CLERK'S REPORT AND RATIFCATION OF DELEGATED DECISIONS

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1. The last Town Council was held on Tuesday March 17th 2020 at which the Town Council agreed a Business Continuity Plan and Schedule of Delegation to take account of the developing COVID crisis.

1.2. On 23rd March the Government issued stringent guidance on lockdown and social isolation measures, culminating in the Royal Assent of the new Coronavirus 2020 Act on March 25th.

1.3 This report provides an update on Town Council matters that have occurred since the last Council meeting and highlights any decisions that the Clerk has taken under the Schedule of Delegation which now require ratification by Town Council. It also provides some recommendation for Council to consider on actions going forwards.

1.4. The Clerk is normally authorised to make decisions on expenditure if they are from the approved budget headings including for instance repairs or replacements. Urgent decisions that haven't been budgeted for (or policy decisions/responses) need to be taken under delegated powers afforded by the schedule of delegation.

2.0 COUNCIL MEETINGS

The Coronavirus Act (2020) prohibits social gathering so all Council and Committee meetings were postponed following the Town Council meeting o 17th March 2020.

2.1. The introduction of The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020
http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/392/contents/made
now permits urgent business to be decided at remote Council meetings using a suitable video-conferencing software. The Council had decided as part of its Business Continuity Plan in March that if remote meetings were permitted it would proceed with the Annual Meeting as scheduled on Tuesday 19th May

2.2. The Clerk has therefore accelerated the project to provide Councillors with tablets and, following discussion with Clerks around the country and SoVision IT, has selected the Business Pro version of zoom conferencing software and paid for an annual subscription. Earlier security concerns with this platform appear to have been resolved by regular updates and the platform provides functionality to include meetings lengths of greater than 40minutes, up to 100 participants and facilities for audio dial-in as well as PC or tablet use.

3.0 STAFF

3.1. All administrative staff have been working from their homes with Council laptops from Friday 20th March.
The Clerk and Deputy Clerk however have had to continue at times to work from the B&NES office (or now Town Council office) producing posters, picking up post and running payroll; performing delivery runs to Councillors, staff or community

organisations including all the hard copy invoices for signing off for the BACS run, and providing access to the Temple Street Office for contractors during the reinstatement process.

3.2. Grounds maintenance have continued to work in the field every day maintaining the Cemetery, Play Areas, Manor Rd etc and responding to requests/concerns from the community as well as the odd demolished bench.

3.3. Youth workers are currently running virtual Youth Services from their respective homes

3.4. Some staff working hours have been altered temporarily to suit personal circumstances including child care and those who have been furloughed from other jobs (ie Youth Workers) who wish to work hours to suit the new on-line provision of services for Young People. There has been a weekly zoom meeting on wednesday mornings for all staff to attend and there have been separate meetings with the Youth Workers. It must be remembered that staff are not "working from home" but "at their home, during a crisis, trying to work". It will therefore take some further time to become fully adapted and effective to the same standard as working in the office. Communication in and of itself requires phone calls and emails and this means that all administrative tasks are considerably slower to complete than usual. New processes and procedures need to be introduced and this has not been helped by the earlier lack of speedy communal access to shared documents on the server.

3.5. All members of staff have now had to be supplied with a Council mobile phone number so their home landline, personal mobile numbers or the Council main phone number are not in use or need to be publicised as contact numbers The main office mobile number which is advertised on the website/facebook etc is manned during office hours Monday to Friday between two members of staff with call forwarding in operation between the two phones.

3.6 There has been one family bereavement for a member of staff which Councillors were appraised of at the time by email. Flowers and a card were sent.

3.6. To date there have been no confirmed cases of COVID reported amongst the staff although several including the Clerk had to self-isolate from Friday 20th March owing to a member of staff being informed they had been in contact with a confirmed case.

3.7 The Clerk would like to thank those Councillors who have enquired after staff health and wellbeing, and is particularly appreciative to those Councillors who have been in regular contact to offer encouragement, support and assistance in what is a very challenging time for all the staff.

DELEGATED DECISION FOR RATIFICATION

To supply all remaining staff (6) with Council mobile phones and basic call package (no data) Phone cost £264 plus £60 per month SIM card charges inc VAT

RECOMMENDATION

To create a separate cost code 4046 for office mobile phones charges

4.0 OFFICE REINSTATEMENT/B&NES CIVIC CENTRE

4.1. Re-instatement has progressed and the office has now had the lighting/electrics repaired, an emergency exit sign on the front door (Health and Safety requirement) a functioning hot water supply to the kitchen and improvements to the supplies in the toilets. Rainbow International subsequently went in and cleaned/reinstated the office in respect of the original dust and water contamination following which new carpets have been fitted.

