



## **FOUR MARKS PARISH COUNCIL** **RISK ASSESSMENT AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY RESPONSE** **TO COVID-19**

**This Risk assessment has been conducted specifically for Four Marks Parish Council with reference to its staff, Councillors, and activities including public events. The Parish accepts no liability whatsoever should any other person or body choose to utilise the information contained herein for their own purposes. You are strongly advised to consult Government websites for advice on coronavirus and conduct your own risk assessment pertinent for your own situation/organisation which will be different from that of Four Marks Parish Council.**

### **1.0 Introduction**

On 31 December 2019, Chinese authorities notified the World Health Organization (WHO) of an outbreak of pneumonia in Wuhan City, which was later classified as a new disease: COVID-19.

- 1.1. On 30 January 2020, WHO declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern” (PHEIC). On 11<sup>th</sup> March WHO categorised the outbreak as a pandemic. And subsequently stated on 14<sup>th</sup> March that Europe is now the centre of the pandemic.
- 1.2. UK Chief Medical Officers HAD classified the risk to the UK as moderate. This has now been raised to high as of 12<sup>th</sup> March.
- 1.3. On 10 February, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock, announced [strengthened legal powers to protect public health](#). [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus\) Regulations 2020](#) have been put in place to reduce the risk of further human-to-human transmission in this country by keeping individuals in isolation where public health professionals believe there is a reasonable risk an individual may have the virus.
- 1.4. On 3<sup>rd</sup> March the Government published its response plan to the virus which consists of 4 phases:
  - Contain: detect early cases, follow up close contacts, and prevent the disease taking hold in this country for as long as is reasonably possible (This includes individuals at risk of carrying the virus being asked by NHS111 to self-isolate for 14 days. Those testing positive are placed in quarantine (either under appropriate medical care or at home) and are required to undergo further testing with two negative results before being released from quarantine.
  - Delay: slow the spread in this country, if it does take hold, lowering the peak impact and pushing it away from the winter season. This may involve social distancing measures including closure of schools and cancellation of public

events.

- Research: better understand the virus and the actions that will lessen its effect on the UK population; innovate responses including diagnostics, drugs and vaccines; use the evidence to inform the development of the most effective models of care
- Mitigate: provide the best care possible for people who become ill, support hospitals to maintain essential services and ensure ongoing support for people ill in the community to minimise the overall impact of the disease on society, public services and on the economy

1.5. The main public health campaign messages from the Government are as follows:

- wash your hands with soap and water often – do this for at least 20 seconds
- always wash your hands when you get home or into work
- use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- put used tissues in the bin straight away and wash your hands afterwards
- try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell
- do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean

1.6 As of 12<sup>th</sup> March, the Government announced it was moving from containment phase into delay phase. New advice has been issued as follows:

- Anyone who shows certain symptoms is now required to self-isolate for 7 days, regardless of whether they have travelled to affected areas. This means people should stay at home and avoid all but essential contact with others for 7 days from the point of displaying mild symptoms, to slow the spread of infection

The symptoms are:

- a high temperature (37.8 degrees and above)
- a new, continuous cough

- Individuals are no longer asked to call NHS 111 to go into self-isolation. If their symptoms worsen during home isolation or are no better after 7 days contact NHS 111 online at 111.nhs.uk. If they have no internet access, they should call NHS 111. For a medical emergency dial 999.

1.7 The Government has announced that it will be considering further social isolation measures including banning large public events as from next week. Whilst schools remain open at this time closure may be considered at a later date. It should be noted that breaking news over the weekend indicates elderly people may be quarantined for 4 months and other drastic measures may need to be implemented including forced requisitioning of buildings as temporary hospitals.

## 2.0 Sources of Information

2.1. The Parish Council will be acting on information and guidance available from the following sources to which all Councillors, staff and members of the public will be signposted.

