



Hinckley & Bosworth
Borough Council

Forward timetable of consultation and decision making

Scrutiny Commission 2 July 2020

Wards affected: All Wards

Coronavirus - the Council's Response

Report of Strategic Leadership Team

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members about the impact of coronavirus on our communities as far as we know, our Council services, our finances and set out the Council's response to the challenges it has presented. This includes the successful creation of the Resident Support Scheme and delivery of the Business Support Grant schemes. Please note there is a separate report on this agenda that sets out our targeted approach to recovery.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That members endorse the positive steps taken in response to the Coronavirus pandemic.

3. Background to the report

- 3.1 From early March all communities across the borough have been affected by the Coronavirus pandemic. As a consequence of the Government's strategy for dealing with the pandemic, and the associated "lockdown", we have had to find new ways of working, as well as delivering new initiatives in challenging circumstances and at a fast pace in very short timescales.
- 3.2 We have achieved a significant amount in the last three months and a summary of some of the key metrics for this are attached in the infographic as Appendix I. We are now moving towards the recovery phase and we have used the evidence at national and local level to inform the development of our Recovery Strategy, which is covered by a separate report on the agenda.
- 3.2 This report will cover the following:
- Impact on our communities
 - Impact on service delivery for our usual business activity
 - The success of the Resident Support Scheme
 - Delivery of Business Support Grants
 - Financial Impacts (additional expenditure and loss of income)
 - Our engagement in local and national recovery

3.3 Impact on our Communities

- 3.31 Whilst it is still too early to tell, in respect of the full and long lasting impact the current COVID-19 pandemic, a summary of the community impacts are set out below.

Health

	Homes	Hospital	Care homes	Hospice	Other Communal Establishment	Elsewhere	Total
Blaby	3	46	18	1	1	0	69
Charnwood	3	66	34	4	1	0	108
Harborough	2	34	19	1	0	0	56
Hinckley	3	45	33	4	0	0	85
Melton	2	13	11	0	0	0	26
North West	5	39	15	1	0	0	60
Oadby	0	40	13	0	2	0	55

- 3.32 The figures above illustrate the stark impact this devastating virus has had on the health of our communities. With over 80 deaths in the borough (over 30 in care homes) and the rate of cases being 247 per 100,000 population, sits at one of the highest rates amongst districts in Leicestershire. However, as confirmed recently by the Director of Public Health, the rate of positive cases in the borough remains below the national average. As of week ending 13th June the latest available figures published up to 5 June, Hinckley & Bosworth has the second highest rate of COVID-19 cases and deaths in the county. The cases peaked on 6th and 19th April and since then there appears to have been an overall declining trend (albeit with two smaller peaks on the 4th and 18th May).
- 3.33 The focus now in Leicestershire is to control the spread and manage any outbreaks through the development of Local Outbreak Plans work, which the Director of Public Health for LCC is leading on in dialogue with partners.
- 3.34 What these figures do mask is the impact on our community's mental health and the ongoing risks of this, even as we come out of lockdown. Also, as has been reported nationally, there is a significant backlog in general planned care. For example, it has recently been reported (The Times 12th June) that NHS figures for March and April show a 60% fall in urgent referral nationally for cancer care, falling from 181,873 in March to 79,573 in April. In April last year there were 199,217. This also appears to reinforce concerns over a hidden backlog of patients afraid to seek treatment during the pandemic.

Impact on Businesses and Workforce

- 3.35 Following the national lockdown from 13th March, the majority of businesses in the borough have had to stop or drastically reduce their operations. All retail businesses and our hospitality sector including restaurants, cafes, hotels and tourism attractions have all had to close. Of our 4,700 businesses registered in the borough, around 1,800 qualified for the Government's Small Business Grant Fund Scheme and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Grant Fund scheme, considered in more detail elsewhere in this report.

