

## **GENERAL UPDATE**

### **MEETINGS:**

The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020: these regulations came into force on 4 April 2020 enabling local councils to hold remote meetings for a specified period until May 2021. The decision made by Council set out in the Extraordinary meeting of 24 March, agreed by email consensus was that The Council chose to suspend meetings for an indefinite period, and will resume when advised by Government. The Clerk is given delegated authority to progress all ongoing matters and projects and authorise all regular payments and incur expenditure in line with the Council's agreed budget, this is in consultation with Chair, Vice Chair and Chairs of Committees when appropriate.

The Town Council are working towards having their first council meeting in July at the Community Centre where social distancing measures can be adhered to. The Clerk is currently working with the H&S Designated Officer to draft social distancing procedures and safety practices to ensure the safety of members, staff, and the attendance of the public. There will be a short agenda and members will of course be given the option to attend or not depending on their circumstances. There will be no meeting in August and the Annual Council meeting will be held in September.

### **ACCOUNTS:**

The Accounts and Audit (Coronavirus) (amendments) Regulations 2020 legislation came into force on 7 April 2020. NALC has confirmed that the publication date for final accounts has moved from 30 September to 30 November 2020, so where final accounts needed to be signed off by the beginning of June, they can now be signed off by 31 August 2020. This has been changed to give Parish/Town Councils more flexibility with regard to completing the financial audit and the requirement for public inspection of the Councils financial statements which did include the first 10 days of July has been removed. Instead, local councils must commence the public inspection period on or before the first working day of September 2020.

National Association of Local Councils (NALC) emphasised to government when making their case that most local councils including Councillors, Clerk and staff members needed to focus on supporting the community response to COVID 19, and urged the need to widen the scope of extending the deadlines for publication and inspection requirements in the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, of which the Government has listened to and complied with.

### **WEBSITE:**

Please continue to view Watchet Town Councils website under 'Noticeboard', then 'Council Notices' as there are many updates there to keep members and the public informed. There are also regular updates on the Town Councils Facebook page.

### **CORONAVIRUS COMMUNITY HELP GROUP:**

Watchet Town Council has supported the establishment of the Watchet Coronavirus Community Help Group in setting up a network of volunteers in Watchet. This is a collaboration between Village Agents, Mind in Somerset, Cotton Street, Onion Collective, Watchet Chamber of Trade and Watchet Coastal Communities Team

The group have established a telephone helpline on 01984 573073, website, <https://www.watchet.link/> and Facebook contact page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/227835288360542/> through which people can make contact and ask for help with shopping for essentials or information on other types of support available. The Government has asked for volunteers to help in such ways. The group should be commended for the

work they have undertaken to date to support the vulnerable Watchet residents. A special thanks go out to all the volunteers, but especially to Simon and Janet at Cotton Street.

Watchet Town Council has further assisted the help group in donating stationery supplies as a good will gesture to support them, and has answered a formal request from the Watchet Coastal Communities Team who administer the group for the Council to purchase a laptop for the Coronavirus Community Help Groups use and it has been issued to them on a long term loan basis.

### **CORONAVIRUS Safety Practices and Medical & Hygiene Guidance Policy Document:**

Watchet Town Council has adopted the above safety practices and drafted a suitable Risk Assessment to support the re-opening of the Harbour Road toilets on Monday 22 June 2020. The Clerk is now in possession of the appropriate PPE for cleaning staff, and the signage is in place. The Council is also looking to adopt a similar template for safety practices for the re-opening of other Council facilities in the future.

### **STAFFING:**

Office staff continue to work from home, and this is working well, until the Government state otherwise then the office staff and Clerk will continue to deliver the services of the Council in this way. In line with government guidelines, the grounds staff now have a skeleton works rota they are following, this however, is weather dependant.

### **COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS:**

*Tourism & Leisure Committee* approved that NJ Nurseries undertakes the Summer Planting for 2020 in the first week of June, planting various tubs and hanging baskets around Watchet and the Groundsman continues to water the flowers in municipal areas to keep the town looking bright and colourful.

*Finance & General Purposes Committee* approved a Grant of £1,000 to support the Quantock Foodbank from the ear marked COVID 19 fund.

*Environment & Planning Committee* continues to make observations as Planning Statutory Consultees on planning applications prevalent to Watchet.

### **GENERAL:**

A tree branch was loose and dangerous on the Memorial Ground. Arrangements were made with a tree contractor to remove and dispose of the branch.

The grounds staff have addressed the weeds growing up out of the tarmac on the path leading to the church.

### **CEMETERY:**

Burial Interments have remained operational as this is classed as 'Essential'. There have been 4 x interments conducted since lockdown. Interment of Ashes are not currently allowed as they are NOT classed as 'Essential'. There have been 4 x Pre-purchased Garden of Rest plots, two of which are just awaiting the end of lockdown to be able to commence.

The cemetery wall rebuild is now complete and looks fantastic.

### **Multi Use Games Area (MUGA):**

After a lot time and hard work by the Clerical Officer, a letter of agreement was received from SW&T and we have been successful in securing £32,500 grant funding from the Section106 funding pot for the installation of the new MUGA located adjacent to the Watchet Community Centre.

WATCH THIS SPACE – the project details are being finalised now and an installation date is being discussed.

**MARKETS:**

The Market Administrator for the Council has been in regular contact with the stallholders to gauge interest in attending the Watchet Market if it is re-opened in the future. There are around 19 stallholders who are interested. The H&S Designated Officer has been working with Council staff to design a format for the Market to accommodate the space available on the Esplanade, whilst also ensuring compliance with government guidelines on social distancing measures to safeguard traders, staff and the public. This is progressing well, and it is hoped that there will be a Watchet Market on the esplanade in the near future.

Watchet Town Council continues to work for the residents of Watchet.

If you have any queries, then please contact the Town Clerk on:

Email [townclerk@watchettowncouncil.org](mailto:townclerk@watchettowncouncil.org)

Telephone: 01984 633344