

Luton Council service response to Covid-19

Changes in service provision and work priorities

Author: Martin Hindmarsh

Contact: martin.hindmarsh@luton.gov.uk

Version: 1.0 (published)

Last updated: 20 March 2020

During this time our main priority is protecting the most vulnerable and the health and safety of our residents and our workforce.

In response to Covid-19 pandemic and government guidance, we are now enacting our contingency plans.

Further changes are likely to follow.

Contents

Chief Executives department core service delivery and changes.....	3
Strategic Community Services	3
Business and Member Support.....	3
Communications	3
Democracy.....	3
Children’s Service’s core service delivery and changes.....	3
Education Service	4
Free school meals	4
Remote learning	4
Education and care for vulnerable children and children of key workers	4
Public Health and Wellbeing core service delivery and changes.....	4
Adult Social Care	4
Quality Assurance.....	4
Public Health Commissioned Services	5
Trusts	5
Active Luton	5
Luton Culture	5
Place and Infrastructure core service delivery and changes	5
Public Protection.....	5
PCS	6
Inclusive Growth	6
Public Realm.....	6
Customer and Commercial core service delivery and changes.....	6
Customer Services	6
Revs and Bens	7
ICT	7
HR.....	7
Legal.....	8
Housing.....	8

Chief Executives department core service delivery and changes

Strategic Community Services

Community centres will close on a progressive basis as social care services cease to be delivered. The first to do so is Bury Park, which will close today.

We're currently in discussion with the NHS with regard to the relocation of some services from the L&D and we are looking at Chaul End as a favoured location, as it is intended to keep that centre open throughout

If the NHS wish to use other centres they too will be kept open but for that purpose, but our preference would be to close as many as possible to reduce running costs.

Closed community centres may be used for the storage of non-perishable food items on behalf of the Luton Foodbank.

Business and Member Support

Members should be advised to cease holding face to face ward surgeries and to use alternative methods.

Communications

Increased Covid-19 focus will reduce the availability for other communications activity. Methods of reaching those citizens who are not IT-enabled are being investigated.

Democracy

A number of meetings have already been cancelled and this will be kept under daily review.

Royal Mail have indicated a change in their service arrangements. Usual service delivery is likely to be affected. The local printing arrangements are also affected. Therefore for those meetings that are continuing we will need to be moving to electronic papers.

In due course, we expect to have to consider the practical implications of holding formal meetings by means other than face to face.

Children's Service's core service delivery and changes

Our focus is to continue to provide essential and critical services safeguarding services to children, young people and their families.

We're currently going through the process of ensuring that children and families open to children's social care and our Youth Justice Service are risk assessed so we can safeguard those most in need.

Our contact will include a combination of face to face contact where it is safe for us to do so, as well as making full use of mobile technologies and in partnership with other statutory partners.

We are prioritising the provision of the following critical services:

- our multi agency safeguarding hub and assessment service - advice and information on children at risk of harm, experiencing harm or causing harm to others experiencing harm including families fleeing from domestic abuse
- all safeguarding services in children's social care. children in custody
- new presentations of 16 to 17 year old homeless and unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- our emergency duty team will continue to provide out of hours support to high risk family situations
- our Corporate Parenting Service will be prioritising those children and carers most in need of support to maintain their placement and we're prioritising the most vulnerable of all of 18 plus care leavers

The following are our priority services which we will endeavour to maintain subject to staffing and ensuring we can deliver our critical services outlined above:

- Lea grave Education centre coordination of support to children of key workers, vulnerable children in line with the government's priorities
- 1:1 family support through our staff at Flying Start Children's Centres- there will be no further group work or drop in sessions until further notice
- support and advice for families through our:
 - Early Help Offer
 - Special Educational Needs Information and Advice Service and Assessment Service (SENDIASS and SENAT)

Education Service

Free school meals

Update just sent by DfE suggests that schools develop local solutions in relation to supermarket vouchers. Information regarding the value of these vouchers, and clarity around universal infant meals, will be forthcoming.

We urged for rapid clarity on this, with universal food vouchers redeemable at local convenience stores as well as major supermarkets.

Remote learning

Materials and links will be updated regularly on the School Support Services: [Luton Online Learning - support for home learning - Google Docs.](#)

This link will be updated regularly and communicated through the newsletter in future.