- 3.36 It has recently been reported that the UK's economy shrunk by 20.4% in April. According to the Office for National Statistics this historic fall has been the biggest the UK has ever seen, affecting virtually all areas of activity. Education, health, manufacturing industry, construction and housing, pubs and car sales saw particularly significant reductions. In summary:
- Education fell by 18.8% as a result of school and college closures during March and April.
 - Food and beverage services fell by 38.8% as a result of bars and restaurants closed in March and April.
 - Wholesale and retail trade and repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles fell by 41.6%
 - Health fell by 11.4%.
 - Retail trade by 8.9% due to temporary ceasing of trading.
 - Construction fell by 40.1%.
- 3.37 We know from anecdotal evidence, there are key impacts locally but that there are also positive stories from opportunities businesses have secured. Of note are Triumph who have confirmed over 240 job losses as a direct result of COVID-19 but given assurances that this is to secure their long-term future in Hinckley. Twycross Zoo has run significant losses amounting to over £250,000 per month during lockdown but, as a result of strong lobbying nationally and locally where, with the support of the council, able to open to visitors from 15th June. Our logistics sector on the whole has flourished with the demand for food and household supplies and some companies have diversified and been awarded contracts for production of PPE equipment, such as Upton Steel in Groby.
- 3.38 From information available from the Leicestershire and Leicester Local Enterprise Partnership (LLEP), since May there has been a 20% drop in jobs advertised or available in the borough since January 2020 (from 1,477 to 1,180). The numbers of furloughed staff in the borough by the 31st May was 14,500 representing 23.7% of total employment numbers.
- 3.39 Whilst furlough has helped stave off job losses in the short-term, DWP have reported a near 100% increase in job seekers allowance and we have seen unemployment rise from 2,500 registered in 2019, to around 3,500 locally. This is obviously of significant concern and hence we have set out a range of measures in our Recovery Strategy to seek to address these challenges going forward.

3.4 **Impact on service delivery for our usual business activity**

With the government's initial message clearly being to "Stay at Home", and certainly to work from home if possible, the first challenge was to enable homeworking for as many employees as possible. Fortunately, given our historical approach to flexible working, we already had many people enabled for homeworking, albeit this may have been on an ad-hoc basis for some. For example, our Revenues and Benefits team predominantly already home worked for around 90% of the time.

One of the challenges was the availability of ICT equipment in a very short space of time. We therefore needed to prioritise the rollout of equipment that was in stock and this was undertaken by Directors based upon those that were clinically vulnerable and clinically extremely vulnerable. Within one week we had enabled approximately 67% of staff to work from home (where their role enabled) and within two weeks with more equipment becoming available this had increased to 94%.

Meetings and business/customer visits also had to be assessed and we quickly developed a protocol for visiting officers to ensure staff were reassured that only critical visits were required.

Risk assessments were undertaken for all other staff whose role could not be delivered from home and those who are clinically vulnerable or extremely vulnerable were stood down, where appropriate, for example where social distancing could not be guaranteed.

Employee wellbeing is important and this is even more important during these challenging times. We have been continuing to positively engage with staff throughout the pandemic and managers are finding new ways of staying in touch. This has included signposting to wellbeing resources and tips for staying safe and well, supplemented by a comprehensive Employee Assistance Programme.

The impact of these new ways of working will now be explored on a service by service basis.

3.5 Waste

The operational challenges for this service have been significant due to increased demand and a 35% reduction in staff availability. Waste volumes for all three bins increased significantly during lockdown causing significant operational pressures. For example recycling tonnage was 30% higher at the peak and is still 24% higher than average which is Christmas levels and the increased gardening, DIY, time at home, clear outs (compounded by charity shops being closed), on line shopping etc, have meant all bins have been heavier and staff have been working much harder to ensure services were maintained.

At the start of lockdown 40% of staff were at home self-isolating and the garden waste collections stopped for five weeks before resuming on April 27th, following risk assessments and provision of PPE. In the two weeks following, HBBC collected three times the normal tonnage for garden waste and the service users have had a two month extension to the service in 2021 to compensate.

Additional trucks have been hired in and agency use has been high (over 40% of staff since garden waste collections resumed). Staff have been unable to take leave during this period so agency staff are being retained whilst staff take a well-earned break.

Bin deliveries have increased and waste transfer from the Jubilee have also had to be maintained throughout the lockdown.

Greenspaces

Priority was given to Ashby Road cemetery throughout the lockdown and burials have increased but not to the extent forecast, as the lockdown has resulted in lower deaths than forecast. Services have changed to graveside only in line with government's social distancing guidelines. The number of burials in May doubled compared to last year, but was manageable.

