

City Solicitor's Directorate Services

Work during Covid-19

Democratic & Civic Support	
Lord Mayoralty	
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cessation and cancellation of all Civic and Mayoralty events.• Closure of the Guildhall;• Postponement or cancellation of all private bookings including weddings at the Guildhall;• Furloughing of all but one member of staff at the Guildhall• Redeployment of Mayoralty staff to the Wellbeing hub.
Elections & Electoral Registration	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Once necessary legislation had been passed, postponement of City Council and Police & Crime Commissioner elections to May 2021;• Unpicking all of the previously made arrangements in respect of May 2020 elections;
Democratic Services	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Immediate postponement of all non-business critical business meetings;• Once necessary legislation had been passed, putting in place mechanism to hold virtual meetings, including preparing necessary Protocols, and working with Councillors to make the meetings work (Exeter City Council was one of, if not the first authority to hold a virtual meeting after the legislation had been passed);• Providing training and support to members in the use of Meeting technology;• Setting up and monitoring of the Members CV email address, to provide single contact point for Members on Corona Virus related issues and the coordination of responses;• Redeployment of staff into the Wellbeing hub
Corporate Support Unit	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Immediate introduction of alternative ways of working when SMB decision to work from home was implemented including scanning of all incoming post and forwarding to relevant departments;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing safe working practices within the Civic Centre for those still required to work in the office; • Initial coordination of PPE for the authority and sourcing them when supplies were nationally low; • Ongoing support for the raising of orders and payment of bills so as to ensure council met its responsibilities to suppliers; • coordination with Strata of requests for additional IT equipment to be taken by staff to allow for home working; • Maintaining contact with tenants of the Civic Centre (including the Police) to ensure safe working practices followed throughout the buildings; • Assisting with the “Operation Shield” project which was set up to coordinate delivery of vital supplies to the vulnerable and shielded households.
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Human Resources	
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Activities	<p>The lockdown was announced on the evening of 23rd March 2020. The 24th March 2020 heralded a significant and critical Work stream of HR support across the whole council for the benefit of both management and employees alike.</p> <p>The volume of this additional work was, and remains, substantial and therefore we have been unable to furlough or redeploy any member of the HR team.</p> <p>This work includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staying abreast of Government Guidance to inform Council decision making and the formulation of appropriate Action Plans relating to staff. • Rapid development and maintenance of Redeployment Register; • Organising and facilitating the redeployment of staff into the Community Hub (the Council’s response to COVID enquiries) • Creating, structuring and submitting the Council’s Furlough claim to HRMC resulting in income recovery Circa £400,000; • Rapid development and deployment of related employment Policy; • Fielding and responding to a large number of enquiries • Revising and delivering appropriate contractual changes • Designing and communicating FAQs for City Council employees.
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Legal Services

Legislation	<p>Legal Services analysed and provided detailed advice on legislation and regulations passed by Parliament in the early stages of the pandemic, particularly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Coronavirus Act 2020 • The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Business Closure) (England) Regulations 2020/327 • The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020/350 • Regular guidance issues by central government.
Legal advice	<p>Legal Services took on the responsibility of proactively coordinating and distributing government guidance issued on a daily basis to relevant Council departments in order to ensure all department were up to date on the latest legislative and policy developments of central government.</p> <p>Prominent legal issues requiring legal advice have included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advising on the application of the law to establishments opening in breach of the regulations and the powers of the police and local authority; • Legal advice to Licensing sub-committee on the application of COVID-19 legislation in the context of the Licensing Act 2003; • Application of procurement guidance from central government, particularly Procurement Policy Note 02/20 on supplier relief requiring support to be considered for suppliers affected by the lockdown and Procurement Policy Note 04/20 on the transitional phase of lockdown. Working with procurement in preparing a Council policy for providing supplier relief in accordance with PPPN 02/20. • Advice on claims by contractors for supplier relief, including the legal and financial protection of the Council; • Application of the law in relation to applications for possession of land; • Application of the law in relation to applications for possession of residential and commercial property and the ban on evictions; • Advising on the application of the Act: Shielding, local support systems and grocery deliveries, Local Resilience Forums, Business Rates relief, Small Business Grants Funds (SBGF) and Retail, hospitality and leisure grant fund; • Advising on the application of the Public Contracts Act 2020 to live procurement processes affected by the lockdown and put on hold together with consideration of the law on abandonment of procurement processes; • Advice on disputed procurement processes;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice in relation to the review of the Council's commercial property portfolio where tenants are facing difficulties in payment rents and measures put in place to alleviate those difficulties. • Employment related advice in the context of the challenges posed by Lockdown.
Key challenges	<p>Remote working in the context of the relatively newly introduced agile and flexible working policy initially provided a challenge to a legal team that had been used to working predominantly from the Civic Centre. As a result, the team collectively reviewed its systems and processes in order to enable home working and the minimisation of office working. The legal team continue to work on this and have further enabled home working through the recent introduction of an on-line case management system and the provision of on-line legal resources.</p>