

Draft Emergency Response to Covid-19 – Version 1
From Cllr Peter Golds and Cllr Andrew Wood

18th March 2020

Dear all.

I assume that these measures have already been put into place or are being planned but if not we believe this is what needs to be done:

Communications – we need to hugely ramp up our comms on this and involve the Council in community conversations underway already

1. Pulp the new March 'Our East End', it is dated March 2020 but does not mention the words 'virus' 'coronavirus' nor 'Covid-19'. It would send mixed messages about the importance of a response if the latest Council communication said nothing on this subject;
2. A replacement 'Our East End' – a new edition focussed on practical advice (in multiple languages);
3. Send a letter to each household (since we do not have to send polling cards now) with links to information and what to do (including in different languages);
4. Hand out at grocery shops & food markets information to shoppers as the quickest way to get information into the hands of people likely not to be on the internet, remind them about social distancing at the same time;
5. First send a separate letter to vulnerable residents to let them know that we know they are vulnerable and how to get help, put phone numbers on letters;
6. Run the NHS 'how to wash your hands' video on permanent loop on display screens in public spaces and on social media, apparently 1/3 of people are still not hand washing and many may not be washing properly;
7. Shut down all other non-essential public relations campaigns to ensure clear messages except for the stop smoking campaign e.g. anti-idling;
8. But it has never been more important for people to be healthy and resilient, communications should also focus on how to stay healthy and to stop smoking;
9. Email – your first email specifically about Covid-19 was sent on the evening of the 17th March, it is a start we need regular updates, pushing messages out on a regular basis;
10. LBTH Website – permanent link in a prominent location linked to all Covid-19 information, place the NHS 'How to wash your hands' video in a prominent location, publication of the pandemic plan on the Council website so that we can all see it plus LGA & government guidance, plus detailed Q&A, all information in one place;
11. Social media – as an example the Canary Wharf & Isle of Dogs Residents Facebook group is currently having 10,000 active members a day, the number of daily posts has tripled. People are talking about little else but Covid-19 and panic buying;
 - a. Facebook paid ads (we can ask FB to make them free), we should be actively using social media to push messages on cleanliness and social distancing;
 - b. Nextdoor – the Met Police are using Nextdoor, the Council needs to do the same as a backup to Facebook to send messages to wider community;

- c. Facebook + Nextdoor + Twitter + Instagram should ensure a good distribution of information on social media. Only one post on Instagram so far. No Facebook posts until last week;
- 12. Plaster Tower Hamlets with a version of the DoE poster – it should be on each bus shelter, each Ideas store, each school child should have a copy to take home, each faith location should have multiple copies;
- 13. Ensure faith locations have copies of the appropriate material;
- 14. Channel S and other media – what is the engagement plan?;
- 15. East London Advertiser & Wharf Life – pay for multi-page ads with Covid-19 information in the next edition;
- 16. Provide Councillors with material to share in different languages:

Database of vulnerable people

We need to build a database of all vulnerable people, based on:

- a. Electoral data (which has birthdates?);
 - b. Freedom Pass data (over 60);
 - c. NHS data;
 - d. Adult social care data;
 - e. Social input from volunteers and Councillors;
2. Gather contact details for that group and ascertain who can provide care for each individual;
 3. Send the vulnerable group additional information;
 4. If vulnerable have no family or other care support allocate to a voluntary group;

Adult Social Care

1. Hygiene standards for carers visiting vulnerable people clearly has to change;
2. What training is being provided to care staff?;
3. Are they being provided with the appropriate PPE?;
4. Do we have a database of ALL vulnerable residents, see point above;
5. Stockpiles, see point below;
6. Staff numbers? What is plan if large numbers of staff go off ill? Can we train replacements?;
7. Rotation of staff should be reduced e.g. they do not visit different people each week but as far as possible keep the same clients to prevent transmission;

Volunteering

I assume you are aware by now of Facebook groups like 'Tower Hamlets Covid19 Community Support' as well as a number of WhatsApp groups trying to co-ordinate a community response and to help the vulnerable;

1. How will LBTH engage with these groups?, will staff join these groups to help provide advice and guidance?;
2. Will it use these groups to help build a database of vulnerable people?;
3. Will it mobilise support if it needs to supplement the adult social care staff?;
4. Will it provide training, support and DBS checks to volunteers?;

Strikes

This is not the time for strikes and other disruption by Council staff or those providing essential services, if necessary delay 'Tower Rewards' for a year. It is a distraction. Push Veolia harder to sort out their issues.