Education and care for vulnerable children and children of key workers

The definition of 'key worker' will be shared by the government this evening. However, the DfE explained it would be all workers who are necessary to ensure infrastructure runs smoothly during this time.

As well as health and social care workers, this would also include a much wider definition than at first we thought such as:

- school staff
- food delivery drivers
- food retailers

This does mean that we anticipate much higher numbers of eligible children than we first thought.

Therefore, we would expect that all schools in Luton will be open on Monday for some care and education provision for their eligible pupils. The exception to this is Special Schools who will have separate arrangement for the next two weeks.

Public Health and Wellbeing core service delivery and changes

Adult Social Care

Closure of day care services with the exception of learning disabilities which are being risk assessed.

Quality Assurance

Review the schedule of visits to providers in the light of CQC decision to suspend routine inspections. Focus on providers of concern and use a more virtual approach as appropriate.

Public Health Commissioned Services

- Drug and alcohol service – group work paused, one to one appointments being carried out by skype or phone where possible. The only face to face work will be for urgent clinical restarts, assessment for new users requiring substitute medication and detoxification support.
- Total Wellbeing – social prescribing assessments by phone, many services, such as quit smoking and weight management carried out virtually. Services for risk groups such as underlying conditions and pregnant women ceased.
- Luton Sexual Health Service – clinics still open but expectation that staff will be redeployed to L&D. Urgent eg HIV testing will be maintained and telephone support (website being updated).
- Terrance Higgins Trust have changed the delivery of their outreach service – support carried out remotely, training virtual and staff not attending high risk places, condoms being sent via post.
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services have RAG rated clients and prioritising accordingly (and supporting remotely where possible). A crisis hub set up at Charter House to avoid/reduce A&E attendance. Families being contacted and signposted to other Services for telephone advice – TOKKO, CHUMS.
- CCS putting together a response for pan Beds.

Trusts

Active Luton

Putting in place measures to support social distancing and hygiene in gyms and classes. Also developing:

- outdoor activities at Stockwood Park athletics track and access to golf club
- videos etc to support people who are staying at home
- online Making Every Contact Count guidance
- offer to support schools to who are educating key workers' children

Luton Culture

- Wardown closed and reduced hours at Stockwood.
- Central Library open as well as one branch library per day on a rotational basis (to be reviewed).
- Hat Factory Café open for drinks only and events monitored.

Place and Infrastructure core service delivery and changes

Public Protection

- Parking enforcement and Neighbourhood Enforcement Team officers' change in hours to core office hours. Focus on key strategic routes and maintaining a visible presence 8am to 6pm.
- Parking public counter closed and payments and permits to be done online.
- Licensing appointments only and where appointments are necessary to use the Parking Counter.
- Pest Control reduce capacity to allow resources to focus on Public Health pests only.
- Enforcement investigations prioritised. Where possible matters disposed of by written warning if appropriate.
- Police And Criminal Evidence Act interviews (face-to-face) to be replaced by postal interviews where possible.
- Suspend knowledge test.
- Cease accepting new applications for T&PH for next three months.

- Taxi and Private Hire renewals - will only require online renewal application. Licences renewed based on that application. Additional supporting information such as DBS can be submitted at later date when DBS service is fully operational. Covid-19 illness or isolation of applicant will be considered as exceptional circumstances.
- Taxi and Private Hire vehicles will need to respond to DVLA MOT standards as changing
- Selective Licensing implementation date of 1 May deferred. Commitment to offering first and second month discount to remain.
- Registrars cancelling citizenship ceremonies with 100+ attendees - consider alternate method of delivery, training up additional officers to support the service.
- Registrars - wedding fees carried forward to rescheduled date.
- All parking processing, permits and Blue badge renewals and apps online only
- Abandoned vehicles - to be lifted only if posing danger to road users or is in hazardous condition.

PCS

- Rent holidays for businesses in Luton Council properties for Q1 and Q2. This will need to be reviewed based on government guidance and would be a deferral of payments but with rent paid later in the year.
- Town Centre Masterplan on hold as was moving in to consultation phase.
- Wandon End on hold.
- No new capital contracts unless Health and Safety or linked to grant spend.