Grounds maintenance has operated throughout the virus with lower staffing levels (due to staff self-isolating) but with careful prioritisation the impacts seen by park users have been minimal. The gradual lifting of lockdown measures has resulted in significant increases in litter volumes on green spaces but parks have been key to

maintaining peoples' mental and physical wellbeing throughout the lockdown and a lot of positive feedback has been received. Our parks have remained open throughout and we have monitored usage and social distancing and there have been no problems.

Events have been cancelled, pavilions closed and play areas still remain closed but tennis and bowls have resumed with additional controls. The café at Burbage common is now operating a takeaway service and options to reopen the toilets at Hollycroft park, cricket and football are all being considered.

Street Cleaning

High numbers of staff in this service area were clinically vulnerable to the virus and therefore the service operated at a reduced level at the start of lockdown and staff were also redeployed to refuse collections. Weekly fly tipping increased by 55% at its worst and is still significantly higher than normal but rates are reducing since the reopening of the household waste sites by LCC.

When the lifting of lockdown commenced litter volumes increased significantly but this has been managed with minimal complaints. There was also a significant delay in removing very large fly tips from two sites by contractors which were resolved. All services are now operating fully (litter collection, road sweeping, special collections, clearance of housing void properties, asbestos removal etc) with the exception of bulky (large item collections) which are still limited in number (due to waste disposal constraints and staff working on refuse collecting) and by the type of items which can be collected (limited to items which can be collected by one person). Officers are working to restore this service full as soon as possible.

Enforcement and environmental crime investigation has continued thorough out the virus particularly for fly tipping and residents have responded positively to social media posts about fly tipping in particular. Complaints about abandoned vehicles were high initially but the majority of these vehicles were residents not going to work.

Planning Service

The Service has been able to continue the majority of business as usual. Planning Committees were cancelled for March and April which has impacted on the determination of a very small number of applications. However, a number of additional committee dates have now been agreed to ensure that we are able to catch up and keep determining applications in accordance with Government targets. The Government have asked Local Authorities to ensure that the system continues. This has caused some disquiet members of the public and the Leader of the Council has expressed his concerns to Government. The usual consultation arrangements have continued as has consideration of applications. The number of Planning Applications received March to May is 261 when compared to the same period last year when 332 were received. This represents a drop of 21% mainly during April and the beginning of May. For the first two weeks of June however 54 applications have been received compared to 55 for the same period last year. There has also been an increase in the requests for pre-application advice over the last few weeks.

Planning Enforcement has continued to receive a large volume of complaints regarding breaches of planning control. Investigations have continued where social distancing in the open air can be practiced. There is likely to be a delay in any action that requires the involvement of the courts as they are not currently sitting and when they do re-open there is likely to be a significant backlog of cases. Recruitment to

vacant roles hasn't been progressed due to the lockdown and therefore there will continue to be reduced capacity.

The Local Plans team have been able to continue progressing the production of a local plan and analysis of evidence gathered. There has also been a significant draw of resources to work on neighbourhood plans with the Burbage, Desford and Newbold Verdon NP's at examination stage and other parishes such as Market Bosworth, Barlestone and Witherley progressing their plans towards submission as well and requiring advice and guidance from officers. Officers are also continuing to work cross-boundary with neighbouring authorities on strategic and local planning issues via online meetings.

The Major Projects team have been able to continue to support economic development initiatives and work on Section 106 monitoring/spending, the securing and managing external funding and providing Heritage support and advice, however, the main focus has been working on the response to Covid-19 with colleagues delivering the business support grant programme, working with the town centre group and working with the LLEP on a strategic response.

Members from across the planning service have also been redeployed to assist maintain other services and delivering new services, such as the business grants.

Environmental Health

The Resilience Officer has been heavily engaged during the crisis inputting and being the link with the county's Local Resilience Forum (LRF) response arrangements. Through the LRF cell structures we have been able to facilitate a local Covid-19 mobile testing site; provided guidance adopted throughout the county on visiting officer arrangements and implementation of a Business Closure Protocol and set up arrangements for our key worker staff to receive rapid testing for symptoms.