4.2. Furniture cannot be moved back yet as the removal company are still in lockdown. Currently there is the large conference table and two chairs, together with two fold up tables and directors chairs supplied by the Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk. The walls are currently in the process of being painted by the Grounds Maintenance team as and when they have a spare moment.

4.3 The Clerk has worked with SoVision to relocate the server and photocopier back to the office together with some of the desk tops from SoVIsion storage. The majority of the Council's files/stationary etc has been relocated back to the office from the Civic Centre by the Clerk. The 5 large filing cabinets and small fire safe containing sensitive data such as leases etc remain at B&NES until the removals company are permitted to start working again.

4.4. The Clerk is now preparing the final schedule of losses for reimbursement by the insurers.

5.0 IT

5.1. Establishing remote VPN connections to the server from all laptops in various locations has been problematical in respect of the lack of speed of the connection and the level of IT competence of the various staff members. Work arounds had been supplied in the interim by the Clerk.

5.2. The biggest issue has been trying to operate Rialtas Accounts Software and Iris payroll software remotely as neither programme lends itself to remote working.. The former is now resolved but means that the staff have lost a month in preparing for Year End. The latter still unresolved and the Clerk attends the office each month in order to connect directly to the server to run the payroll.

5.3. Various issues have now been addressed including

a) Change of Council broadband to a static IP address
b) Upgrading of one member of staff's home broadband to high speed fibre for an additional cost of £10 per month – to be paid for by the Council from IT budget for the duration of working from home as it will not be required for personal use.
c) Now that the office has been re-instated, the Clerk and SoVision have now installed 3 existing desk tops in the office that staff can connect to using remote desk top connection software which speeds up communication with the server and gives almost instant access to documents without having to wait ages for them to load. It is planned to bring the fourth desk top out of storage at SoVision and set it up similarly as only one person can access a machine remotely at any one time.
d) Repair of broadband fault at BT exchange

5.4. Unfortunately the strain on some older PC's has taken its toll. The Clerk's laptop has needed to be completely replaced and the Deputy Town Clerk's hard drive has also needed to be replaced (Latter from normal IT budget (£167 ex VAT)

5.5. In addition Councillors tablets have now been procured and configured for Town Council emails and zoom videoconferencing and delivered to all Councillors together with details of their passwords. The cost has been budgeted for in this year's budget and includes for remote support from SoVision. As the knowledge/capability of individual Councillors varies, the Clerk has relied on feedback from Councillors to alert her as to whether any further instructions may need to be circulated to address specific common issues. To date, most feedback has been positive and any connection problems are usually resolved with a phone call to the Clerk to talk through what is being seen on the screen (Members should remember that the Clerk does not have a tablet and has little experience of using them – and details of how to access SoVision support were provided with the tablets).

5.6. Videoconferencing Software - Zoom – The Clerk and Deputy Clerk have been experimenting with the software in respect of configuring it for different types of meeting. It appears that when Councillors are required to authenticate themselves as a zoom user before joining the meeting then issues can occur This needs further work/trials to fully understand how it applies to the Councillors new tablets which operate slightly differently than a laptop when using zoom. Otherwise, connection has been good for the most part and there has only been one issue when Virgin had a major broadband outage for half of Keynsham.

5.7. SoVision have been very attentive and helpful towards resolving all the issues – however it should be noted that resolving them has also taken a considerable amount (50%) of the Clerk's time over the last 8 weeks – especially over the last 4 weeks in trying to ensure a functioning remote access accounts system in order to complete year end which has included regular attendance at the office to log on with different staff profiles to check functionality.

DELEGATED DECISION FOR RATIFICATION

To purchase a new laptop for the Clerk at a cost including configuration of £761 ex VAT

6.0 COMMUNTY RESPONSE/SUPPORT DURING COVID19

6.1. COVID19 Facebook group

This has been established by a group of residents including Dave Biddleston acting in a personal capacity, and has provided an admirable level of support to residents in respect of shopping, food donations and prescription delivery etc for vulnerable people including those in self-isolation for the duration of the lockdown. An army of volunteers (over 200) have signed up and are co-ordinated via street wardens for most areas in Keynsham.

