

Coronavirus (COVID-19) response: Ipswich Borough Council

Summary of announcements up to, and including, 8th May 2020

The list below includes all previously announced decisions / information from Ipswich Borough Council that remains of relevance. The information below was contained within one of our 8 weekly updates up to and including 8th May 2020.

This summary supplements the weekly statement issued on 15th May 2020.

Council Buildings / Events / Services and Bookings

1. **Council Buildings:** Ipswich Borough Council's public buildings will remain closed until at least 22nd May 2020 and thereafter until such time as the government restrictions are lifted and we have the ability to re-open them. These facilities include the Regent Theatre, Town Hall & Corn Exchange, Shop Mobility, Swimming Pools & Sports Centres, the Tourist Information Centre, the visitor centres in Christchurch and Holywells parks and the Museum, Art Gallery and Christchurch Mansion.
2. **Cancelled Bookings:** Anyone who has booked one of our facilities to hold an event / meeting etc - for the period between 1st May and 30th June 2020 can, if they wish, get in touch and reschedule it (without any additional cost) to sometime later in the year. Please contact us using the General Enquiry option available on our website www.ipswich.gov.uk and we will respond as soon as we can.
3. **Future Bookings:** The Borough Council will not take any more bookings for any of our rentable spaces in our public buildings for a period up to and including 30th June 2020.
4. **Regent Customer Contact Progress:** The Council has contacted all customers of cancelled shows at the Ipswich Regent or Corn Exchange who had purchased tickets through our Box Office. The Council is processing requests for refunds for shows that have rescheduled and for which customers do not want to transfer their tickets or that have been cancelled without a rescheduled date. Customers of future shows are advised to check our website and social media feeds for updates and we will be in contact if there are any further changes.

5. Council Events: All events that have been organised or managed by Ipswich Borough Council and that are scheduled to take place in our parks or on the Cornhill before 1st August 2020 have been cancelled. These events include Holi Festival, Global Rhythm, Music Day, Indian Summer Mela, Open Air Theatre and Family Fun Days. No one yet has any clear idea as to when larger gatherings will next be allowed. The Council is making some plans to reschedule its events to late summer / early autumn - if gatherings etc are allowed by then. We are focusing on two weekends and we hope this will enable other organisations to plan their thinking on rescheduled events – i.e. with some certainty that they wouldn't clash with major Council organised events. These weekends are 22nd and 23rd August (already scheduled for Maritime Ipswich) and 26th and 27th September.
6. Council Owned Office Buildings: That IP-City Centre and Grafton House (both owned and managed by the Borough Council) will remain open for appropriate Council staff and for tenants but meetings rooms in both buildings will not be bookable by outside organisations for any date prior to 30th June 2020.
7. iCard Refund Progress: All customers have been notified of options available to them and all have now had the relevant refund, voucher or credit. All customers with iCard memberships have been written to and all direct debits have been amended to zero. Those customers with annual iCard memberships have been notified of the option to refund or to extend membership. For classes, parties, junior activities and casual sessions, all vouchers have now been sent and all customers contacted.
8. Parks: The Council is continuing to keep its parks open but with kiosks, toilets, courts, outdoor gyms and play areas closed. The parks can be used for exercise as long as social distancing is applied.
9. Street Traders: All the regular street traders in Ipswich have confirmed they will not be operating until further notice.
10. Parking enforcement: Our parking patrols are taking a common-sense view and focussing their time on tackling obstructive and dangerous parking to ensure emergency services, refuse collections and those carrying out essential travel can do so safely. Enforcement continues as usual in our Car Parks and in residents parking areas.
11. Parking for NHS and Social Care Key Workers: Critical key workers in the Health and Social care sectors are able to obtain free parking in car parks owned by Ipswich Borough Council and in on-street pay & display locations. Eligible critical key workers who apply are given access to an online MiPermit account which enables them to register their vehicle and park for free. More details can be found at: <https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/keyworkerparking>.