(a) Coronavirus – UK Government Response

<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk->

[government-response](#)

- (b) General information to the public  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>
- (c) Guidance for non-clinical settings – Employers and Businesses  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/covid-19-guidance-for-non-clinical-settings-and-the-public>
- (d) NHS Overview, symptoms and advice  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
- (e) Government Action Plan  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan>
- (f) Government Advice for Self-Isolation at home  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-people-with-confirmed-or-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>
- (g) WHO – Getting Workplace ready  
[https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7\\_6](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7_6)

2.2. In the preparation of this updated risk assessment and the subsequent business continuity plan, additional information/guidance has been utilised by the Executive Officer from the following sources:

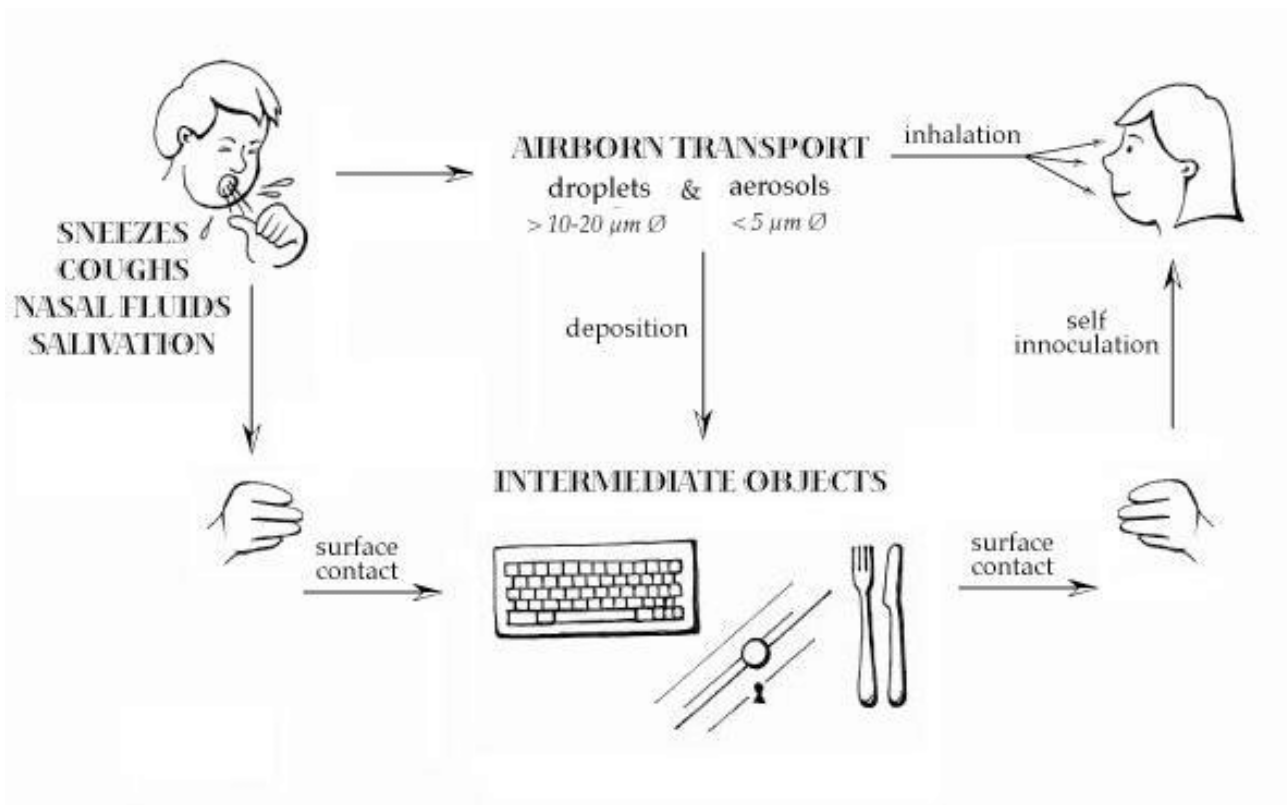
- (a) Research published by Chinese Centre for Disease Control
- (b) WHO website technical guidance
- (c) Society of Local Council Clerks
- (d) National Association of Local Councils
- (e) Local Government Association information for Councils  
<https://www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus-information-councils>
- (f) Ellis Whittam (Employment and Health & Safety Advisers)
- (g) National Joint Councils for Local Government Service – Advisory notice 6<sup>th</sup> March

### **3.0 Key facts underpinning the risk assessment**

The following information has been used to underpin the risk assessments.

