

Brixton Parish Council

Covid-19 (Coronavirus) Business Continuity Arrangements



1. Introduction

Councillors will be aware of the Covid-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic and the Government guidance is that the worst case scientific modelling estimates that up to 80% of the UK population could become infected during the course of the outbreak.

It is expected to last for months in the UK, and this is the reason for the strong distancing and isolation guidance already issued. Brixton Parish Council (BPC) has a duty of care to prevent the spread of infectious disease not just to BPC Council members and staff but also to members of the public.

However, BPC needs to ensure that it maintains effective and lawful decision-making processes and continues the operation of essential services and contractual obligations.

This report sets out how BPC can respond to ensure that these objectives are met.

2. Matters Relating to Staff / Councillors

If the clerk / councillor is fit for work but decides, or is instructed, to self-isolate then home working will continue.

In the event of the Clerk being unable to work, contact with the public will be maintained by the Chairman of BPC (or in her absence the Vice Chairman) as currently happens when the Clerk is on Annual Leave.

The Clerk / Councillors who are sick or unfit for work need to focus on their recovery.

3. Day to day business of BPC

It is intended that the Parish Clerk ("the Clerk") will continue to respond to enquiries from the public. While BPC has no formal role or expertise in public health matters, it is well placed to distribute information to local residents and to keep people informed. This will be done via the BPC website and local Facebook pages.

All enquiries will be dealt with via telephone and email.

The Clerk will continue to update the BPC website and request that any correspondence is placed on the LOVEBrixton Facebook page and the Brixton village website. If the Clerk is unable to fulfil these duties, then the Chair will access the emails and update the websites as per Clerk instructions.

4. Public Meetings

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

Due to the nature of local government and considering the Councillors and Members of Public who attend meetings, there is a significant proportion of attendees considered “high risk” to Covid-19. Therefore, in order to protect attendees, public meetings are suspended until the Government specifically lifts current restrictions imposed to deal with Covid-19.

New temporary regulations allow for remote meetings to take place (valid until May 2021)

There is no requirement to hold the Annual Meeting of BPC this year (2020). The current chair of BPC will continue in her post until May next year (2021)

No regulations have been made for the Annual Parish Meeting, but under current circumstances, it would be impossible to call an Annual Parish meeting and comply with public health. In this instance BPC will not hold the Annual Parish Meeting in April 2020.

5. Delegation to the Clerk

The Clerk is formally designated Proper Officer/Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) and in law is the only individual who can act on behalf of BPC and lead the administration of all BPC’s activities. Some obligations are statutory whilst others are determined by BPC as part of the Clerk’s job description. These delegated powers are the everyday duties of the Proper Officer and Responsible Finance Officer, including management of all staff, services and finances.

i) General Delegation

To allow BPC to operate on a minimum requirement basis, the following is delegated to the Clerk until the Government lifts the restrictions imposed to deal with Covid-19:

The Clerk shall have delegated authority to make decisions on behalf of BPC where such decisions cannot reasonably be deferred and must be made in order to comply with a commercial or statutory deadline.

This will be carried out in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of BPC and whenever possible with all BPC council members, by electronic means or telephone. The delegation does not extend to matters expressly reserved to BPC in legislation or in its Standing Orders or Financial Regulations. Any decisions made under this delegation will be recorded in writing and will be published in accordance with the relevant regulations.

ii) Planning Applications

The Clerk will continue to follow the procedure set out in the Planning Policy (adopted by BPC on March 2019) taking into consideration the following points:

- All planning application site visits will be undertaken in conjunction with the appropriate government guidelines.
- Having obtained comments from all councillors within an agreed timescale and having secured agreement for a response from a quorate majority of councillors the clerk in collaboration with the Chairman, would submit the response to the relevant body (SHDC or DCC)
- The decision will then be reported at the next meeting of BPC.

6. Finance

All purchases and payments will be recorded on the monthly finance report and circulated to councillors on or before the date BPC would meet.

- If the BPC are meeting remotely this would then be agreed as per the standing orders / financial regulations.
- If BPC do not meet remotely, then this would be agreed by councillors via email and recorded on the monthly report ready to be ratified at the next meeting of BPC.

To minimise social interaction between BPC bank account signatories, cheque book will be sent via Royal Mail or delivered to the appropriate councillor to sign. This will then be returned to the Clerk and cheques photocopied and dispatched to the relevant beneficiaries.

BPC are at present trying to set up internet banking to alleviate the above. If this is successful, this will supersede the above. Clerk will set a up payment via the online system and two signatories will authorise the payment. This will be recorded on the monthly reconciliation report.

The clerk will still produce the quarterly reconciliation, and this will be emailed to all BPC councillors. To avoid social interaction between BPC members the independent check of the quarterly reconciliation will be suspended until further notice.

7. 2019/2020 end of year accounts

The publication date for final, audited, accounts for local councils will move from 30 September 2020 to 30 November 2020

The requirement for the public inspection period to include the first 10 working days of July has been removed. Instead, BPC must commence the public inspection period on or before the first working day of September 2020.

This means that draft accounts must be approved by 31 August 2020 at the latest or may be approved earlier where possible.

This section will continue to be updated once information has been received regarding the internal audit.

8. Community Emergency Plan

Responding to the Government and Public Health England's information and guidance on the coronavirus implementing Brixton Parish Council's Community Emergency Plan will be led by Cllr Helen Williams. Actions agreed as a part of the Community Emergency Plan will be regularly reviewed in line with any emergency status. In the event that Cllr Williams is unable to co-ordinate the plan, then the Chair of BPC and Clerk would deputise and co-ordinate along with a couple of parishioners.

Conclusion / Recommendation

That BPC considers this report and approves it in full, noting that these continuity arrangements and delegations remain in force until such time that Brixton Parish Council is able to meet in public.

This document will be updated as and when specific advice is received from the relevant bodies.

Adopted and approved by BPC Council 29th April 2020

Amended and updated by BPC 28th October 2020