



Key Messages Board

31 March 2020

This is a brief summary of the current issues emerging through the APSE COVID-19 support network and WhatsApp Groups for service areas.



Parks

- **Restricting gatherings**

Parks are remaining open but all facilities which can cause people to gather have been closed e.g. fixed playgrounds.

- **Disabling equipment**

Many pieces of equipment have been disabled as members of public were still accessing the areas. Fencing does not appear to be a solution, due to size of some of the playgrounds but also due to vandalism. Skate parks still seem to be attracting younger people but these are now subject to Police dispersals.

- **Grass cutting**

None essential grass cutting has ceased in many authorities but there is a concern about fine turf and sport pitches particularly now that warmer weather is causing grass to grow more vigorously. Some authorities are trying to get at least a minimum cut agreed to prevent such areas facing major re-instatement problems later, whilst others have put football, rugby and cricket pitches 'to bed'.

- **Closing car parks and toilets**

More councils are promoting greater use of local green spaces by closing car parks and toilet facilities at major destination parks to prevent large crowds gathering and preventing unnecessary travel.

- **Litter bins**

Litter bins in some parks have been taped up to prevent the need to collect litter which may be contaminated with COVID-19 materials. However, in those areas where there is a higher footfall, particularly with people walking dogs this could cause significant problems with the type of waste that could be littered rather than being taken home. Assessment of need is therefore advised.

- **Abuse of staff**

One concern raised by a number of local authorities is that some staff have been verbally abused and even photographed and put on social media regarding the fact they are still

working when others are being promoted to home work. Therefore, perhaps councils need to use social media themselves to explain why staff are still needing to work to allow parks and greenspaces to be safe for public access particularly in light of current government advice to undertake a daily exercise session.

- **Staff absence**

Staff absence and redeployment into other services are now beginning to take effect with some services on 'full shut-down' with only emergency work being undertaken.



Refuse, Recycling and Street Scene

- **Numbers in cabs**

The major concern is whether 3 people in a cab is acceptable with regards to the 2 metre social distancing rule. Some are retaining three in a vehicle but offering additional PPE with hand sanitizers and access to public toilets to facilitate additional hand washing. Other working practices include picking up crew members' en-route to avoid contact time. Where 2 in a cab is being adopted, the extra crew member is following in a second vehicle.

APSE is currently in dialogue with the PHE and HSE to get definitive national guidance on whether 3 in a cab is acceptable bearing in mind social distancing advice, in order to help local authorities in the delivery of refuse collection and other services. This seems to work where there are small round numbers, but where there are large round numbers the availability of smaller vehicles and the ability of enough loaders to drive is proving problematic.

- **Staff numbers**

Reductions in staff numbers is causing problems for some authorities. Overtime has been used to cover staff absence but this is not sustainable and is increasing exposure to staff members. The private sector has offered trained drivers due to some of their work slowing down, in particular commercial waste contracts.

- **Suspension of some services**

As a result of reducing staff numbers bulky household waste, green waste and some recycling services have been suspended. Residual waste collections are being seen as priority with some increasing frequencies of collection to address the suspension of other waste/recycling services.

The provision of increased residual waste collection services may become more essential as HWRC's have now closed in many areas.

- **Increase in work-wear provision**

Work-wear provision has been increased in local authorities where stocks are available. Perhaps a longer term issue is the impact of non-collection of recyclables affecting

processors and existing contracts. WRAP is currently looking into this issue.



Building Cleaning and FM

- **Redeployment of staff**

Following the closures of schools, local authorities are looking to deploy cleaning and FM staff into other priority areas including providing support in distributing food to vulnerable groups.



Building Maintenance and Housing

- **Emergency maintenance**

Still the same issue as key message from last week with questions on control measures specifically if someone is self-isolating.

- **Contractors**

Some contractors are looking at providing a collaborative approach to sharing types of work.



Leisure

- **Facility Closures**

All facilities are now required to be closed. Too soon to be seeking to mothball facilities including the draining of pools however procedures will be required to avoid legionella problems on re-opening if closure persists.

