

Wilton Town Council

Covid-19 and Wilton HELP

Report of the Town Clerk



The Council Offices
Kingsbury Square
Wilton SP2 0BA



01722 742093



[Email the clerk](#)



[Wilton TC Website](#)

Legal context

Wilton Town Council has powers to consider these matters in accordance with its General Power of Competence as set out in The Localism Act 2011, qualified by SI 2012/965 - Town Councils (General Power of Competence) (Prescribed Conditions) Order 2012.

The purpose of this report

This report recommends actions to be considered by Wilton Town Council in response to the current Covid-19 epidemic.

1 July, 2020

1. Introduction and context

- 1.1. After three months in national lockdown, the slow road to recovery has begun. The easing of restrictions has been cautious. Failure to follow a managed approach to risk may see an up-turn in infections and the prospect of local restrictions being re-imposed – as in Leicester.
- 1.2. The Council's actions have been guided by advice it receives from [UK Government](#) and other official government bodies. This advice is available online and updated daily during the epidemic:
- 1.3. In addition, the Council receives advice from the [National Association of Local Councils](#) (NALC).
- 1.4. This report draws on the advice received and sets out the actions required by the Council as restrictions are relaxed.

2. A proportionate, policy-led approach

- 2.1. The Council's administrative arrangements have been guided by the advice it receives and its own [High Consequence Infectious Disease \(HCID\) Policy](#).
- 2.2. The main areas of concern for Wilton Town council as it starts on the road to recovery are:
 - Protecting the wellbeing of residents.
 - Remaining effective during ongoing restrictions
 - Safeguarding the wellbeing of councillors, contractors, staff and volunteers
- 2.3. The HCID Policy deals with the Council's need to continue to operate effectively during the outbreak – it covers staffing issues, meetings, decision making, finances and communication. For the time being, the policy will remain in place. However, there are a number of issues that now require attention:

3. Facilities

The Council operates parks, play areas, outdoor gym, tennis courts, the pavilion, cemetery and public conveniences. In addition it is responsible for street furniture – benches, shelters, map-dispensers, etc. The following schedule sets out the Council's recommended approach

Facility/Asset	Advice	Recommendation
Sports Pavilion	Community centers may re-open from 4 th July provided it is possible to comply with Government advice .	Remain closed - except for uses currently prescribed, such as, indoor markets, blood transfusions, food banks, etc. The Council has inadequate resources to adequately sanitize the pavilion between uses and the cost of providing bio-security measures is prohibitive for the time being.
Cemetery	Burial grounds remain open	Burials and scattering of ashes have been permitted with social distancing observed.
Public conveniences	May reopen from 4 th July	The public conveniences have remained open during the crisis.
Open Spaces, tennis courts, playgrounds and gym.	Open spaces remained open throughout the crisis for exercise. Tennis courts were reopened in June. Play areas and outdoor gym may open on 4 th July.	National advice is now well known and it is likely that use will begin whether the sites are officially open or not. New guidance signs will be erected and the play equipment came back into use on 4 th .
Street furniture	High frequency contact points are a source of possible infection. The C19 virus can survive up to 2 days on hard surfaces.	It is not possible to maintain effective sanitization of fixed street furniture. New signs will be used to reiterate Government advice on sanitation and social distancing.
Council meetings	NALC advice to local councils is for online meetings to continue while social distancing remains in force.	Continue with monthly online Council meetings and current delegation arrangements.

4. Mayor Making

In accordance with the decisions and wishes of the Council, Mayor-making has been postponed until it is possible to hold the event with the public physically present.

5. Council Offices and Staff

The Council's offices will remain closed to the public for the time being and staff will continue to work from home until the Government advises that this should return to normal. The Assistant Clerk has received a high vulnerability 'shielding' notification and will work from home until all risk has passed. The clerk makes periodic trips to the office to pick up invoices and correspondence.