From the 16 March a number of key services were halted in response to the developing incident, particularly those that required visits to businesses which then were closed. The service did however remain committed to investigating serious health and safety accidents and food hygiene breaches and continued to provide advice to customers. The biggest effect on service was the decision to withdraw, in accordance with national guidance, from providing food hygiene and health and safety inspections. In the first few weeks of the incident this enabled some officers to be redeployed to providing assistance to the Business Rates service in contacting businesses about rate relief and grant applications. However, as the incident and legislation developed officers became heavily involved in advising businesses on compliance with the business closure and social distancing legislation with 123 requests between 23 March and 12 June 2020 (96 business closure and 27 social distancing service requests). These requests resulted in the service receiving in total 148 requests for service between 23 March to 12 June 2020, as opposed to the 43, for the same period in 2019, resulting in a 344% increase in requests handled.

The Environmental Health (Pollution) services have continued as normal and has seen a significant increase in complaints, particularly on noise and smoke. Between 23 March and 12 June 2020 247 noise service requests were received, compared to 160 for the same period in 2019, an increase of 54%. For the same period in 2020 there were 99 bonfire complaints compared with 19 for the equivalent period in 2019, an increase of 421%. Overall the service has seen a 96% increase in service requests received in April 2020 compared to April 2019 and during May 17% increase from last year.

With regards to licensing, the service has been able to continue to offer all licence holders advice and guidance on Covid19 scenarios in their trade sector and specifically have been issued with a pre-opening check list and information on 'Off-Sales'.

For taxis and private hire vehicles (PHVs), we have been discouraging new applicants during the incident as the service would not have been able to complete the required pre-application checks and tests. However, current licensees have been provided with information as to how Covid-19 is impacting on the taxi trade and on advice and precautions necessary to protect drivers and customers for instance on the use of face coverings and screens.

Whilst Councils do not have the power to extend existing taxi/PHV licences, the Government have extended MOTs for vehicles for six months and relaxed the need to see original documents in person where renewals of vehicle licences are due, allowing us to request all applications be made via e-mail attaching the application and all required documents. The Council also agreed to give a three month extension to the payment licence fees as these are set locally which was well received by the local trade.

3.6 Community Safety and Housing

Officers from across Community safety and Housing have supported the new Resident Support Scheme detailed below, in various different roles.

Community Safety

Many crimes, such as burglary and violent crime, have seen significant reductions in offences during the crisis. However some emerging threats were identified and a COVID specific Community Safety Partnership Action Plan was developed and delivered to ensure an appropriate response to key emerging community safety related issues during the crisis. These emerging threats included Domestic Abuse, an increase in scams relating to COVID 19, an increase in secondary fires, vehicle crime and an increase in anti-social behaviour. A current focus for the partnership is the recovery of the Night Time Economy for which a dedicated partnership plan is in place. Close work is taking place across LLR and with town centre recovery teams to effectively plan for this re opening and to ensure actions are taken which will increase public safety.

The council's Domestic Abuse Outreach Service has continued to operate throughout the crisis. The numbers of referrals have remained steady into the service and telephone contact has been maintained. A recovery plan is in place to start to offer some face to face contact on a need basis with the majority remaining as telephone contact for the next few months. Our schools awareness programme is on hold with plans being looked at for alternative delivery options post September.

Community Houses have been closed to the public. During the crisis key users have been contacted by staff on a regular basis to reduce isolation and keep users up to date. A virtual community group offer is being delivered during the summer whereby service users can take part in group activities, such as crafts and cooking, virtually and provision for the activities are being delivered to participants.

Another consequence of the pandemic has been a significant increase in anti-social behaviour. We have seen an increase of 93.6% in reports to the council compared to the same period last year (23/3/19 - 15/6/19 = 141 cases compared to 23/3/20 -

15/6/20 = 273 cases. This significant rise can be directly associated with concerns that people may not be complying with lockdown restrictions.

Housing

Many of our tenants have advised us that they have been adversely affected financially throughout this period. In response the Rents Team have been proactively assisting and supporting our tenants to ensure that individual arrangements regarding repayment can be established.

At the beginning of the pandemic local authorities were asked to identify accommodation for different cohorts of people including the homeless, those affected by domestic abuse, key workers and hospital discharge as significant increases in those requiring support with accommodation during the pandemic was anticipated. In response the housing allocations process was temporarily suspended with the view that we could use our own housing stock to best meet this anticipated need.

