



LEIGHTON-LINSLADE TOWN COUNCIL

Council

Date: 24th August 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.

Corporate Objective/s		
Implications:		
Financial	Yes	In accordance with the resolution made by Council at its Extraordinary Meeting held 20 th March 2020 that the Town Council continue to support the following expenditure that will be reviewed at its meeting to be held 25 th 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 th July 2020 stood at £44,211
Risk management		
Operational/service delivery	Yes	The project will require ad-hoc Town Council administrative as well as financial support
Legal/compliance		Relevant legislation: Civil Contingencies Act 2004 Localism Act 2011 (General Power of Competence) Local Government Act 1972 s137

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

Should members be minded, the recommendations are;

- 1.1 That the Town Council continues to provide ad-hoc support to all constituent groups that form part of the Covid-19 Task Force in

accordance with the resolution made at Extraordinary Council Meeting held 20th March 2020 and that this be reviewed by Council at its meeting to be held 25th January 2021.

- 1.2 To make all the constituent groups that form the Covid-19 Task Force aware that town council funding mechanisms are available (subject to meeting town criteria) should they decide to apply for direct funding or grant funding.**

2.0 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- 2.1 At its meeting held 27th July 2020, Council sought additional information to help inform any decision it may wish to make in support of the on-going pandemic situation as well as any future emergency should it arise. The purpose of this paper is to respond to the questions raised at that meeting. Therefore, this paper should be considered as a supplement and be read together with the original paper presented to Council on 27th July. The background information in terms of the way local volunteer groups responded can be found within the original paper.

Context: At Council on 27th July, there was considered discussion around the principles of independence and citizen empowerment of volunteers and the groups they represent. The Town Council fully supports these principles being a signatory to the Beds and Luton Compact Agreement. Revised in 2011, the Compact <http://www.voluntaryworks.org/compact> outlines the relationship between the public sector and the voluntary sector by allowing them to work together more effectively to strengthen communities and improve people's lives. The shared principles are:

Respect: Differences between the public and community sectors are mutually understood, acknowledged and respected.

Independence: The independence of voluntary and community organisations in fulfilling their mission is recognised and supported. This includes their right within law to campaign, to comment on and challenge public sector policy (whatever funding or other relationship may exist with the public sector) and to determine and manage their own affairs.

Citizen Empowerment: Valuing a civil society that is built around communities and people, meeting their needs and reflecting their choices.

Volunteering: The energy and commitment of people giving their time for the public good contributes to a vibrant society and should be recognised and appreciated.

The following questions were raised and include Officer responses:

- a) **Which organisations and individuals to partner with, rather than assuming that the present Covid Task Group is the best available going forward.**

Dealing with the on-going Covid-19 situation:

The situation is unusual when compared to a typical emergency. A typical emergency situation would possibly last a couple of days with a concentrated multi-agency response in the first few hours of it being declared. Here, the declared emergency was called in March and remains in place with the Covid-19 Task Force (including volunteer groups and volunteer individuals) continuing to provide support to the local community.

Through the Bedfordshire and Luton Emergency Volunteer Executive Committee (BLEVEC) – (please see flow diagrams), it is Central Bedfordshire Council which engages with the volunteer groups (please see **attached** diagrams which show all the constituent parts of the Covid-19 Task Force). The Town Council's role is to facilitate the work of the Task Force only. This was the resolution made by Council at its meeting held 20th March 2020 namely:

- 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 emergency services.**
- ii) **The Town Council supports, in principle, the use of the Community earmarked reserve for expenditure related to the Covid-19 community response.**

In accordance with the above resolution, the Town Council's facilitating role extends to the hosting of meetings and providing practical help/resources and support to the Covid-19 Task Force as and when it is required. The Town Council does not make decisions nor directs the work of the constituent parts which form the Task Force. Moreover, the constituent parts that form the Task Force are not in any way accountable to the Town Council; most of them already have their own governance in place, being registered charities with trustees, having a managing steering group or other formal governance arrangements. The decision to continue providing support is down to the volunteers themselves. Should they decide they no longer have the interest or capacity to carry on, that decision is entirely theirs. In this case, BLEVEC will advise Central Bedfordshire Council who will request volunteer support from other local groups who may be able to help. The parish is privileged in having several organisations prepared to offer volunteering support should this situation arise.

