

The Village Stores/Community Shop Stoke St Gregory

Our Operating Policy During the COVID-19 (novel Coronavirus) Crisis March 2020

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to set out our policy for protecting people and the integrity of the business during the prevalence of the COVID-19 (novel Coronavirus).

Policy Aim

The aim of the policy is twofold:

- To contribute to the protection of human health;
- To maintain the integrity of the business.

Policy Drivers

The policy is driven, primarily, by the following factors:

- The integrity of the business (i.e. the capability to operate and offer essential services) is important for the wellbeing of the community;
- Operating the business requires a degree of human interaction;
- The virus appears to be highly contagious;
- Certain members of the community are more vulnerable to effects of the disease than others;
- Actions taken during this time must be pragmatic, effective and sustainable over a (currently unknown) long period of time.

Keeping People Safe

To keep people safe and to contribute to the protection of our community we will need to minimise the risk to all whom we come into contact. The current understanding is that those with underlying health issues are the most vulnerable and we must prioritise their safety. Current government advice is to implement 'social distancing' measures and employ rigorous personal hygiene.

We will suspend formal volunteer training from Friday 20 March 2020. Volunteers who are 'vulnerable' will be asked not to work in the shop. Volunteers, who do not fall into the 'vulnerable' category, will continue to have the opportunity to sign up for shifts.

Our interpretation of 'vulnerable' is:

- People who have known or undiagnosed health issues relating to respiratory and cardiac conditions;
- People who have reduced immunity to disease;
- People over the age of 70 years;
- Pregnant women.

Whilst age is not in itself a restrictive criteria, there is an increased likelihood that people over 70 years old will either have underlying health issues, or be close to someone that has health issues. Therefore, we will request that volunteers who fall into the 'vulnerable' category do not work in the shop from Friday 20 March 2020.

We will not allow volunteers of any age to work in the shop if they have a known or suspected condition that is likely to be worsened by contracting the virus.

Members of the community who have, or may have, been in contact with the disease will be asked not to work or to visit the shop until they have self-isolated for at least 14 days and have been symptom-free during that time.

As the situation continues to develop, we will reduce the number of people working in the shop. From Friday 20 March 2020, we will restrict the number of staff to no more than two at any time. If the risk of infection continues to rise in the short-term, a decision may be made to reduce the number of staff to one. There is no timescale for making this decision – it will be based on the local situation and professional or government advice.

We will employ a rigorous cleaning regime. Surfaces that are routinely touched will be cleaned hourly during shop opening hours. These surfaces will include: chiller doors and handles; freezer doors; shop door handles; the counter; cash register, PayPoint terminal screen, and; card reader. An anti-bacterial surface cleaner will be used. Normal cleaning routines will be undertaken.

It may be necessary to restrict the number of people in the shop at a given time. This is because the shop area is very small and it may not be possible to ensure a reasonable level of social distancing. If this strategy is implemented, a sign will be posted stating the fact and requesting customer cooperation.

Given the relatively small size of the shop and to improve air quality, the shop will operate as much as possible with the door and windows open.

Protective clothing is to be sourced. This will likely comprise disposable aprons and gloves. Staff will be required to regularly wash hands and adopt the recommended protocols to ensure they remain safe.

Maintaining Business Integrity

It is important that the shop and the business is operated in a way that maintains its integrity. By this, we mean that it can continue to provide the goods and services that the community has come to expect.

A functioning village shop is not just a convenience, but for some members of our community it provides essential services. This is particularly true for those with health and transport considerations. Many people rely on access to a PayPoint terminal for charging electricity keys, for example, and it is important that we continue to provide such services.

The supply chain for goods is reliable and robust. Whilst we have witnessed a spate of 'panic buying', which has stretched the supply chain resulting in some goods being temporarily unavailable,

it is not expected to last. People will adapt to restrictions and adopt new habits in time. We do not expect a major disruption in supplies but it is possible that some goods become more difficult to source in the time periods to which we are accustomed. Imported goods may face some restrictions and so we will endeavour to source locally, if at all possible.

The business will continue to operate on the existing opening hours. However, some minor adjustments may be necessary, or desirable, in order to match staff availability. Reducing the opening hours may, indeed, be counter-productive insofar that it may increase customer density at key times during the day. A decision will be based on the balance of risk.

At this time there appears to be no need to implement restricted opening, i.e. opening at certain times of the day for elderly customers. Whilst stock levels remain stable, it is envisaged that all customers will have an equal opportunity to make purchases. It may be necessary to restrict the quantity of certain goods if these are in short supply.

Many of our suppliers are taking proactive steps to limit the possibility of infection and transmission. We will work closely with them to help ensure mutual objectives are achieved. We have received no indications that deliveries will be affected but changes are inevitable.

Financial management of the business will remain largely unaffected. Remote payments (e.g. BACS) to suppliers will be implemented as much as possible. Customers will continue to pay for goods and services by cash, cheque or payment card. We will look into the need for enabling remote payment over the telephone.

The shop will continue to post news and advice using its Facebook site (The Village Stores at Stoke St Gregory) and it will share posts of interest, where these posts are from a reputable source, where they are considered genuine and factual.

Contact with the shop can be made by mobile phone – 07837 764367 – and email – info@stokevillagestores.co.uk.

By ensuring the safety and wellbeing of staff and implementing safe methods of working, it is anticipated that we will be able to continue operating the business throughout this event. If it is necessary to close the business for a period of time, as much warning as possible will be given to customers, the Parish Council and Heart of the Village team.

Footnote

This policy has been produced as a result of the expected acceleration of the disease and based on the facts available at this time. It is produced in an attempt to be open and transparent about how we provide a functioning village shop in challenging times. The facts and the advice may change and we will review this policy as the situation develops. We ask all our volunteers, customers, suppliers and visitors help us to meet our objectives.

17 March 2020