6.1.1. The group has been very active in the last 8 weeks and it has a considerable number of regular clients on its books as well as helping residents with one off needs. It has also organised food donations (collected at Community at 67) to make up food parcels for those in financial hardship who don't qualify for Keynsham Food Bank (for those in food crisis), has engaged a chef to prepare ready meals with fresh food surplus from supermarkets and is currently looking at an adopt a

grandparent scheme to put local families in video contact with local residents in care homes.

6.1.2. Cllr Wait has been working with B&NES Property services and the old Pomegranate in Temple Street is now being utilised for the group's activities – mainly in relation to food storage in the banks of fridges and freezers now installed. Keynsham Community Fridge are now also operating out of "the old POM".

6.1.3. It should be emphasised however that the COVID group has no formal constitution or governing structure, nor does it have insurance to cover public liability. The Town Council has no representation or direct involvement in the group's activities and is not a party to any decisions made so the group's activities cannot be covered under the Town Council's insurance as they are not Town Council-controlled activities.

6.1.4. The leaves the individuals concerned therefore in the unenviable position of being personally responsible (and liable) for the group's activities including volunteer and public safety, any risk assessments, safeguarding, data management (with associated GDPR consequences) and financial accountabilities.

6.1.5 As this is a non-constituted group, the Music Festival have stepped in to enable financial transactions relating to the group's activities (including shopping payments and grant awards) to be run through the Music Festival bank account to enable financial transparency and accountability. The group have now started using SumUp for taking payments ofr shopping from vulnerable residents and have therefore been given one of the phones originally supplied by the Council to Churches Together.

6.1.6. Owing to the time taken to reinstate the office, it has not been possible for the main Council phone number to be substituted for the group's current contact number or for the office to be used as a drop-off point for collections. The group have continued to use the mobile phone and SIM card package provided by the Council from the COVID Contingency fund.

6.2. Community Response Group (CRG)

6.2.1. In addition, as community organisation liaison for the COVID19 group, Dave established the Community Response group to co-ordinate the groups' efforts with other community organisations. The Town Council agreed to support this initiative at its last meeting on March 17th 2020. The Clerk has hosted weekly meeting on Monday chaired by Dave using the zoom software and attendees include Churches Together, Keynsham in Bloom, Community at 67, Dial A Ride and Keynsham Music Festival. Cllr Andy Wait has also been in attendance as B&NES Councillor.

6.2.2. As the weeks have progressed, a more co-ordinated and consolidated response to supporting the residents has developed in order to reduce the number of trips made by the volunteers. E.g. the Churches and Community at67 are functioning as collecting points for various initiatives, DIalARide are providing transport for deliveries including prescriptions and hearing aid batteries. A full list of current support is detailed in Appendix 1.

6.3. <u>GRANTS AND FUNDING</u>

6.3.1. The Town Council's annual awards for community grants have been open for applications since beginning of April and were meant to close on 15th May 2020. This has been extended to 31st July to provide adequate time for organisations to

put together applications.

6.3.2. At Its last meeting the Town Council agreed to support/endorse a Community Hardship fund being proposed by Community at 67 who have subsequently decided that they do not wish to pursue this option

6.3.3. Town Council Community Resilience Contingency Fund
At its March meeting the Town Council agreed to set aside £10,000 from General Reserves for community organisations needing financial assistance to deliver support to the community. This may be money given to the organisation directly as a grant, but more likely to be the Town Council purchasing supplies or resources to assist the community. The Council already agreed to support 2 mobile phones and SIM card monthly costs for Churches Together to run the Befriending line.

6.3.4. Western Power COVID Community Support fund
The Clerk applied for £10k from Western Power towards supporting community organisations with provision of PPE and contributions towards the running costs of keeping venues open for community support initiatives despite the lack of hire income. Unfortunately the application was unsuccessful.