Inclusive Growth

- Adult Community Learning closed.
- Procurement activity focuses on critical services.

Public Realm

- Focus on delivery of residual waste and protect Health and Safety.
- Cease food waste trial
- Cease glass collections
- Cease garden waste
- Grass cutting may reduce if staff are unavailable
- MOT testing station available for private hire and taxis and LBC needs. No general public access.
- Capital and revenue spend on schemes only from external funding.
- Planning and Transport
- Development Management appointments only
- Local Plan slowed to allow release of agency spend.
- Dualling of Vauxhall Way design work suspended unless government funding committed.
- Bus pass online only
- Changes to bus passes to allow bus journeys before 9.30 to allow access to supermarkets.
- Passenger Transport Unit meeting revised requirements

Customer and Commercial core service delivery and changes

Customer Services

- We're minimising face to face appointments and replacing these with scheduled phone calls. For now customers are still able to present at reception in either the Town Hall or Library but we may need to switch to asking them to call in the first instance as the situation develops (particularly if public spaces close).

- As we shift to more telephony services, staff will be diverted from customer facing roles to the contact centre.
- As the existing telephony system does not permit homeworking, we are exploring switching to email channels for some services (most notably benefits).
- This will mean work can be allocated centrally to staff working from home who will make outbound calls to customers. This will also enable us to manage demand, and prioritise calls to critical life/limb services.
- Also exploring telephony provision with 4net to enable full home working, with CS advisors taking inbound call from home.
- Luton Access - Citizens Advice Luton have closed all their face to face service this week and only taking phone calls. Luton Access implications significant

Revs and Bens

- We have revised work procedures for all staff. Those that can work from home are doing so. Meetings are via telephone or skype.
- CT and BR Visiting and Inspection Officers are performing telephone calls where possible and are not entering customers premise. They are standing three feet from the door.
- ASC visiting officers are not going to over 70 clients. Most visits are via the telephone and will be verified by evidence posted to the team.
- Enforcement agents are not entering premise and are standing three feet from the door. They are not asking for customer signatures. All is recorded on camera.
- Regarding debt collection we have issued this note to staff:
- Of anyone's normal income has been effected due to the Coronavirus then try and get them to make some sort of payment and arrangement if possible even if on a temporary basis, but if they really can't pay put the account on hold I would say initially for a month and then review in a month's time.
- In light of the chancellor's announcement of giving all hospitality, retail and leisure a business rates holiday for 2020/21, we have ceased the issuing of daily business rate billing changes as the system is producing demand notices that are not correct. We need our software supplier to provide revised software to enable us to re-issue bills.
- Have received £24m section 31 grant for retail relief (987 businesses).
- We expect the Small Business Grants to be administered by local authorities
- We are expecting approx. £1m of council tax hardship funding to come in

ICT

- 115 laptops arrived on 18/3, it will take two days to build, and they will be deployed on 23 March. More laptops are due to arrive by 31 March.
- Plans to extend the VPN network are fast tracking well. Should go from 750 to 5,000 by Tues 24 March. At its peak in 19 March 590 people were logged in remotely.
- Reviewing measures re ICT security

HR

- As at 17 March 134 members of staff were self isolating across the council. This figure is growing.
- A range of employee guidance and intranet articles have been produced re keeping safe at work. Q&A published.
- Business continuity plans have been produced for all services
- Guidance has been produced re home working and this is being widely facilitated where it doesn't impact adversely on services
- Payroll can be run from working at home. This has been tested.
- All training events cancelled.

Legal

- Criminal Courts closed until end of April for trials over three days.
- Employment hearings postponed.
- Still awaiting confirmation from the Family Court about different approach ie video links.

Housing

- Care pathways being developed for rough sleepers who need to self isolate.
- Detailed planning underway re prioritising BTS work.
- Detailed planning underway re managing vulnerable tenants and older people.
- Inspections are only carried out where tenants are happy to receive visits.
- Planning underway for possible COVID-19 report in hostel and TA accommodation where self-isolation. Alternative accommodation to be procured.
- Joint planning with Customer Services to ensure consistency of service.
- Approaches to council rent arrears being developed for agreement.
- Emergency legislation to suspend new evictions from social or private rented accommodation while this national emergency is taking place.
- No new possession proceedings through applications to the court to start during the crisis.