

Making decisions during the Covid-19 crisis: Sheffield City Council schema

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Definitions

Incident Management Group (IMG) is the Council's internal response co-ordination group made up of a number of staff including the following Directors:

Director of Operations, Mick Crofts

Director of Finance & Commercial Services, Ryan Keyworth

Director of Policy, Performance & Communications, James Henderson

Director of Legal & Governance, Gillian Duckworth

Executive Management Team (EMT) is the Council's officer leadership team and is made up of the Chief Executive, the Executive Directors, the Director of Public Health, the Director of Policy, Performance & Communications and the Director of Legal & Governance

Cabinet Management Team (CMT) is the Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Members plus EMT

This note describes how it is proposed that decisions are made during the Covid-19 crisis. It explains how decisions are categorised, who the decision maker is in each case, and who else should be informed and/or involved for each type of decision. It also sets out how decisions should be implemented and communicated.

Because we are operating an emergency response, the decision making process is very different to our normal business as usual operation – this will feel uncomfortable but it is necessary. In the first week of this incident, we have already had to make extremely rapid and significant decisions to scale back or stop some of our services and it is likely that we will have to make even more difficult choices over the next weeks. It is important that all that we do is:

- Consistent – in line with the agreed Local Resilience Forum strategy and our own agreed strategy for responding to the incident
- Corporate – owned by the organisation as a whole and decisions taken with a clear view of the bigger picture and any knock-on implications known and understood
- Communicated – appropriately to those affected by decisions (service users, staff and other stakeholders) and understood by EMT, Cabinet and other partners
- Timely – decisions must be capable of being made quickly given the rapidly changing nature of this emergency. Making the right decision at the right time may result in lives being saved.

- Recorded – decision makers are accountable for the decisions that they take. They may be required to account for them in a court of law at a later date. It is important that all such decisions are recorded, including a clear rationale for why the decision was taken, the factors considered and the alternative options considered and dismissed.
- Lawful – made in accordance with the law and our Constitution

We have four types of decision ranging from those that have minimal implications to those that are highly critical. Most of these will be dealt with within the defined emergency response arrangements, although some of the most critical will be escalated for decision by the Leader, Chief Executive or their nominated deputies. No Covid-19 related decisions will be taken by Individual Cabinet Members.

Category 4 decisions are operational level decisions that are taken by managers, Heads of Service or Directors within a service area. This includes decisions such as redeploying a team from one area of the city to the other in response to an increase in demand. These are largely business as usual decisions that have no impact on the quantity or quality of the service being provided. These decisions should be logged locally but there is no requirement for these to be relayed to the Incident Management Group or communicated more broadly.

Category 3 decisions are decisions that affect the quality or quantity of non-critical services (as defined in the relevant Business Continuity Plan) and that have no or minimal impact on other parts of the council. These decisions should be made by the director of the service concerned, logged formally and reported to the Incident Management Group via incident@sheffield.gov.uk. The IMG will determine whether the decision requires communication to the public, staff or stakeholders including whether this decision needs to be taken formally and published. The relevant Cabinet Member will be informed of the decision to be taken, although this may occur after the fact if the decision is urgent. If the Cabinet Member disagrees with the decision taken this should be recorded on the log. These decisions should also be reported via the daily situation reports that each director is required to complete.

The IMG may determine that a decision identified as Category 3 is in fact a category 1 or 2 decision – in this case the relevant director will be informed and implementation of that decision should be paused, pending review.

Example: A decision to reduce opening hours of a park has a material impact on a non-critical service and is likely to be a Category 3 decision.

Category 2 decisions are decisions that have material impact on the quantity or quality of a business critical service and/or have implications for a range of different services. This category would also include decisions where there is likely to be substantial public interest

even where they are confined to a non-critical service area. These decisions must be proposed by the relevant director and endorsed by the relevant Executive Director, and then passed to IMG for decision. The decision should be discussed with the relevant Cabinet Member in advance, although a Director within IMG, will be the decision maker and will be advised by the Director of Legal & Governance, Gillian Duckworth as to whether the decision needs to be taken formally and published. If the Cabinet Member disagrees with the decision to be taken this should be noted on the decision log. CMT will be informed of these decisions. It is likely that all of these decisions will require communication to the public, staff and stakeholders and this will be managed through the IMG communications cell.