DELEGATED DECISIONS FOR RATIFICATION

(i) To extend the deadline for submissions of the Council's annual grant awards to 31st July 2020

(ii) To make the following awards from the COVID Contingency fund:
- **(a) Reimbursement - Publicity/leaflets for COVID Facebook group community support helpline –£270.00**
- **(b) Donation - 1 mobile phone for COVID19 response group plus ongoing monthly SIM card costs (£44 plus £10/pcm inc VAT)**
- **(c) Grant - £1000 grant to COVID19 group towards operational costs (paid to KMFA)**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION

(iii) That a Town Council representative be nominated to attend the Community Response Group meetings (Monday 5pm)

(iv) That the Town Council COVID Resilience contingency fund be rolled over to the current financial year

(v) To consider if organisations can apply to the fund to cover costs of PPE, running costs for venues and any other specific categories of costs

(vi) That full guidelines/eligibility and application forms FOR THE Contingency Fund be presented to the next Council meeting for approval -

7.0 PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

7.1. The Deputy Town Clerk has submitted Planning responses following consultation with Councillors that will be taken to the next Planning and development Committee on Monday 18th May for ratification

7.2. An informal zoom meeting was held Councilllors on the Local Plan consultation on Monday 8th May. A meeting with the NDP s also currently being organised.

DELEGATED DECISION

To note the Planning Committee are meeting on Monday 18th May to ratify the Planning responses made under Delegated Powers by the Deputy Town Clerk

8.0 COUNCIL SERVICES AND GREEN SPACES

Following the lockdown order on 23rd March until the recent easing of lockdown, Grounds Maintenance Recruitment has been put on hold – therefore there is only a team of 3 who are working every day in the field emptying litter bins and ensuring upkeep/maintenance. Obviously in light of the easing of lockdown restrictions, the Council will ned to review its Business Continuity Plan later in the meeting.

Allotments
The Council has been working with the Allotments Association in respect of ensuring appropriate advice/notices are provided to ensure Government regulations and the safety of all Allotment holders are respected

Cemetery
This has remained open to the public, and been regularly mown, but is closed during interments. There have only been 3 interments (Haycombe have been very busy) and those have all happened in the last week.

Play Areas
Have remained closed/padlocked

Skatepark
Notices prohibiting use have been regularly renewed. The police have been asked to patrol this area in light of social gatherings that have been occurring in the evenings.

Tennis Courts
Have been closed and padlocked

Manor Rd
Has remained open/regular mowing but goalposts have been removed owing to concerns expressed by residents about social gatherings happening in the evening.

Footpaths
Have been maintained and vegetation cut back

9.0 MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

9.1. Website:
A new suite of pages entitled COVID19 has been put on the website with details of B&BES, Town Council, Community and Business information.

9.2. Mailing lists/Social Media
Information and updates have been regularly circulated via the Community organisation and Business Forum distribution lists and Facebook posts/sharing to Keynsham pages has also been undertaken.

9.3. Notices etc
Various notices, leaflets and posters have been produced for community groups.

With the advent of the change in restrictions, this all needs to be updated to reflect the Council's changes to the Business Continuity Plan and government-issued advice.

10.0 FINANCE/PAYROLL/YEAR ENDS

10.1. Payroll and Pensions Year Ends have now been completed. The Town Council's Auto-Enrolment Staging date was 1st April 2020 and the Clerk is preparing the response required by law for the Pensions Regulator which needs to be with them by early June. Monthly payrolls have been run to time by the Clerk attending either B&NES or Town Council office in order to directly access the server. Pay has been rung through each month to Barclays payroll and there have been no issues.

10.2. Avon Pension Fund have now provided confirmation that the Town Council does not need to pay any deficit contributions next year…..and in fact the Town Council has now had a credit applied to the account which means that £642 will be deducted from each of the Council's monthly pensions payments representing a saving on the budget of £7,704

10.3 The issues with accessing the accounts system means that staff are 8 weeks behind with the preparation of year end. The accountant is scheduled to log on and complete year end on Tuesday May 26th and the Internal Auditor will be visiting the office on Monday 8th June. The Town Council will meet as agreed on 16th June to approve the submission of the year end accounts and Annual Return to the External Auditor.

10.4 The first time a BACS run was attempted in mid-April it took 2 whole days hanging on the telephone to Barclays to get fraud restrictions lifted!! A further BACS run for the remaining April payments proceeded smoothly. Additional time has had to be added to accommodate the time required for paperwork to travel and decontaminate between staff and Councillors. The Clerk is grateful to Cllr Simmons for his fortitude and persistence, especially in liaising with Barclays to ensure all mid-April payments could finally be authorised for release.

RECOMMENDATION
To note the credit to be applied to the Council's Pension Fund contributions of £642 per month for the year 2020-2021

11.0 PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

11.1. Owing the national/global shortages, the Council is still awaiting delivery of the FFP3 masks ordered back in early March. These are the only certified masks that protect the wearer from infection via aerosols which are potentially generated whilst backfilling graves and must be worn by the Grounds Maintenance team. The Council has a very limited number of masks ordered in mid-February that will last for the next 5 interments. Hopefully stock should start to come through in the next few months when pressure to supply the NHS will have reduced.