3.1. This is an enveloped respiratory virus spread in aerosols/droplets via person to person direct contact and indirect contact with infected surfaces/hands. Main

transmission routes are therefore as follows:

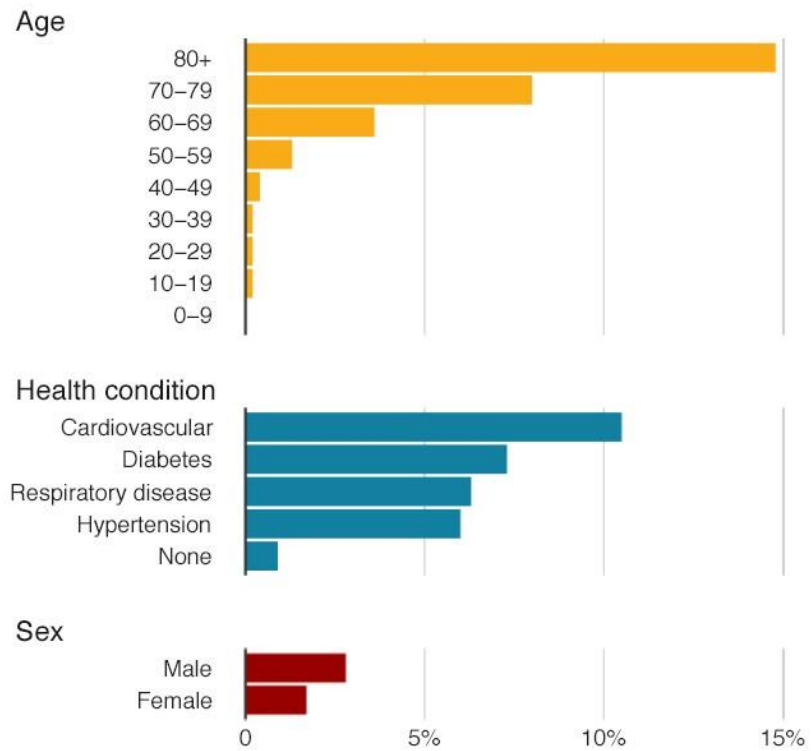


The key to managing the risk of contracting the virus is to limit the opportunities for spread/transmission. This not only includes the main campaign measures suggested by NHS England in respect of hand sanitisation and reducing aerosol transmission by using tissues, but also adopting procedures for surface decontamination of “multi-use touch points” such as door handles, keypads etc.

- 3.2. This is a novel virus hence unlike influenza, there is no natural immunity/vaccine. Therefore it is likely a high proportion of people will become infected (current estimates are 80% of the UK population) and according to the Governments action plan up to 20% of the Council’s staff/Councillors may be infected during the peak of the outbreak. Business continuity planning is therefore key to maintaining Council services and corporate decision-making capabilities.
- 3.3. The population segments at most risk of severe disease/death are those over 60 or with underlying medical conditions including diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular, renal issues and respiratory issues. This has implications when assessing the risk to the public, councillors and staff in Four Marks as a significant proportion of Councillors and staff are either over the age of 60 or have pre-existing conditions.

## Death rate varies by age, health and sex

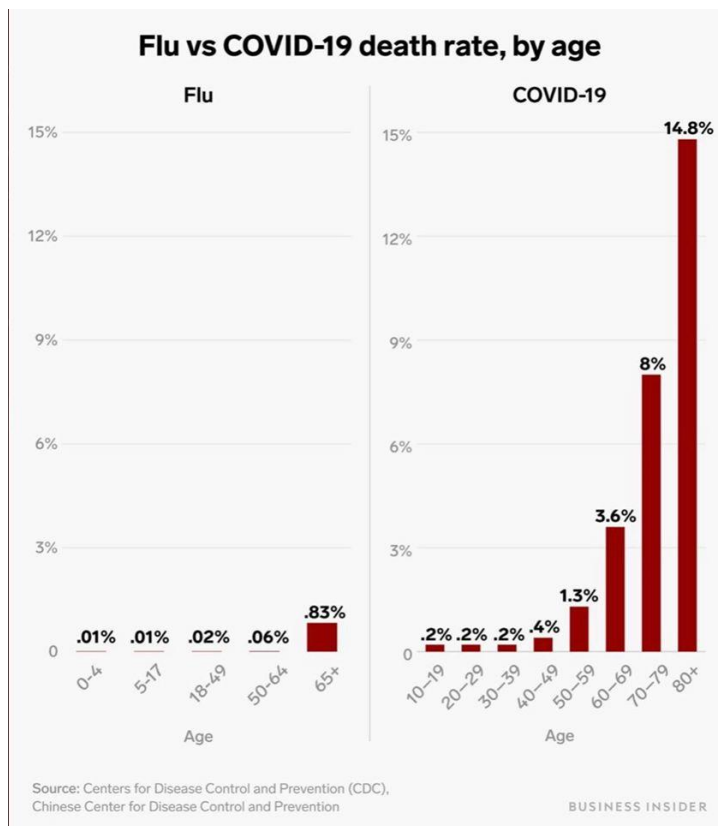
Proportion of deaths among confirmed cases



