East Dean & Friston
Parish Council

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| **Date:** | **15th March 2020** |
| **Title:** | **Emergency Response to Coronavirus Outbreak** |
| **By:** | **Mike Keller** |
| **Purpose of Report:** | **To inform Councillors of action taken to date and future plans.** |
| **Recommendations:** | **To note the report.** |

The Parish Council first adopted an emergency plan following the severe weather of 2011, which resulted in the village being cut off for a number of days. That plan was revised at regular intervals, the latest revision being in 2018 when it was updated following guidelines from ESCC, WDC and the emergency services. Since its original adoption the PC Chair has been *Ex Officio* the Emergency Plan Co-ordinator with the Vice-Chair acting as deputy.

During the 2018 revision, a number of criteria were adopted for the triggering of the emergency plan, one of which was the threat of disease within the village. It was further agreed by the Council that, upon triggering the plan, the Co-ordinator or his appointee could incur expenditure of up to £500 without the need to seek further Council approval.

Following the UK Government's statement on 9th March detailing the measures to be taken as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak, I decided to invoke the emergency plan and I informed Cllrs. Seeley and Godden, as well as the Parish Clerk that I was taking this action.

My first priority was to ensure that official advice was effectively communicated, particularly to residents who do not have internet or email access. My second priority was to ensure that the village had a team of volunteers to provide aid and assistance (where possible) to any affected residents. On 10th March I chaired a meeting with the editor of the Parish Magazine, the co-ordinator of Community Watch and the Church's Pastoral Care co-ordinator. We agreed that any communication had to be up to date and, although the Parish Magazine was an effective way of reaching residents, the long lead time between going to print and distribution made this impossible.

It was decided that leaflets were the most effective way of communication and, subsequently, I obtained the agreement of the Rector and the PCC to use the Church's Photocopier to produce leaflets. The first of these were produced on 13th March and distributed at a Gardening Club meeting that afternoon. These leaflets have also been distributed to the Churches' congregations and placed in the Barn Stores. The contents of the leaflet have also been uploaded to the PC website. Future printings will be placed in other Village Shops and distributed to other village clubs and societies (assuming their meetings are not cancelled due to the virus). Incidentally, WDC issued guidelines that only official statements should be used in local communications and this has been adhered to in the leaflets so far produced.

The second priority was to provide support for residents who found themselves in self-isolation at home, either because the were showing potential symptoms of Coronavirus (or had been in contact with someone who had the symptoms) or because they had an underlying health condition that would affect them more severely if they contracted the virus. Here, it was agreed that Community Watch would take the lead in providing support in three particular ways. Firstly, by providing a shopping delivery service for those who were unable to do on-line shopping. In these circumstances, I have obtained the agreement of the owners of Barn Stores and Downland Butchers to supply goods for delivery and to accept payment by cheque (since anyone in isolation will not have access to cash).

The second area of support was identified as collecting repeat prescriptions for those with pre-existing conditions and the Community Watch co-ordinator agreed to liaise with the GP surgery to facilitate this.

The final area of support identified is the provision of telephone contact to give moral and practical contact for those in isolation. The Church Pastoral Care co-ordinator took on this task and agreed to recruit volunteers who would make contact (on a non-sectarian basis) with those in home isolation.

Subsequently, I have liaised with the Chair of the Village Hall Trust. In the absence of national guidelines it has been agreed that the decision to cancel Hall activities will remain the prerogative of event organisers, but that no cancellation charges will be made for bookings that do not take place. The VHT will intensify cleaning of surface areas and are looking to install hand gel dispensers in the lobby.

A further contact meeting was held on 14th March which was additionally attended by other members of Community Watch. They agreed to suspend their hospital taxi service except for residents without symptoms who require regular tests. They will also deal with any residents who wish to volunteer their services, screening them for suitability if necessary. It was agreed that we cannot look any further into the future than the publication of the Parish Magazine at the end of the month, which will contain an insert from the PC giving the latest information. It was encouraging to hear, at this meeting, that a resident of a similar village in another part of the country had expressed their amazement that East Dean and Friston had been so pro-active in pressing forward with plans compared to their village. Hopefully, we can continue to work with other village groups to support residents in this time of national crisis.