Locally, however, this specific increased need for accommodation has not transpired as first expected, although we have seen a rise in people accessing support who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness. Since the start of the pandemic, the Housing Options Team has supported an additional 37 single people. Of these 37, 26 have now moved on for varying reasons, most having had a positive outcome such as securing move accommodation or re-uniting with friends and family. We have 11 people remaining in placements, all have been risk assessed and are either actively looking for private rented accommodation, have been referred to specialist hostel or to the Rapid Rehousing Pathway for assistance. There are a further 4 single people whom we have a duty to under the legislation and are awaiting social housing or private rented sector.

In response to the challenges presented by Covid-19 frontline service delivery has been adapted, across all services, to ensure that both staff and customers remain safe. Non priority visits were immediately suspended and most customer interactions, where appropriate, have taken place over the phone or by other virtual methods. The sheltered housing Scheme Managers, who are usually based at the sheltered schemes, have worked from home for the majority of their week, providing direct support over the phone, attending the schemes or visiting customers only when essential.

Until very recently only urgent and emergency repairs have been carried out within our tenants' homes. Working practices have been introduced to ensure that we are able to readily identify tenants or household members who are shielding or symptomatic. Repairs operatives attending these properties have been supplied with the appropriate PPE to ensure that they can work safely, and working practices have been introduced to mitigate any risks associated with Covid-19.

As lockdown easements are now beginning to be introduced we are working towards the resumption of usual business, re-establishing routine repairs, planned maintenance programmes and other routine housing visits.

The government introduced emergency legislation at the start of the pandemic to ban evictions in both the private and social sector for at least three months. The government has also progressed financial relief for private landlords who may have otherwise placed pressure on their tenants due to the impacts of the virus. Government direction to landlords is such that personalised repayment plans are

advised rather than a move towards eviction. The Private Sector Housing Team expects to see an increase in requests for their intervention and support as further easements are introduced over the next coming weeks.

3.7 Leisure Services

In the very early stages of the pandemic, the majority of employees within this service area were re-deployed to support the new Residents Support Scheme. During this period complimentary work streams have focussed on:

- Supporting our voluntary led sports clubs - £24,000 of external funding has been secured to date.
- Promotion of health & wellbeing lockdown activities, including advice on mental health and exercise.
- Safeguarding our vulnerable adults and children.
- Led on getting our town centres 'Back to Business'.
- Entered into negotiations with Places Leisure over the closure and remobilisation of Hinckley Leisure Centre.
- Assisting Tourism sector in recovery.
- Developing a comprehensive partnership offer for children and young people.

The leisure centre closed on 20th March and since that date there have been discussions taking place with Places Leisure to understand the financial impact and to agree arrangements for the remobilisation and reopening of Hinckley Leisure Centre. Representations have been made at a national level regarding the negotiations taking place with leisure providers.

All events have been cancelled since March up to end of July. We are awaiting further guidance from Government post August.

There has been a significant uplift in the number of people undertaking moderate levels of physical activity. This included walking and cycling. The service area will need to maximise these opportunities with the aim to modify behaviour patterns, leading to positive health outcomes.

3.8 Resident Support Scheme

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic the council, working with volunteers and community groups, set up a Resident Support Service to work with those residents who had to self-isolate and who had no support networks. Priority is given to those over 70, those with an underlying health condition, individuals who are on their own and feeling isolated and families that struggle to cope.

The Resident Support Service developed in a dynamic, fast way to deal with people who suddenly were advised to stay at home. During the early stages of lockdown the service was continually reassessed and developed to ensure it was meeting the needs of those who were contacting the service. Officers from within the Community Services Directorate joined key multi agency cells to ensure that our localities needs and issues were represented.

The Resident Support Service provides the following:

- Links people into local support networks where these are in place.
- Help with emergency food access and ongoing shopping assistance
- Advise on collection of prescriptions and other essentials

- Social contact for those who are lonely
- Advise on financial help for those who are worried about their personal finances
- Advise on how to look after your health and wellbeing whilst self-isolating

It was immediately evident that access to food was clearly the biggest need from day one of our service launch. Whilst a number of local offers were available through the large number of volunteers and community groups supporting their local areas, there were gaps and therefore, as well as ensuring we use the local options available to us, we have created a number of options to fill the gaps, where needed. These are listed below:

- Emergency food parcels - complimentary packages have been delivered within a 4 hour window from receiving initial requests. We have worked in partnership with our local Sainsbury's who make up the parcels for us to purchase and deliver.
- Food Buddies - a bespoke offer using the service of committed volunteers who provide ongoing shopping support to our most vulnerable customers.
- Centralised food distribution - working in partnership with a registered local charity we have established a warehouse which stores food and acts as our distribution centre.
- Foodbanks - we have embraced and enhanced delivery via the voluntary sector who oversees the coordination of our 4 Foodbanks.
- Support material - with each food parcel we enclose targeted literature on wellbeing, such as mental health, staying active, sleep, trips and falls.