12. Crown Street Car Park: Due to the lack of use and the cost of keeping it open (as two employees need to be on site at all times) the Council has shut Crown Street Car Park until further notice. William Street Car Park is 50 metres away and – at this time - has plenty of spare space for those that were still using Crown to relocate to it.
13. Allotments: Allotments are still appropriate to be used as people's daily exercising and the Council is asking allotment users to remember the social distancing guidance given by the Government. We have a number of vacant plots at our allotment sites. At the moment, we are not accepting requests from potential new plot-holders but we are looking at whether we can simplify processes to enable new plot-holders to start on their plots in a manner where social distancing guidance can be followed – e.g. when handing over of keys and provision of 'start-up' advice at the plot. If we can do this in an acceptable manner we will communicate that via one of these weekly statements.
14. Black and Blue Bin Waste: During the period when brown bin collections were suspended, on average the weight of waste collected from residents' black bins increased by about 2kg per household, which is a 10% increase on this time last year. On average the weight of the material within the blue recycling bins is much the same as usual.

Democracy

15. Executive Authority: On 24th March 2020 the Leader of the Council (Councillor David Ellesmere) delegated authority to the Chief Executive to use the full range of powers held by the Executive of the Council until further notice.
16. Executive decisions taken: Following the cancellation of the Executive meeting that had been scheduled to take place on 24th March 2020, the Council Chief Executive has taken decisions on 9 of the items on that agenda. The details of the published papers are still available online – despite the meeting being cancelled – at <https://democracy.ipswich.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=135&MIId=2496&Ver=4>. Details of the decisions the Chief Executive has taken under his current 'emergency' authorisations are all recorded online at: <https://democracy.ipswich.gov.uk/mgListOfficerDecisions.aspx?bcr=1&BAM=0>. Any future decisions he might take will also be recorded and available via the same web-link.
17. Elections: Under the Covid-19 2020 Act, the Police and Crime Commissioner Election (Suffolk) and Ipswich Borough Local Elections, due to be held on 07 May 2020, have been postponed until 06 May 2021. The cancellation of polling station venues and associated equipment is complete. Similarly, where a by-election arises this will also be postponed until May 2021 and we await further guidance on the procedures that will apply.

18. Annual Council Meeting: The Annual Council Meeting scheduled for 20th May 2020 has been cancelled – as allowed for by recently agreed legislation. The current Mayor (Councillor Jan Parry) and Deputy Mayor (Councillor Jane Riley) will remain in post till the next Annual Meeting – scheduled for May 2021.

Community Impact and Volunteering

19. Council Tenants: The Council can confirm that following Government advice issued on 18th March 2020, the Council has suspended all rent related eviction action in relation to council tenants and will not initiate any new rent related actions until further notice.
20. Council Housing Repairs: The Council has limited repairs to our Council Housing stock to absolutely essential items only until further notice.
21. Volunteering: A new Suffolk-focused community support service, 'Home but Not Alone', has been set up as part of a call for volunteers to help the most vulnerable people who need help during the COVID-19 pandemic. The service will mean willing volunteers, charities, town and parish councils, community and religious groups can all log their details and offers of support on an app, while people who need help can phone to request support. As the number of offers and requests grows, they will be matched so that the right help can be given where it's most needed. The free app, called Tribe Volunteer, can be downloaded from the Apple App Store and Google Play Store.
22. Commercial and CVS Rents: All Ipswich Borough Council's voluntary and community sector tenants and all Ipswich Borough Council's commercial tenants who are no longer able to operate due to the direct implications of the Borough Council's decision to close buildings they operate from e.g. the coffee shop in the now closed Town Hall and Corn Exchange complex - will be given a three-month rent holiday by the Council covering the period April 1st to June 30th. The Council's Property Team has written to all who will benefit from the three-month rent-free period. This support is valued at around £80,000.
23. English as Second Language: The Council are providing information and resources for those residents in Ipswich with English as their second language. Details can be found here <https://www.gyros.org.uk/our-services>. Additional support is provided for refugees or asylum seekers through the Suffolk Refugee Support Team <https://suffolkrefugee.org.uk/>. The Government has also translated the Covid-19 guidance into 11 of the most popular languages in the UK and this can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>.