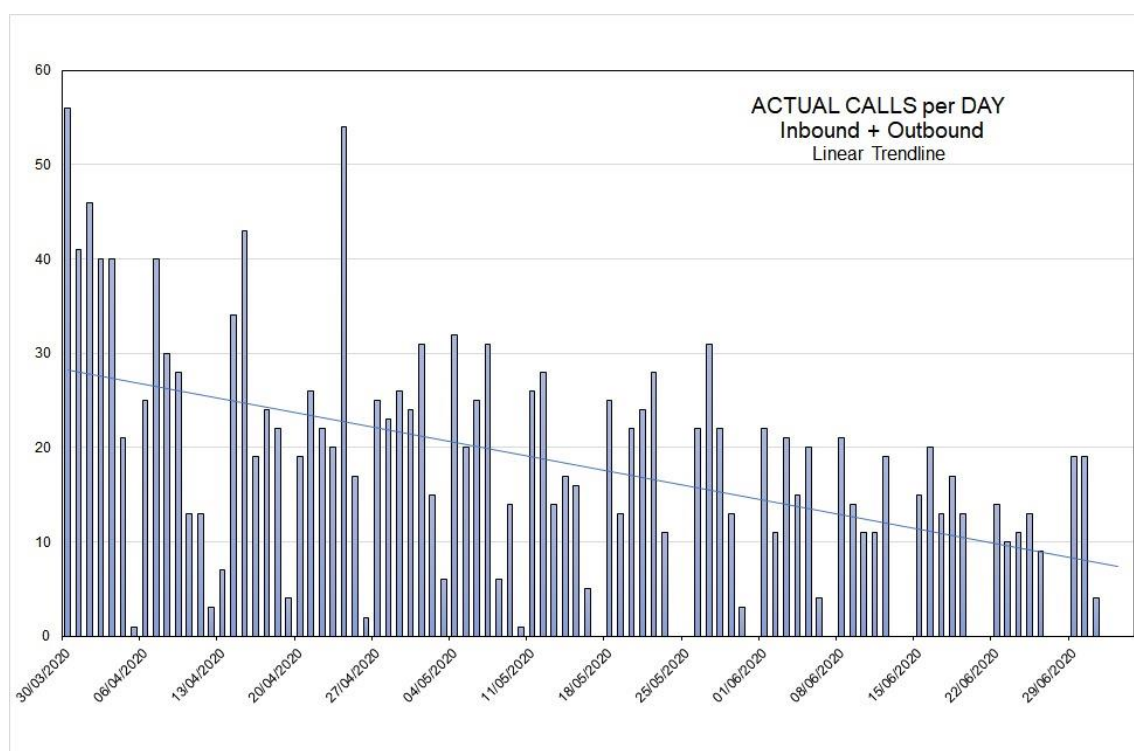
6. Supporting Wilton HELP

6.1. Wilton Town Council has been supporting the COVID-19 Wilton HELP volunteers. The Council has set up the virtual call centre, provided an invoicing service for clients, processed payments to volunteers and secured grant funding from the Wiltshire Community Foundation. Councillors and staff have also volunteered – either in the call centre or on the ground, helping with shopping and prescriptions.

6.2. Since its launch on 30th March, Wilton Help has handled 1,882 calls from vulnerable and isolating individuals using the Council's TOKY virtual call centre system. 1,775 of these calls resulted in requests for assistance being logged on the Wilton HELP system designed and built in Wilton by Adam Cooke. As of 1st July, 1,722 of these requests had been completed by the volunteers. This includes; 526 shopping trips, 907 prescription deliveries and 254 personal errands. In addition, the volunteers have provided ongoing reassurance calls and undertaken transport tasks.

6.3. Wilton Town Council has issued 371 invoices to clients and processed the payments as they have come in to the office. Volunteers have been reimbursed for all out of pocket expenses incurred and claimed using the bespoke facility on the Wilton HELP system. This has created a large additional workload for the Clerk and Assistant Clerk – something in the region of 1,500 individual transactions with associated queries and checks. Inevitably, this has had an impact on routine Council administrative work.

6.4. The Wilton HELP scheme has been very busy over the last three months but call levels have gradually reduced since the peak in April. The graph below shows the gradual decline in demand (thanks to Cllr Crossley for the graph):



6.5. In the light of low call volumes at weekends, the volunteers have already reduced operating hours to 9.00am – 1.00pm Monday to Friday. The Government has also signaled a further relaxation of lockdown, indicating shielded individuals may now spend more time out of doors provided they observe strict social distancing. With this coming into effect from 4th July, the decision has been taken to close the service in its current form two weeks later on 17th July.

6.6. The plan for closure is as follows:

- Include an announcement on the call centre welcome message setting out arrangements for closure on 17th July (in place).
- Take the details of clients who feel they will have ongoing support needs after 17th July and arrange a support call before the system closes (in place).

- Retain the TOKY system for a further month (until 21 August) with a message providing support numbers – NHS, Wiltshire Council and Pharmacy2U service. The system will also have an option for the caller to leave details if they want a volunteer to call them back - a skeleton service.
- Messages will be logged on Wilton HELP by volunteers each day.
- The Wilton HELP system and WhatsApp group will be retained after 17th July and tasks will continue to be posted (very low volumes anticipated). The Wilton HELP system may be modified at this point.
- The existing volunteers will consider whether they wish to continue as Wilton HELP in some form and if so they will launch a revised offer and new leaflet.

6.7. A survey was undertaken of volunteers to find out what should happen following closure. The [results of the survey are available online](#). The key message is that 98% of the volunteers want to continue in some form after 17th July. Keeping the skeleton service running until 17th August, provides a month in which the volunteers can decide how they wish to proceed.

6.8. In order to support the volunteers and provide a lasting legacy for the Town, the Council is asked to support Wilton HELP as it develops after the COVID-19 work. It is **recommended** that:

- The Council ear-marks £1,500 of the Wiltshire Community Foundation funding to support start up and ongoing costs – printing, TOKY licenses, moving the Wilton HELP system onto the Council's network server, website build, etc.
- That the Council acts as the official sponsor organisation for Wilton HELP and assumes responsibility for the group in its start up phase. The Council's [volunteering policy](#) would apply and insurance cover provided.
- That Cllr Crossley and the Town Clerk assist with the startup of any new service, working alongside the volunteers.
- That the Council's COVID-19 emergency funds continue to be used to pay volunteer 'out of pocket' expenses on the existing 'pay and invoice' basis.