- **Retention**

Suggestions that staff use the time to contact gym members and offer online content.

- **Trusts**

It has been reported that many trusts have no more than 8 weeks reserves and little or no income so are in a precarious position. Seeking potential for the local authority to utilise their staff and sports halls if possible.

- **Food Distribution Centres**

Repurposing of sports halls as food distribution centres – the details of for whom, from where and what remain sketchy.

- **Allotments**

Some authorities uncertain about whether to close access to allotments. The consensus is allow them to remain open but advise holders of social distancing and handwashing.



Transport

- **MOT testing**

Suspended for HGV & PSV and now vans, cars & taxis for 6 months from 1st April – a question mark remains over taxis that failed prior to 31 March.

- **What counts as essential**

Some taking it as waste, cremes and social care vehicles – others highways/plant too.

- **Managed reduction in operation**

Most are reducing servicing and repairs down to essential and rotating staff to limit the numbers working at any one time. At the same time there is a flood of technicians offering their services as dealerships lay off staff.

- **Drivers hours legislation suspended**

However breaching the current limits by local authorities, only likely in extreme circumstances.



Highways

- **What counts as essential?**

Confused advice on construction equally applies to road surfacing so some authorities continued as 'normal' others down to reactive cover only.

- **Road Safety Inspections**

Regarded as important and legally high risk if suspended or reduced.

- **Materials**

Suppliers are shutting down manufacture of blacktop and deliveries of aggregate uncertain so work programme suspended. Some approaching utility companies in an attempt to secure supplies jointly.

- **Social Distancing**

Some allowing only the driver in the cab and other operatives to follow separately.

- **Civil enforcement officers**

Stood down or refocused to support the Police.



Cemeteries and Crematoria

- **Limiting the number of mourners**

Limiting the number of mourners at funerals now seem to be nationwide. Numbers range from 25 to 5 per burial and are aimed at immediate close family, although some problems are arising regards defining what constitutes close family. Web-casting is also being offered as well as suggestion to hold life celebration events when the current crisis has ended.

- **Funeral procedures**

Procedures for COVID-19 funerals now seem to becoming well established, they include exclusion zones being applied around the graveside, no pall-bearers, remains removed from hearse to trolley, all lifting at waist height. PPE masks and gloves and eye protection, tapes to lower coffin are being left in grave or Funeral Directors providing their own to prevent cross contamination. No mourners present at back-filling and no staying to leave floral tributes.

- **Paperwork**

All paperwork is being avoided, with e-mails being accepted, although some legal documents still needing signatures. Original documents being posted at a later date.

- **Muslim funerals**

Regarding Muslim funerals, some helpful advice is being given with regards to adhere to religious requirements at the following website:

<https://eternalgardens.org.uk/coronavirus-resource-hub/>

- **Closure of grounds**

There doesn't appear to be any closure of cemetery grounds, as burials are still taking place and for many these greenspaces are providing local facilities for exercise.



Commercialisation

- **Sharing of resources**

Staff from within these services are currently helping other frontline departments by providing communications as part of the pandemic.

- **Contract reviews**

APSE is working on advice on contract issues including early termination, compensation and other commercial issues.

APSE is here to help

The current situation with COVID 19 is placing enormous strain on our public services. We are very proud of our member local councils and want to reassure you that we are ready to assist you in any way that we can during this current situation. Our COVID-19 Information Hub has been set up to ensure greater resilience & learning between each other. Our dedicated team of Principal Advisors will post regular advisory notes and responses to network queries between frontline service managers within this Hub.

This Hub is regularly updated and can be accessed [using this link](#).

Whilst this is a very testing time for all of us we know that local government is a strong and resilient public service that has come through many challenges. Our communities rely upon us for vital frontline services. APSE wants to support our members in the delivery of those services and ensure that local councils are best placed to support the social and economic recovery that will be needed within our local communities and local and national economies.