



**Report to: Policy and Resources Committee, 28<sup>th</sup> July 2020**

**Report of: Managing Director**

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**Subject: COVID-19: DECISIONS UNDER URGENCY POWERS**

**1. Recommendation**

**1.1 That the Committee notes the decisions, since the last report to Committee on 26 May, which have been taken by the Managing Director under urgency powers in response to the Covid-19 emergency incident.**

**2. Background**

- 2.1 At its meeting on 26 May the Committee considered a detailed report on the Council's management of the Covid-19 emergency incident. A number of decisions were reported back to the Committee which the Managing Director had taken under urgency powers, in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader, or the Chair and Vice Chair of the relevant committee as appropriate.
- 2.2 Since the last report to Committee, the operational arrangements for the Council's management of the emergency incident have continued. The strategic and tactical level response arrangements within the Council and within Worcestershire and wider region have continued to operate, albeit with frequency of meetings reducing overall. The Council has kept pace with a rapidly changing situation and with updates to Government guidance.
- 2.3 While the incident is undoubtedly still on an emergency footing, organisations including the Council have been ensuring that sufficient planning and resources are identified for the recovery phase. The Council's Communities Committee and Place and Economic Development Committees are this month considering Council proposals for a Community Recovery Strategy and an Economic Recovery Strategy respectively.
- 2.4 This report provides a summary of the decisions taken under the Managing Director's urgency powers since 26 May 2020.

**3. Decisions**

3.1 The decision log is attached at **Appendix 1**. All decisions were made in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader or the Chair and Vice of the relevant committee. A summary of the decisions is set out below.

## **Council managed buildings and facilities**

- 3.2 Following detailed risk assessment work and in line with changing Government guidance, the Council has now re-opened the Museum and Art Gallery, the Commandery Museum and the Tourist Information Centre. The Guildhall was reopened to the public with controlled access via the new 89 High Street entrance which is also providing face to face customer services. Following the completion of refurbishment works, the Council's new Housing Advice centre will be opening for appointments from 24 July. Covid secure arrangements are in place at all sites. The first wedding in the Guildhall took place on 6 July and further bookings are being taken.
- 3.3 The Council has been reopening playgrounds on a phased basis since 6 July as all necessary risk assessment work is completed and the Splashpad will follow the same process. Toilets are fully reopened at all sites except Barbourne Road where essential maintenance works are being completed.
- 3.4 The Council is not programming any large outdoor events itself at the present time. However, dialogue is being maintained with the City's regular events organisers and the Council will consider hiring arrangements for the City's parks in the event that Covid secure arrangements could be guaranteed and events fully complied with all applicable Government guidance.
- 3.5 It has been possible to increase the number of mourners at the Astwood chapel from 14 to 20. This is in line with the latest guidance from the Government and the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management. Social distancing requirements will continue to be followed at all funeral services.

## **Leisure centres**

- 3.6 The Council has kept in regular dialogue with Freedom Leisure during this very challenging period for them. Freedom Leisure has been committed to reopening their centres from the earliest date the Government has permitted.
- 3.7 The Covid -19 pandemic has had a major impact on the viability of the leisure sector affecting operators of public and private facilities. The Government provided funding for consultancy support to leisure operators and councils across the country to broker discussions about financial support. The Committee has previously been informed of the Council's immediate financial support to Freedom Leisure. This arrangement was subject to review at the end of the first quarter. The outcome of the Council's negotiations with Freedom Leisure to apply to the contract up to 31 March 2021, will be reported to the Committee at its meeting on 28 July.

## **Markets**

- 3.8 The City's markets operator, LSD Promotions Limited, made a proposal to recommence the City Centre market from Angel Place only, as the space on the High Street was considered too constrained to offer a Covid secure environment. The Council accepted this proposal and agreed some variations to the contract, including a price per stall, until the end of the contract term which is January 2021. Plans for this year's Victorian Fayre are still under consideration.

## **Pavement Licences**

- 3.9 The Government's Business and Planning Bill 2020 is passing through the Houses and expected to receive Royal Assent this month. One aspect of the new legislation is a new temporary regime for pavement licences. Hospitality businesses will be able to apply to the Council for a pavement licence and, provided that certain tests are met, the Council will grant a licence for the business to put tables, chairs and other street furniture outside their premises. There is a statutory consultation process and considerations of safety and anti-social behaviour will be factored in. The Council has agreed to apply a Worcestershire-wide policy for pavement licences and the Worcestershire Regulatory Services team will process and determine licence applications except those which are subject to a call-in process by Council Members which will be determined by a sub-committee.

## **Discretionary grant scheme for businesses**

- 3.10 The Government provided the Council with £888,000 funding for grants to City businesses which had not been previously eligible for the Government's Covid related financial support. The Council agreed the detailed criteria and process for the assessment and allocation of this grant funding. The scheme received over 200 applications, which are being processed, and so far £230,000-worth of grants have been approved.

## **4. Risk management**

- 4.1 As reported to the Committee on 26 May, the Council's corporate and service risk registers clearly identify which risks are caused or impact by Covid-19. Risks have been regularly reviewed by the senior management team and while it has been possible to close or reduce the impact of some, others remain of concern. A summary of the current status of the Covid-19 corporate risks are attached at **Appendix 2**.

## **5. Financial impact**

- 5.1 The impact of Covid-19 on the Council's income and expenditure is set out in a separate Q1 Finance Report, elsewhere on the agenda.
- 5.2 The decisions regarding Freedom leisure have given rise to additional costs, which are also reported in the Q1 finance report. These costs can be offset by grant provided by Government which amounts to £1.235m to date.
- 5.3 The variation agreement made with LSD Promotions will affect concession fee income for the remainder of the contract. The level of impact will depend on the level of demand for stalls. However, the value of the concession for 2020/21 is £33,099, which represents the maximum risk exposure for the Council.

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**Background Papers: None**

**Appendix 1: Decision log**

**Appendix 2: Risk log**