Source: Chinese Centre for Disease Control & Prevention, 18 Feb 2020



The death rate will be significantly higher in the elderly (who are immunised against flu) than for an influenza outbreak as the following comparison shows:



- 3.4. Transmission of the virus is no longer contained or restricted to direct contact with people travelling abroad. The virus is now spreading within the community.
- 3.5. Unlike flu, there is a much longer incubation period, and people start shedding the virus at a much earlier stages before any symptoms are showing (pre-symptomatic phase) Although studies in China show the incubation period can range from 0-27 days. WHO have determined a quarantine/isolation period of 14 days to be appropriate. Most people start showing signs between 5-11 days post infection.
- 3.6. Data available suggests the virus can survive in the air for at least 3 hours, on cardboard for 24 hours and on hard surfaces (e.g. stainless steel, melamine etc) for up to 72 hours, possibly longer. In respect of infection by close contact, advice is to limit contact to no more than 15 minutes and to stand more than 2m distance.
- 3.7. Once recovered from the virus, an individual has immunity. Tests are still being conducted to understand how long after recovery infectious viral particles (as opposed to fragments of viral RNA) are shed. Recent published research indicates that people with mild symptoms stop shedding infectious virus after about day 10 of the onset of symptoms. This is relevant in respect of how soon after recovering from coronavirus staff can return to work and Council can resume business.

- 3.8. The key risk of exposure is therefore from pre-symptomatic staff, Councillors or members of the public having contracted the virus and subsequently attending Council activities and thereby transmitting the virus to others.
- 3.9. The Parish Council cannot determine or control what people do away from the workplace.

#### **4.0 Current position**

As of 9am on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020, Hampshire has the largest number of confirmed cases within the UK, with 53 people having tested positive for COVID-19. Across the UK, 1372 people have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and there have been a total of 35 deaths confirmed.

A daily bulletin is issued at 2pm giving the number of confirmed cases. There is a 24-hour delay before details of the locations of the confirmed cases are released by Public Health England. This is now recorded by Upper Tier Local Authority so unless it is published in the press, it may not be possible to readily identify whether there are confirmed cases in Four Marks. The bulletins are monitored daily by the Executive Officer as the risks will increase once cases start to be confirmed within the local community.

The government has announced that it will not be testing people with mild symptoms for coronavirus who are self-isolating. Therefore the number of confirmed cases will not accurately reflect the extent to which the population of Four Marks is infected.

In response to this, several local organisations have postponed meetings and events such as the Four Marks comedy evening have been delayed. The Annual Parish Council meeting is still planned to go ahead but the Council will review this in line Public Health England guidance nearer the time.

Although the Dept of Health and Social Care, Public Health England and the NHS are leading on the UK response to the outbreak, the Parish Council nevertheless has a duty of care to staff, Councillors and members of the public to conduct its own risk assessments at local level specific for its activities and take steps accordingly.

## **5.0 PEOPLE AT RISK**

The Parish Council cannot control what people do in their personal time and how they choose to respect (or not) the guidance from HMG Gov or indeed take additional steps to limit their exposure (such as taking holidays, visiting public places etc). Councillors and Members of the Public have a choice in whether they undertake Parish Council activities however staff do not.

It may be that decisions in respect of working from home for 'at risk' members of staff may need to be taken at an earlier stage.

In addition some members of staff may care for close family members in vulnerable groups. Their specific concern is not that they become infected but that they unknowingly transmit the virus during the 14 day asymptomatic period to their vulnerable relatives. Again, if they have vulnerable dependents, then decisions on working from home may need to be made at an earlier stage.

### **5.1. Administrative Staff**

There is a personal supply of hand sanitiser and antibacterial handwipes in the Parish Office for the two members of staff along with anti-bacterial wipes for cleaning surfaces. Toilets that are used in the sports pavilion have soap dispensers, hot air dryers and paper towels.

All members of staff are asked to act responsibly and follow all precautions to keep the work area free from contamination and not come into work if they feel unwell and display any of the symptoms noted above.

Risk from members of public (particularly bereaved who may have lost someone to coronavirus) – staff advised to ensure they are at least 2m away and limit contact time to no more than 15 minutes.