24. Changes of Circumstances of Existing Claimants: Existing Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction customers should report changes in their circumstances at the earliest opportunity. Losing hours of work or having your pay reduced could increase the level of help you are entitled to. The sooner you tell us about changes in your circumstances, the sooner we can calculate any increase due to you. The Council will look to award any increase in entitlement (due to loss of earnings/employment resulting from the Coronavirus outbreak) from the date that the change happened - providing we are told within 1 month of the change. However, if there are good reasons why you are not able to tell us within one month (such as being in hospital receiving treatment) we will be able to consider longer periods. Changes of circumstances can be reported on line – please go to www.ipswich.gov.uk/changeincircumstances.
25. Council Tax: Ipswich Borough Council is aware that in these challenging times many people might find keeping up with their Council Tax payments and their housing rent payments particularly challenging. We are looking at how we can assist residents further on these matters. In the meantime if you are in severe financial difficulty and cannot pay your next Council Tax instalment or your housing rent please go to www.ipswich.gov.uk/counciltax or www.ipswich.gov.uk/benefits.
26. Residents Parking: Ipswich residents who have Resident Parking Permits for zones 1 -4 can now use some Ipswich Borough car parks as demand exceeds capacity in the on-street bays within Residents Parking Zones. For further details see: <https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/coronavirus-impact-residents-parking>.
27. Rough Sleeping: Since the Government announced on 27th March 2020 that all rough sleepers should be accommodated, there has been a significant increase in demand for accommodation. The Council, working with the Suffolk Accommodation Group has secured accommodation for appropriate households and individuals including rough sleepers. The Chief Executive has, on Wednesday (1st April), authorised the 'block booking' of hotel accommodation for the next 12 weeks. The Council will continue to carefully monitor capacity. You can help by reporting rough sleepers at Roughsleeping.enquiries@ipswich.gov.uk.
28. Homelessness / Begging: The Council and other partners are working particularly hard to ensure homeless households and rough sleepers have safe accommodation as they are a high Covid-19 risk group. Additional accommodation has been recently secured to ensure there is sufficient capacity. People who beg may not be homeless and you cannot be sure what your money will be used for. Instead, if you wish to show support, there is the established Ipswich Help our Homeless charity. Every penny raised goes to Ipswich agencies who help the homeless and rough sleepers. Visit <https://helpourhomeless.co.uk/> for more information.

29. Hardship Fund: (JC) The Government has introduced a new Hardship Fund in response to Covid-19. This is being allocated in accordance with Government advice to support those households already in receipt of means-tested working age Local Council Tax Support. This means bills for these households will be reduced by up to £150 – which will ensure that the most financially vulnerable households have nothing to pay. These awards will be applied automatically if you are already in receipt of this support - there is no requirement to apply. Letters to the nearly 7,000 households affected should all have been sent by the end of today (3rd April). Ipswich Borough Council welcome new claims from people whose financial circumstances have been affected by Covid-19. To find out if you may be entitled to some help with your Council Tax, please go to www.ipswich.gov.uk/benefits to make a claim. It is never too late to register for help with Council Tax.
30. Gateway to Homechoice: The Gateway to Homechoice is a sub-regional system used by many local organisations to advertise available social and affordable rented property. Due to Government guidance restricting home moves the website and the service has been suspended. This means that the Council's normal letting process has stopped for the time being.
31. Preparation for Likely Higher Local Death Rates: A Suffolk 'Excess Death Cell' has been set up. This is to consider and plan for County-wide body storage capacity to be increased and whether the paperwork associated with deaths and funerals can be simplified. The Borough Council is participating in and contributing to this workstream. The Council has trained additional staff to ensure that capacity for both cremation and burial are increased. Spare parts have been ordered for our cremators.
32. Direct Line Community Fund: Direct Line Group has committed £100,000 from its Community Fund to provide essential supplies for homeless people in Ipswich during the Coronavirus emergency. This will enable the Borough Council to buy dozens of 'starter packs' for families and individuals moving into the Council's temporary accommodation. The packs include bedding, crockery, saucepans, nappies, toiletries, electrical goods, children's drawing books, food and shopping vouchers – items that can help people at their most vulnerable. People who have been sleeping rough will be offered a change of clothes or vouchers. This commitment has been secured in the last few days and launched on 17th April 2020 by Direct Line Group's CEO Penny James and Councillor Neil MacDonald, the Council's Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health.