Food delivery for those told to self-isolate

1. 14 days is likely to exceed peoples stocks of food at home;
2. How to help people without internet access or ability to internet shop (which is anyway under pressure)?;
3. Will we set up a food distribution network?;

Q&A information

1. Dedicated phone line, email (is the new email to be made publicly available), weblinks to provide advice and support;
2. Provide detailed Q&A in various locations, for example as posters on bus stops;

Personal Hygiene

1. Clear messages in all publicly provided toilets about acceptable behaviour;
2. Wash facilities: No spitting, no face washing, no washing of other parts of the body, nothing that leaves viral material on wash basins;

Parking

1. With staff being sent to work from home and more driving generally to help with social distance we have cars parked in TH during weekdays that do not have permits, can we only ticket vehicles which are blocking emergency access or are parked dangerously;
2. We need to avoid elderly etc coming into Ideas stores to renew parking permits etc, can we automatically extend all permits until end of crisis;
3. Provide NHS and other emergency staff who work in TH but live elsewhere with free parking to help them avoid public transport which is anyway being reduced in frequency;

Retail/Panic Buying/Price gouging

1. Remind all retailers about the Competition and Markets Authority advice on pricing and information;
2. Panic buying also means customers in close proximity to each other, no social distancing is in force. Can we be visiting supermarkets / larger shops to encourage them to enforce social distancing at all times;
3. Trading standards officers to help enforce, starting with biggest retailers and then work down;
4. Work with retailers to understand their supply issues and to provide them with support to enforce any rules on limiting the sale of certain items, this may include placing THEO's in stores to assist staff to enforce rules as the reports suggest they are not being universally applied, staff are busy and may not want to confront panicked shoppers;

- a. We have 7 main supermarkets, 4 large grocery shops plus a number of markets;
 - i. Waitrose * 2 – Wapping and canary Wharf
 - ii. Tesco - Bow
 - iii. ASDA – Isle of Dogs (this is a particular problem shop)
 - iv. Sainsbury - Whitechapel
 - v. Lidl – Burdett Road
 - vi. Marks & Spencer – Canary Wharf
 - vii. Four Tesco Metro – Canary Wharf, Roman Road, Bethnal Green, Whitechapel
 - viii. Plus smaller Sainsbury shops
 - ix. Plus important markets at Watney Street, Chrisp Street, Roman Road, Whitechapel with their own stores;
 - x. It should be possible to have staff present at many of these locations:
5. Work with retailers to find some method of allowing the vulnerable to shop, for example at set times after shops have been restocked, or set aside separate areas only accessible to people in vulnerable groups?;
6. Environmental health rules – can they be used to force retailers to behave;
7. Restaurants & pubs – remind them that they can run a take away service in the meantime;

Financial

We clearly need to be worried about:

1. The survival of businesses;
2. The survival of families/individuals with no cash savings and / or who have lost income;

Suggestions might include:

- Council tax holiday – is it possible to delay payments for people in need?;
- Speeding up of payments by LBTH to its own supply base?;
- Speed up project delivery, spend money, pump prime TH economy;

This section needs more work, how will we use extra money granted by government?;

Education

1. Are schools ready to close?;
2. What help can we provide those on lower incomes with food given loss of free school meals, can we provide take away food for children on free school meals?;
3. What help will we provide parents in critical occupations with child support, can schools provide limited child care for selected parents;
4. What help will be provided to students to keep studying especially those close to exams?;

Stocks

1. What stockpiles exist of emergency equipment e.g. face masks, gloves, alcohol hand sanitisers, thermometers, toilet roll, soap, coffins, lime, etc?;

2. Care packages – are we creating care packages for vulnerable people i.e. masks, toilet roll, thermometers etc;
3. What storage space do we have?;

Faith gatherings

The Church of England has stopped public worship and the Muslim Council of Britain strongly recommended the same the day before. Have we passed that advice onto all faith groups and facilities?

Gyms, Libraries, Public facilities

1. Do we keep them open? We think yes for now subject to clear information in each about what to do and provision of hand sanitiser etc. Maybe ban larger meetings in them
2. How are we cleaning them?
3. Recycling bags – can we restart process of sending them out to people after 1st April rather than ask people to come into Ideas store to pick up?
4. Library fines – good step to extend return date

Registering deaths & funerals

1. Are we ready for a big increase in deaths and funerals should it happen?;
2. Storage capacity for bodies?;
3. How much capacity remains in our multi-faith burial plot?;
4. Where is the nearest crematoria? What is its capacity?;
5. What rules will be implemented at funerals to prevent further infections?;

Council Meetings

1. Livestream all meeting to encourage public to stay away, post links;
2. Review agenda of Council meetings to ensure that only urgent items are dealt with;
3. The Government have already made proposals for adjusting the procedure of council meetings during the current crisis;
4. Lawyers in Local Government and the Association of Democratic Service Officers have come forward with proposals to lobby to permit remote meetings in the event the current situation deteriorates to the point that all meetings are cancelled;
5. Tower Hamlets operates under an Executive Mayor and so decision making is different to most other councils;
6. There is no reason why full council meetings should only undertake business that it is legally required to do;
7. The May Annual Meeting can be restricted to electing the speaker and appointing committees. There is no need for anything else to be on the agenda and the meeting can be formalised in a short time;
8. Obviously there will not, this year, be a reception following the meeting;
9. The Cabinet should meet but it's deliberations can be web cast and members and officers can sit with wide spaces;
10. The regulatory committees; planning and licensing, have public involvement. Again, members and officers can sit and deliberate with spaces between them. The problem

comes with public representation. Meetings can be webcast and limits can be placed on those attending the meeting, with public attendance limited to those making representation;

11. Parliament has placed restrictions on access to the parliamentary estate, this includes mass lobbies and no longer being able to enter the estate and access not permitted to non-pass holders who may only attend on parliamentary business.