### **5.2. Grounds Maintenance**

Staff are less at risk when out in the community completing site visits to areas such as the cemetery/pond/footpaths for example. Main risks are from approaches by members of the public, particularly at the cemetery and direct contact with play equipment etc recently touched by members of the public. N.B. There is no risk from actual burial of COVID-19 casualties as all infection risks are addressed by the Funeral Directors following appropriate Government guidance.



### **5.3. Councillors**

Risk from staff, each other and members of the public whilst attending Council meetings/events and undertaking work with residents.

### **5.4 Members of Public**

In particular, members of the public attending Council events such as the Parish Meetings and Annual Parish Meeting. Any communication or meetings that were planned to take place have now been postponed.

Attendance at Council and Committee meetings is normally low with the exception of the Planning Committee meeting, particularly if there is a contentious planning application.

## **MEASURES**

The point at which further measures will need to be undertaken, will be considered when cases are confirmed in the local community. This may include working from home for Parish staff and amendments to the office opening hours.

### **6.1. INFECTION CONTROL MEASURES – hand and surface sanitisation**

The Executive Officer will endeavour to purchase relevant sanitising products for the Parish office.

#### **6.1.1. For individuals**

- Staff are aware of correct handwashing procedures and posters are in the toilets that staff use in the sports pavilion.
- Box of tissues and surface wipes are available

#### **6.1.2. For use by residents/Councillors at meeting rooms/events etc**

- All surfaces will be disinfected prior to all meetings of the Parish Council.
- The Executive Officer will aim to provide all councillors with sanitiser on entry to the meeting or ensure that anyone entering the meeting washes their hands on entry

#### **6.1.3. Other measures**

- Staff encouraged to use their own personal mugs and maintain their own workspace.
- Masks have not been purchased at this time.

#### **6.1.4. Storage/use of products**

Most stocks of hand sanitiser and alcohol wipes are sold out everywhere including online. The Parish Council will use the supplies that it does have responsibly and continue to try and source further stock of hand sanitiser and wipes.

## **6.2. INFECTION CONTROL MEASURES –Self Isolation, Working From Home, And Phase 2 Social Isolation Measures**

### **a) Self-Isolation**

Self-isolation: Currently, the guidance states that individuals are required to self-isolate if they have a continuous cough or high temperature. Employees who are actually ill will be treated as off sick with associated sick pay in the usual manner.

**It is important that all staff and Councillors SPEAK DIRECTLY to the Executive Officer if they are ordered to self-isolate or feel ill as the individual circumstances /timing of the self-isolation will impact the risk assessments and may mean other staff/Councillors could be advised to self-isolate.**

### **b) Working from Home**

At some point, it will be necessary for the Council to consider staff working from home as per HM Gov advice. The Parish Office are working on a contingency plan for both flexible working hours in the Parish Office and working from home to keep the office operational.

### **c) Cancellation of Public meetings**

It is a legal requirement that all Council and committee meetings must be open to the public (except for discussion of sensitive matters). Therefore either the meeting takes place with members of the public attending if they wish, or it is cancelled. It is proposed that the Council meeting planned for 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020 will be held in the large room at the Sports Pavilion. Although a much smaller space than the village hall, and a licensed premises, it is frequented by less members of the public generally. The Executive Officer is currently in the process of trying to organise this for this and further meetings.

At the upcoming Parish Council meeting, and any subsequent committee meetings and the Annual Parish Council meeting, the Executive Officer will try to ensure that there is ample room between the councillors themselves and between members of the public, however at some point it is very possible the Government will ban public gatherings. Until then, Councillors attending meetings also run the risk of infecting each other.

*At NALC level, there are investigations by the legal team regarding whether face to face meetings (e.g. video conferencing with live streaming to the public) can be utilised by Local Councils during a period of risk to public safety, or whether total suspension of the council decision making process is the only option. This information will be shared as soon as it is known.*

**d) Council Events and other services**

Council events such as the Great British Spring Clean scheduled for the 4<sup>th</sup> April 2020 and the planned VE75 celebrations on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2020 will need to be evaluated in light of any confirmed cases within the community and any restrictions that are in place at the time. As hand sanitiser is in short supply, this will also need to be acquired if these events are to go ahead.

Apart from meetings and events, the two main items that will be affected by any working from home policy will be the administrative operation of the Cemetery and the Parish accounts administration. The RBS Alpha software is only available on the PC in the Parish office.

**RECOMMENDED AND APPROVED**

- (i) The Risk Assessment**
- (ii) That implementation of Working from Home will be the decision of the Executive Officer and reflect the risk to staff/Councillors of community spread once the first cases are confirmed in the local region.**