Example: A decision to delay providing non-emergency housing repairs has a material impact on a critical service for the council and would therefore be a Category 2 decision. Similarly a decision to close parks would be a Category 2 decision because although it is a non-critical service, there is likely to be substantial public interest.

Category 1 decisions are for the most significant issues. They are likely to be decisions to terminate or significantly curtail the delivery of critical services (usually those services that had been identified as business critical). They are likely to have an impact on the welfare of vulnerable people or on the economic wellbeing of the city. They may have human rights or other legal implications. There may also be substantial financial implications. These decisions will be referred to CMT from the IMG and will be made by either the Leader or the Chief Executive in consultation with CMT and will be advised by the Director of Legal & Governance, Gillian Duckworth as to whether the decision needs to be taken formally and published. The Leader and relevant Cabinet Member(s) will have been briefed by the Chief Executive and Executive Director in advance of the meeting, which is likely to be held virtually and at short notice, with as many Cabinet Members as are available. These decisions will require extensive and sensitive communication with the public, staff and stakeholders.

Example: A proposal to make an emergency change to eligibility thresholds for adult social care support, including for those currently receiving care.

This decision-making scheme applies a) only for decisions that are related to the Covid-19 incident (other decisions are to continue to be taken in line with the Constitution or Leader's Scheme of Delegation of Executive Functions) and b) is in force on a temporary basis until such time as the major incident is closed.

It will be kept under constant review.

	Officer Process	Member Process	Publicity/Media
Category 4 Operational	Operational decisions that have no impact on the quality or quantity of service being delivered should be made locally as in BAU	N/A	N/A
Category 3 - Non-Critical Director decision Cabinet Member informed	Decisions to change the quality or quantity of services that are not rated as critical in your Director's BCP should be made by your Director provided they are clear that there is no impact on another Director's service operations. This might require the re-evaluation of what constitutes a critical service. Decisions will be logged formally. Email notification sent to; incident@sheffield.gov.uk	Relevant Cabinet Members are informed of the decision. The principle is that Cabinet Members hear about changes to services in their portfolios from Officers first wherever practical. If a decision in this category is urgent, it is acceptable to inform the Cabinet Member after the fact.	Public information updated on internet Communications notified by IMG or direct check of mailbox? Media Release via Leader and relevant Cabinet Member
Category 2 – Critical IMG Decision Cabinet Member informed in advance when possible	Decisions which impact the quantity or quality of a business critical service must be proposed by the Director or Exec Director and agreed by the IMG. We would expect the vast majority of Director / Exec Director recommendations to be agreed by IMG and reference to EMT would be by exception only. Decisions will be logged formally. Email notification sent to; incident@sheffield.gov.uk	Directors / Executive Directors should inform the Leader relevant Cabinet Member as part of the decision making process, although the ultimate decision will be made by Officers not Cabinet Members.	Public information updated on intranet Communications notified by IMG or direct check of mailbox? Media Release via Leader and relevant Cabinet Member

	EMT will be informed.		
Category 1 - Highly Critical EMT / Cabinet Decision	<p>Decisions to terminate or significantly curtail critical service delivery will be referred to CMT. These decisions would most likely impact the key priority services that EMT have identified for protection as part of the BCP and generally have an impact on the welfare of vulnerable citizens and/or the city's long-term economic wellbeing.</p> <p>Decisions will be logged formally.</p>	<p>Decisions of this magnitude will require an urgent CMT meeting to be convened for the decisions to be made.</p> <p>The Leader and portfolio Cabinet Member(s) will require full briefing from the Director / Exec Director in advance.</p> <p>It is expected that this meeting would take place virtually with as many member as are available at short notice.</p>	Intensive media plan will be put in place