

## RECORD OF OFFICER DECISION

### APPROVAL FOR CLOSURE OF LIBRARIES AND LEISURE CENTRES

#### Decision made

To close until further notice all Wiltshire Council Libraries and Leisure Centres to the public, including the leisure centres managed on behalf of the council by Places Leisure.

**Made by:** Alistair Cunningham, Chief Executive Officer

#### Background

1. Pursuant to paragraph 4 of Part 3 Section D, the Directors of Wiltshire Council are empowered to take all necessary decisions in cases of emergency. This decision is being enacted by Alistair Cunningham, Chief Executive Officer, using these powers in circumstances where it is believed that there is a risk of damage to property, a threat to the health or wellbeing of an individual and/or that the interests of the Council may be compromised if this decision is not otherwise taken.

#### Reason for decision

2. This decision would in other circumstances be taken by Cabinet or the relevant Cabinet Member. However, in circumstances where Cabinet or the relevant Cabinet Member is unable to meet to expedite its functions in a timely manner during the COVID-19 pandemic, this decision is being taken in accordance with the power referred to in paragraph 1 above in consultation with Chief Executive Officers, other Directors and the Leader. This decision will be reported to the next meeting of Cabinet.
3. The background to this decision is the COVID-19 pandemic. Pertinent to this decision is the impact of the advice from government on self-isolation and social distancing; the closure of schools to most pupils from 23 March 2020; and, in turn, the impact of these measures on staffing (paid and voluntary) within the library and leisure services.
4. The Leisure service has 273 staff with 148 FTE. The Library service has 152 staff with 83 FTE. The position as of 20 March 2020 is as follows:
  - In Leisure 89 staff are self-isolating and 12 are WFH due to social distancing. A further 36 staff are off due to the over 70, pregnant or underlying health condition category.
  - In Libraries 25 are self-isolating and 8 are WFH due to social distancing. On top of these 5 staff are off with Covid 19 symptoms. A further 21 staff are off due to either being over 70, pregnant or have an underlying health condition.
  - The 915 volunteers in Libraries have been greatly reduced for obvious reasons.

5. Apart from Tidworth Leisure Centre, which the MOD have made the call on closing, most of the service has been BAU although programmes have been curtailed to a greater degree. The position moving forwards is that sites are continuing to feel the strain, and this increases each day, and enforced closures will be imminent. Springfield and Devizes will have to close for periods over the weekend because of staff shortages.
6. Of the 30 Libraries 7 are now closed at the moment because of staffing shortages. A further 3 have partial opening because of the same reason and there is a real likelihood that the situation will worsen from tomorrow. None of the 3 mobile services are operating because of staffing issues. The History Centre will have to close tomorrow because of staffing shortages and is included in the Library service for the purposes of this decision.
7. The national picture for both services is that many services have either closed or are considering closing. Most of our neighbouring authorities have already closed. There are those providers that are holding out for decisions from either the government or local authorities. Whilst most governing bodies are fence sitting at this moment in time many of our bookings and sessions are starting to diminish following strong Public Health advice on social distancing.
8. Places Leisure (contractor for 10 x leisure sites) are constantly pressing us for our current situation and need to be consistent across Leisure. Places have circa 600 staff, circa 300 FTE. They have a similar picture with staff self-isolating/social distancing, participation numbers reducing
9. Our two independently run Leisure Centres in Cricklade and Downton are also wanting to know what we are doing, we are in communication and they are preparing for closure. We are witnessing more and more discourse from members of the public in both services to the point where staff have been subject to verbal aggression.
10. When schools close on Monday, already strained services will become greatly strained once again and more closures will be imminent but we are currently working with teams to understand the impact of this. Where schools have closed already staff on the ground are reporting children are coming in to sites, in some cases with grandparents.
11. We need to work closely with our teams on the ground, Communications, and partner organisations using those facilities, to ensure the close down plan is both coordinated and effectively communicated to all. Delaying the decision will put this at risk.
12. All our teams are currently conducting the staff survey and feeding their skill sets back in to HR to enable redeployment. Closed sites can also be repurposed for whatever is seen fit following consideration by the Communities Cell on how else they can support our communities. Time is required, to understand how this staffing resource could be deployed to remobilise should that be needed. The front desk at Devizes Hub and Library, which offer council services such as council tax, benefits,

registrations and customer services, and customers will need to be redirected to phone and online services once this closes to the public.

13. I confirm that in making this decision I have considered the following in line with Wiltshire Council's Constitution:

Key decision requirements	Yes
Views of relevant cabinet member(s), committee chairman, area board(s)	Yes
Consideration of the area boards and delegated decision checklist for officers on the issue of when and how to involve local councillors and area boards in decisions about local services	N/A – this decision applies county wide
Implication of any council policy, initiative, strategy or procedure	Y
Consultation in accordance with requirements and expectations of consultation with the public	Consultation with the public was not possible in light of the urgency of the decision.
Range of options available	Y
Staffing, financial and legal implications	Y. Customers with leisure membership will have this frozen. If people have any borrowed items from our libraries, they will be renewed automatically throughout the closed period and we will not be issuing or enforcing any fines or charges. The financial implications of closure for three months are £2.5m. However, the government may order closure in any case and income is already reducing.  Redeployment of staff will be explored.
Risk assessment	Y. The risks of maintaining opening of the sites are considerable given public health implications, severely reduced staffing and other potential liabilities. As soon as we are able to re-open these facilities we will do so.
Involvement of statutory officers and/or directors	All directors had an opportunity to comment following the gold meeting of 9am on 20 March where the potential

	need to close was discussed. The chairs of the community cell developed this proposal.
Regional or national guidance from other bodies	The decision was taken in light of national guidance from Public Health England.
The council's constitution	Yes
This contract is suitable for execution under the e-signature process.	N/A

**Conflict of Interest**

14. Not applicable

**Other options considered**

15. The other options considered were maintaining the existing opening hours of library and leisure services or running reduced hours. Both were rejected as impractical as well as being inconsistent with the advice from government on social distancing.

Made by:



ALISTAIR CUNNINGHAM, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Date: 20 March 2020