33. Discretionary Housing Payments: Every year the Government make funds available to Local Authorities to help customers who, despite receiving Housing Benefit or Universal Credit Housing Costs, still have a shortfall in the amount they need to pay their rent. The Council generally use this discretionary funding to help customers who are affected by the Local Housing Allowance rent restrictions or the Bedroom Tax but have specific reasons why they could not look for alternative, cheaper accommodation. Applications from customers who have been affected as a consequence of the Coronavirus emergency are welcome. Short-term assistance can help prevent rent arrears accruing while customers wait to return to their normal employment or hours of work. To make an application for Discretionary Housing Payments please go to www.ipswich.gov.uk/dhp.
34. HEARS: Ipswich Borough Council's Home Emergency Alarm Response Service (HEARS) - which provides a much needed service to many customers - continues to provide 24/7 cover. Since the start of the pandemic (23rd March) HEARS have received 3,412 calls and made 379 safe visits to customers' homes. HEARS has successfully contacted all of its 1283 customers to check on their welfare with 8% being provided with the Home, But Not Alone number - as it was identified that they may have been in need of more support.

Support for Business

35. Business Rates: The Council has also decided not to start any formal enforcement action related to any non-payment of business rates - that are related to the financial impact of Coronavirus - until (at least) June 30th 2020.
36. Ipswich Central Levy: The Borough Council has worked with Ipswich Central and their industry body to lobby Government to extend the business rates discount for retail, leisure, and hospitality businesses so that it covers the Ipswich Central levy as well. But for the moment, pending any government announcement, the levy money is still owed. However, in order to allow Government the time required to reach a definitive decision on this matter, businesses in the retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors will not have their levy payments enforced until, at least, 30th June 2020. Therefore, whilst the due date for payment remains unchanged (30th April 2020) as set out in the Regulations it is not the intention of Ipswich Borough Council or Ipswich Central to send reminders or take action against any business in those sectors prior to 30th June 2020. For the avoidance of doubt, however, should Government not take up our recommendations, the levy for this sector should be paid by 30th June 2020 and, for other levy payers, the due date remains as existing (30th April 2020).

37. Business Rate Relief: The Council has sent out just over 1,200 letters to businesses that qualify for full business rates relief (i.e. a £0 bill) for 2020/21 – in the ‘retail, hospitality leisure’ sectors. If you haven’t yet received a letter from the Borough Council and believe your business qualifies then please apply online at <https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/businessratesgrant>. Please first check the government guidance at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses> that sets out who should qualify for the business rate relief.
38. Paying Suppliers: The Council has updated its procedures so that we are paying all invoices from suppliers within 7 days - to support businesses during this difficult time.
39. Suffolk Chamber of Commerce: Suffolk Chamber is working hard to ensure that its members – and indeed the wider business community – are kept up to date with all the latest information about COVID-19. In particular, Suffolk Chamber has: (i) set up a COVID-19 hub at www.suffolkchamber.co.uk providing up-to-date links to authoritative information of relevance to business; (ii) sent out daily COVID-19 briefings with the latest ‘must-know’ facts for businesses; (iii) conducted a weekly COVID-19 survey of its members to ascertain their actions and views – in order to lobby Government to boost its support packages; (iv) handled hundreds of direct queries from businesses by phone, email and social media and lobbied for improvements to various Government COVID-19 schemes.
40. Business Rate Holiday: The Government have previously announced a 12 month business rate holiday for the ‘retail, hospitality and leisure’ sector. The Council wrote to all qualifying businesses last month. Revised bills (i.e. bills of £0) have now been sent to all 758 qualifying business. The Council has now extended this to include – following revised Government guidance – childcare nurseries on Ofsted’s Early Years Register. Revised bills have been issued to 23 such ratepayers. This additional relief amounts to around £153,000 in support.

