funding up to a maximum of £500 to be used for a one-off project and which can be completed within 12 months or
- ii) Any request that falls outside of the general grant criteria to be made to the Policy and Finance Committee and thereafter Council for ratification.

2.14 For the parish, having a local volunteer group who has now demonstrated a pedigree in providing support in a time of crisis will be invaluable should for whatever reason the parish find itself being confronted with any future disaster (Electricity outage/loss of water/flooding/ train) or an anticipated spike in Covid-19 cases. Through the network of contacts and support groups made, the Task force would be able to lead a local response in accordance with the objectives of the Town Council's emergency resilience plan.

**End**