



WINSFORD TOWN COUNCIL

COVID-19 POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Winsford Town Council actively seeks to protect councillors, volunteers and staff working for and on behalf of the council and its activities. As such and following current Public Health England (PHE) and government guidelines, the following policy applies to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

This policy sets out the general principles and approach that the Town Council will follow in respect of a COVID-19 outbreak in the United Kingdom with an imminent threat of infection in the Parish of Winsford.

SCOPE

The main areas of concern for Winsford Town Council with respect to COVID-19: -

- Remaining an effective council; and
- Safety and health of councillors, contractors, staff, volunteers and members of the public.

ACTIVATION

This policy will be activated, when

- There is an active outbreak of COVID-19 in the UK with an imminent threat of infection in the town of Winsford and is resolved in a meeting of Winsford Town Council; or
- The government of the United Kingdom suspends or advises against holding public meetings and the policy is activated by the agreement of Members via email/remote meetings.

DEACTIVATION

This policy is deactivated, when

- The imminent threat of infection in the Parish of Winsford has passed;
- The Town Council has requested public meetings be recommenced; and
- The government of the United Kingdom has advised that public meetings can held

MATTERS RELATING TO STAFF – THE CLERK

Winsford Town Council offices are situated at Wyvern House in Winsford and has three permanent employees currently working from this site.

The office is open daily from 10.00am-3.00pm Monday to Friday and the public can attend the office at any time.

During any active outbreak of COVID-19 in the UK, no appointments will be permitted, and the offices will be closed to the public and elected Members.

The Town Clerk, the Administrative Officer and the Support Officer will not meet the public during working hours, at their first normal place of work.

The CWAC Council Chamber¹, or any other public location used for Town Council meetings is the second normal place of work for the Clerk, and this will be dealt with later in this policy.

In the event of a COVID-19 outbreak the National Joint Council for local government services (NJC) will issue guidance for employers which the council will follow. A summary of the most recent guidance during the COVID-19 outbreak of 2020/21 is detailed below: -

- Employees who are sick or unfit for work need to focus on their recovery;
- As per Part 2 Para 10.9 of the 'Green Book'², if an employee is fit for work but decides, or is instructed, to self-isolate, their absence should not be recorded as sickness absence. We would expect all options for home or remote working to be explored with the employee. As they are 'well' at this stage they should stay on normal full pay for the duration of the self-isolation period until such time as they are confirmed to have contracted any such HCID, at which point they transfer to sickness absence leave and the usual provisions of the sickness scheme will apply.
- In circumstances where an employee decides to self-isolate without instruction from the authorities it is not unreasonable, for example, for the employer to ask for some evidence such as an email from a holiday operator that shows the dates of a holiday; the resort location and flight details. It will probably not be possible, however, in all cases for an employee to produce any evidence, so employers will need to use their discretion when trying to establish the facts behind the employee's decision to self-isolate.
- If an employee is caring for someone who has or may have COVID-19, this period of absence should also be regarded as self-isolation. Given the employee may then have been in direct contact with the virus we

¹ Located on the ground floor of Wyvern House, Winsford

² The "Green Book", or to give it its' full title, the *National Agreement on Pay and Conditions for Service*, was a product of the amalgamation in 1997 of the previous Administrative, Professional, Technical and Clerical (Purple Book) and Manual (Book colour varied, according to Region) Terms & Conditions Handbooks for Local Government employees. It is the property of the National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Government Services, and it covers all Local Government employees in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, except where an LA has opted out of specific provisions of the Green Book. Representation on the NJC is provided by the Local Government Association (LGA), representing the employers, and the three recognised Local Government Trade Unions (Unison, GMB and Unite), who represent the workforce.

would expect only working from home arrangements to be then considered for the duration of the incubation period. Employers should keep in touch to support employees.

- Following any school closures, employers should be fully supportive of employees with childcare responsibilities and consider flexible working arrangements, including adapting working patterns to care for children or dependants or taking time off, whether this is special leave, annual leave or flexible working.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

It is a requirement of the Local Government Act 1972 that council business shall be conducted at public meetings of the council and its committees.

Councillors and others can choose to not attend public meetings. As an officer of the council, the Clerk cannot choose not to attend meetings.

Due to the nature of local government and considering those who attend meetings (councillors and public), a high percentage of these attendees would be considered “high risk” with respect to HCIDs. As such, to protect the health of all attendees, public meetings will be suspended during the active period of this policy.

ADDENDUM (12th APRIL 2020)

On 4 April 2020, the government brought The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020 into force to allow local authorities to conduct meetings remotely. Winsford Town Council will therefore be holding meetings in this way whilst this policy is in force. Details on these remote meetings will be advertised via the Town Council website www.winsford.gov.uk.

FURTHER ADDENDUM (9TH FEBRUARY 2021)

The above regulations expire on 7th May 2021, after which no remote meetings may be held. In these circumstances, the ‘delegated authority’ provisions set out below will apply.

DELEGATED AUTHORITY

To allow the council to operate on a ‘minimum requirement basis’, the following items are delegated to the Town Clerk and, in the absence of the Clerk, the Administrative Officer (0.8 FTE) for the duration of the activation of this policy.

- Planning applications - after consultation with a minimum of four councillors, a summary response will be circulated to all councillors for comment prior to submission to CWAC by the Clerk;
- Finance – the following will apply: -
 - All standard recurring payments listed as line items on the budget will be paid by the Clerk/Administrative Officer at the appropriate time to prevent any late charges
 - Non-recurring payments will be paid by the Clerk /Administrative Officer
 - All payments will be formally authorised by the Finance & General Purposes Committee at the next full meeting

- Where this policy is activated at the end/start of the financial year, the Clerk/Administrative Office (in conjunction with Edge IT³) will prepare the end of year accounts in accordance with normal procedures and circulate to all councillors. On being accepted by councillors, the accounts will be signed by the Clerk/Administrative Officer and Chair of Finance & General Purposes, as applicable, for submission to the external and internal auditors. The accounts will be accepted by resolution at the next available Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting
- Responses to other communications - the Town Clerk will circulate via email - at the earliest opportunity - any communications from third parties which would normally be presented at a meeting for consideration by the council. The Clerk will then circulate any response to the full Council prior to responding to the third party.

In accordance with the 1972 Act, where this policy is activated during a meeting of the council, the meeting will be adjourned. Using the delegated authority detailed in this policy, the Clerk will endeavour to deal with as much of the remaining agenda, the results of which will be reported to the council after the adjournment when the rest of the agenda is considered.

APPROVAL OF THE POLICY

Ideally, this policy should be approved by the Town Council at the earliest available opportunity via a formal meeting of the Council and will thence be reviewed annually.

In the event, however, that meetings are not held as per the conditions set out in this policy, then the policy will be considered via email with all councillors and will be implemented by the Town Clerk – following approval – in consultation with the Mayor/Chair of Finance & General Purposes Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to note this policy and approve or otherwise the policy.

³ Edge provides the accounting software for the Town Council