Staffing matters

41. Home-working: The Council has limited the number of its employees at our Grafton House Headquarters to less than 50 people per day (all practising social distancing). This is approximately 10% of the numbers who normally work out of the Council’s space in Grafton House each day. Significantly increased levels of home-working are taking place
42. Key Workers at the Council: The Borough Council has identified all its Key Workers across its services (just less than 50% of our employees) and sent letters to all those identified on 20th March 2020.

43. Employee Rules: With the exception of maintaining our Cemeteries and Crematorium service and enabling 'on-site' meetings to take place - with appropriate social distancing measures followed - all Ipswich Borough Council staff are still banned from attending (in person) any external meetings or events until at least 22nd May 2020. Employees will continue to provide essential services to residents (such as essential emergency repairs for tenants and our HEARS service) and will therefore meet residents but they may ask residents whether they or their household are displaying any coronavirus symptoms first and will follow best practice wherever possible on social isolating.
44. Furloughing: The Council has decided (May 2020) to furlough over 200 employees (around 80 full-time equivalent) under the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. The furloughing will take place across a range of Council services that are unable to operate fully at this time such as sports centres and theatres. As stated at point 16, we have already redeployed 117 employees into key services that are leading our response to Coronavirus - but we need to take this additional action to improve our financial position in the face of unprecedented costs in tackling the virus – and unprecedented losses of income across many of our services. None of the employees affected will lose out financially as we will continue to pay the 20% of their salary which falls outside the Government's furlough scheme. The decision to furlough staff means that each will be furloughed for a minimum period of three weeks. This should save the Council about £100,000 over a three week period.

Funding

45. Cultural Organisations / Individuals: Arts Council England, with funding from the National Lottery, are providing £70 million for cultural organisations and individuals in the arts sector affected by the pandemic . Organisations can apply for a maximum of £35,000; individuals can get grants of up to £2,500. Applications open on 9th April 2020. For further information please go to: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/covid19>. National Portfolio Organisations (of which we have 6 in Ipswich) are able to access a separate Arts Council pot of £90 million. If you would like support from the Council in preparing a submission to these funds please contact the Council via events@ipswich.gov.uk.
46. Sports Clubs and Organisations: Sport England has opened a £20 million Community Emergency Fund as part of a UK-wide £195 million support package. Suffolk clubs and community organisations can find out more and apply for emergency grants of between £300 and £10,000. For further information please go to: <https://www.sportengland.org/news/coronavirus-information-sector>. If you would like support in preparing a submission to these funds please contact our partners at Active Suffolk via <https://www.activesuffolk.org/sectorworkers>.

47. Sources of External Funding for Groups (Persimmon): Persimmon is actively operating two charity schemes, specifically for groups supporting the under-18s and people aged over 70. Persimmon's Charitable Foundation is committed to relaunching its Building Futures scheme for 2020. Persimmon will donate more than £1 million to support children in sport, health and education. They are calling on local groups which support children to apply online: www.persimmonhomes.com/building-futures. Persimmon's Community Champions initiative gives away £64,000 every month in single donations up to the value of £1,000. From April 2020, all funding will go directly to groups supporting the over 70s, and therefore groups can apply online: www.persimmonhomes.com/community-champions.
48. Sources of External Funding for Groups (Historic England): The Council will highlight any major sources of funding it has become aware of that may be of interest to local people, businesses or groups. Historic England have launched an emergency fund to help tackle the impact of Coronavirus on the heritage sector. The aim of the fund, which will be up to £2m, is to extend the safety net as far as possible for the sector by helping small heritage organisations both to survive the immediate challenges posed by the pandemic, and to prepare for recovery. This will complement measures put in place by the Government, and the National Lottery Heritage Fund's £50million emergency fund. Applicants are invited to apply for grants of up to £25,000 to address financial difficulties arising from Coronavirus. More information on how to apply: <https://historicengland.org.uk/coronavirus/fund/> The deadline for new applications is midnight on 3 May 2020.
49. Sources of External Funding for Groups (New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership): The Council will highlight any major sources of funding it has become aware of that may be of interest to local people, businesses or groups. New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) has launched a new grant programme worth £3.5m to support businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic and support their recovery following this outbreak. It will provide capital and revenue grants of up to £50,000 towards costs involved in initial resilience and future recovery of businesses, with a maximum 50% intervention rate. This grant is for businesses who are interested in R&D, diversification, Coronavirus related production, purchase of new plant/machinery, IT upgrades and expansion into new markets. Businesses interesting in applying for support should first contact the New Anglia Growth Hub on 0300 333 6536 or email growthhub@newanglia.co.uk. More information is available on the LEP's website - <https://newanglia.co.uk/grant/business-resilience-and-recovery-scheme/>.