11.2 The Clerk has procured sufficient hand sanitiser, gloves, alcohol wipes, disinfectant and 70% alcohol stock for Council use. With the exception of the 70% alcohol, supplies, and depending upon what level of services/activities the Council decides to operate, most supplies should last until the Autumn if used prudently.

11.3 Responding to concerns from the Community Response Group, additional supplies in the form of sanitiser and gloves have also been procured by the Clerk for distribution amongst community

organisations. Gloves were procured at a reasonable (but higher than previous) price from an existing supplier (and before stocks ran out). Sanitiser is now being made in the UK to WHO standards (ie liquid not gel) and is now 3 times the price it was when procured by the Clerk in mid February, Surgical masks however are still unavailable and the standard of those offered at premium prices is dubious – many are not fluid resistant.

11.4 B&NES donated a large quantity of non-fluid-resistant surgical-style facemasks and hand sanitiser which Councillors were consulted on in terms of prioritising distribution to community organisations and care homes. The hand sanitiser (along with any gloves) would help protect volunteers from infection by reason of touching contaminated surfaces however the masks were purely to protect others from infection by those volunteers wearing them.

11.5 Following feedback from Councillors the Clerk and Deputy Clerk disbursed 100 non-fluid-resistant masks to each organisation with 200 masks to the COVID19 group. One care home refused as the masks were not fluid resistant. B&NES did not supply suits, they were instead a limited supply of fluid-resistant masks – a pack of 20 were given to each of the care homes and GP surgeries as they are the people who are required to use these masks when working with COVID patients. Subsequently the Clerk distributed boxes of gloves from the Council's supply and hand sanitiser from B&NES to COVID19 group (to cover activities at St Johns and the old Pom), Keynsham Food Bank, community at 67, Keynsham Baptist Church. DialARide declined as they have sufficient supplies at present.

11.6 There are still therefore enough non-fluid-resistant masks for a second round of distribution to the same organisations. The Town Council will also need to consider how much sanitiser, gloves and other supplies ti wishes to procure going forwards specifically for distribution to community organisations

DELEGATED DECISIONS FOR RATIFICATION

(i) To prioritise masks for the community organisations and care homes as listed

(ii) To purchase additional gloves for distribution to community organisations

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION

(iii) To determine whether to distribute the remaining masks as before

(iv) To consider how much/what type of supplies to continue to purchase and a policy to govern supply to community organisations and set aside a sum for the financial year – proposal to be brought back for approval at the June Council meeting

(v) To consider how much the Council wishes to spend on supplies for Council use for the remainder of the financial year – specifically 70% alcohol and FFP3 masks – proposal to be brought back to the June Council meeting.

APPENDIX 1 – LIST OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT INITIATIVES

B&NES	Food Parcels for those individuals on Government list for Shielding PPE Donation Virgin Care Support line for vulnerable individuals
Churches Together	Befriending Line Baptist Church – drop off for toiletries donation for NHS staff (co-ordinated by Keynsham in Bloom) St Johns – space for COVID19 group to organise shopping and food donations
Community at 67	Collection point for COVID19 food donations and In Bloom toiletries
COVID19	COVID Support line number for those in need Shopping, prescriptions/hearing aid collections, food hardship parcels (FareShare) Ready meals, adopt a grandparent, Health and Wellbeing
Community Fridge	Now operating out of the Old Pom
Crown Inn	Meals for RUH staff (delivered by DialARide)
Dial A Ride	Members support services including transport to hospital or doctors appointments Deliveries for other organisations as part of the co-ordinated support effort
ISOFEST	Virtual music festival (hosted by St Johns) 2nd May raising funds for local community organisations
KCRfm	Radio Station is broadcasting daily
Keynsham Food Bank	Food donations for those in Food Crisis (must comply with conditions of Trussell Trust)
Keynsham In Bloom-	Toiletries and making of toiletry bags for RUH staff Children's activities including colouring competition n seed growing
KMFA	Bank accounts and financial management facilities for COVID19 group
Virtual High Street	Closed Facebook group set up by individuals to promote services in the High Street including delivery and lick and collect
Bristol Suicide Prevention	Keynsham patrols of known "destinations"