The pandemic remains an on-going emergency. Resident needs for help continue with every likelihood of this increasing should anticipated future

spikes be realised. To have a local volunteer response team in the form of the Task Force established and prepared to continue responding to resident needs is a positive for parish residents.

Responding to a future local emergency:

The Community Emergency Plan document that the Town Council endorsed at its meeting in January 2020 provides details of a range of groups willing to respond to any future emergency. Depending on the incident, no situation is the same and therefore different skills and resources will be required at that time. When a civil emergency is declared, the statutory responsibility in dealing with it rests with Central Bedfordshire Council (Civil Contingencies Act 2004).

The co-ordination of local volunteers would come from BLEVEC which would decide what local resources are needed given the nature of the incident. BLEVEC would have access to the Community Emergency Plan as well as the Town Council's on call duty officer. The duty officer is to provide practical support (use of assets such as buildings and vehicles) where appropriate as well as details of local skills and resources (Community Emergency Plan – Adopted January 2020). It is the intention that the Community Emergency Plan will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that the contact details held for local volunteer organisations remain up to date.

Presently, the parish is privileged in having numerous volunteering organisations prepared to support during any emergency situation. Having groups that give freely of their time in support of the local community puts less strain on public finances as they give freely of their time and in certain cases, offer up their own resources. For example, farmers offering up tractors to clear roads, 4 x4 team offering their utility vehicles to deliver supplies, groups providing refreshments, boats to search the river and canal for example.

b) How the democratic involvement of councillors can best be achieved

In the case of any future emergency, the Town Council would support the response by making its resources and assets available to BLEVEC. Be it a council owned vehicle or building for example, these would be at the disposal of BLEVEC should they be required. Presently, several councillors in their own capacity as parish residents have and continue to support the local emergency response. Beyond that, Members are able to join the Bedfordshire Community Emergency Response Team should they choose to do so. Details of this scheme can be provided should they be required.

Democratic involvement of councillors would come should any of the volunteer groups wish to apply for grant funding. Should any of the volunteer groups request funding then councillors can consider the merits or otherwise in realising this. The Guaranteed grant mechanism would allow councillor representation at recipient's meetings.

c) The objectives and terms of engagement with those groups/individuals

Statutory responsibility in terms of the deployment of volunteer's rests with Central Bedfordshire Council. It is they that have the relationship with the local groups. Through BLEVEC, regular training of volunteers and groups is provided and encouraged.

The constituent groups which come under the Task Force umbrella also, in many cases, have their own objectives, rules, insurance, governance and financial arrangements.

d) The funding needed for this continuing work

Funding or other support requirements will vary from group to group, for the organisations which form the Task Force.

As a new organisation only started this year, the Leighton-Linslade Helpers have to date been largely dependent upon Town Council support, as well as voluntary donations from the community. However, now that the pressures of responding to the pandemic crisis have lessened slightly, focus has turned to constituting the group and therefore enabling it to register as a charity and to open a bank account.

Presently, the Leighton-Linslade Helpers are in the process of opening a bank account as well as registering as a charity. Once achieved, this would allow the volunteers to fund raise and seek financial support from other sources including the Town Council (by way of direct or grant funding). The present arrangement of ad-hoc support including the provision of a van is welcomed by the Helpers.

To date, none of the other volunteer groups which form the Task Force have requested support (financial or otherwise) from the Town Council. Indeed, the Leighton-Linslade Homeless Service has been actively encouraged by the Town Council to apply for a grant which they have yet to apply for.

LLTC already provides financial support to some of those organisations which have been involved in the response through its community grant schemes, for example Community Action Bedfordshire.

e) How the Town Council could be involved in a future local lock-down if that happened

The Covid-19 emergency declared in March remains. Subject to the constituent parts who form the Covid-19 Task Force wishing to carry on supporting their community, there is little at this stage that the Town Council can meaningfully offer other than financial help should it be required by the groups. For example, the Town Council has been supporting the manufacture of visors by making funding available.

Through the duty officer, Town Council assets and resources would remain available should they be required.

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