Re-starting Services

50. Regent Shows: We will - on a gradual basis - be announcing 17 new shows going on sale through the Regent Box Office over the coming month. These shows are for various dates between Autumn 2020 and Spring 2021, that we are contractually obliged to put on sale now in order for ticket sales to build over time.

51. Ipswich Market: The market re-opened on 1st May with a small number of food stall following recent advice on outdoor markets issued by Government (including maintaining appropriate social distancing standards). The market will open on Fridays and Saturdays over the coming weeks. To further minimise length of personal contact, market traders have been asked to take advance orders online or by telephone and communicate this as the preferred option to their customers. The Council will also promote this via its social media channels.
52. Empty Council Houses: The Council has restarted work on 50 of a backlog of 94 unoccupied council houses (voids). A significant number of employees who will work on these homes have now be trained in new risk assessments observing relevant social distancing rules and national guidance. 19 of these voids were are able to matched to 19 priority households in temporary accommodation and work has started on 17 of these voids. These works include inspecting and surveying to identify the scope of refurbishment required to meet our Ipswich Voids Standard, clearance and where required and asbestos surveys. Once refurbished, these will be direct lets to households in temporary accommodation. The Government issued further advice on 27 April confirming that Local Authorities should continue with essential home moves, which include those moving from temporary accommodation. The Council is restricting the number of employees that work in any individual property to 2 persons to comply with Government advice. A further 33 properties are also in progress. In addition to this, a further three 2 bedroom bungalows - currently unoccupied - are receiving major conversions to fully wheelchair accessible homes.
53. Construction / Development work: With a few exceptions, including on-going works at Eastern Gateway and – now finished works - to the Chantry Park Pond, most major development projects that the Council has an involvement in suspended works as a consequence of Coronavirus. In the next week or two work is expected to re-start at a number of sites including at 1 Cornhill (the Old Post Office). The Council will be starting work next week on a 10-week programme to replace the equipment in the (currently closed) Christchurch Park play area. Work should also restart shortly on the site being developed by the Council's wholly owned company, Handford Homes, on new homes (including council houses) at the former Tooks site on Bury Road. In all cases, the latest government and Construction Leadership Council guidance on safe working during Coronavirus is being applied

Additional Items

54. VE Day: It was important that we commemorated the 75th anniversary of VE Day today (8th May) but it is vital that we did so safely and responsibly. While we could not come together to celebrate and honour the heroes who made victory possible in 1945 we could still get involved through all the many 'events' highlighted on the special VE Day website www.veday75.org. You could, of course, have a quiet moment of reflection by joining the national two-minute silence at 11am.

55. Arts / Cultural Performances: A decent summary of arts and cultural activities going on in the town during these challenging times can be found at: www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/events-activities/online-and-streamed-events/arts-activities/. Each week we will draw attention to one organisation and what performances (etc) they are making publicly available. This week (8th May), the spotlight is on Red Rose Chain Theatre Company who are live streaming (free) a play reading of The Secret Heart of Ann Boleyn: Fallen in Love at 19:30 on Tuesday 19th May. They also release a new video every Friday afternoon. For more information visit: www.redrosechain.com.

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Future Communications and Contacting the Council

The Borough Council intends to issue a full updated summary position every Friday while communicating more regularly about individual issues and services.

If you wish to contact the Council about anything please contact us via www.ipswich.gov.uk or 01473 432000 rather than visit Grafton House or the Customer Services Centre).

The Leader of the Council, Councillor David Ellesmere, should be available to comment if there are any media enquiries – he can be contacted via the Council's Press Office.

Issued by the IBC press office - telephone: 07736 826104