Another issue which was identified early on was that there were a number of people who were struggling with the isolation aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to this we set up a Staying Well Befriending Scheme which involves a weekly phone call to have a chat and check in with a resident. This service has been operating with redeployed staff and volunteers supplied via our local Volunteer Hub.

A key partner in our Resident Support Service response was Next Generation, who a week prior to the official lockdown measures being announced launched a volunteer recruitment exercise, specifically for this support service. This received a fantastic response with 261 people registering to volunteer. Next Generation enabled effective registration, vetting and safe mobilisation of volunteers. Some of the volunteers were redirected to established VCS groups who needed more volunteers and a number were also used to support the service set up by the council, such as food buddies and the Staying Well Befriending Scheme.

One of the positives to come out of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the fantastic response of the VCS sector. This was celebrated during National Volunteers work and Appendix II provides details of some of the work undertaken by volunteers during the time.

The fact that the council had set up the Resident Support service meant that we were able to respond to the work needed to support Shielded residents quickly. Residents who are on the shielded list had to register if they wanted support with basic care needs, food assistance or other support. Districts are part of the partnership approach to responding to these requests for support, in particular to providing on going food support and social isolation support and to making calls to "priority" four residents (those who had registered for support but who didn't have an emergency food need or basic care need). For Hinckley and Bosworth this has resulted in 1,744 calls being made to shielded people over eight weeks. Our Resident Support Service

also picked up calls from residents confused about the shielded programme, in particular about the government emergency food delivery and priority supermarket slots.

Key areas that have contributed to the success of the Resident Support Service are:

- **Database of key contacts for support in each area** - work took place very early in the crisis with Parishes, local community groups and voluntary sector organisations to ensure we were aware of support networks in each area of the district. This has continued throughout the crisis and support options are added on a regular basis to this database. This has enabled effective signposting to support at the most local level
- **Effective redeployment of staff** - the right staff with the right skills were redeployed in a timely way to support the support service.
- **Clear effective scripts and procedures** - to ensure redeployed staff members are clear of processes and the customer gets a consistent service. This has been key as normal training and induction timescales have been extremely short due to the need to respond in a timely way to the crisis.
- **Excellent community response** with all areas having communities and community groups who have responded to the crisis by providing support for people in their local areas.

Key performance data for the Resident Support Service can be seen below with more detail provided in appendix III.

1. Number of referrals received by triage - 411
2. Number of referrals to Resident Support Service - 449
3. Number of calls made - 6531
4. Number emergency food parcels delivered - 134
5. No of social contact calls made - 766 (call back housing and loneliness service)
6. Number of volunteers registered with NG - 261 and 89 mobilised
7. Number of volunteers working with trusted groups in the Community - at least 900
8. Number of shielded referrals for additional support received 145
9. Number receiving food buddy support - 18 volunteers supporting 60
10. Number of shielded priority 4 calls made - 1697
11. Number of Fitness Friends requests - 20

Moving forward we will be reviewing the Resident Support service taking into consideration future demand both for the current services and for demands arising from the financial consequences of COVID 19 on residents. We will remain flexible in order that we can step the service back up should there be a locality lockdown or impacts from track and trace.

By using existing officer capacity we have been able to deliver the service in a cost effective manner, with little additional financial burden on the council. This was assisted by the fact that officers were unable to deliver on their normal duties during this period.

3.9 Customer Services / Reception

At the start of the pandemic, we moved to an appointment only system within Customer Services Reception. This enabled us to remain open to customers in the greatest need and we were able to use the interview rooms to ensure both customers

and staff continued to feel safe. Once lockdown was announced, we reinforced messages for customers to contact us by phone or via the website, wherever possible, and moved away from appointments. However, throughout the pandemic period we have always retained a presence within the reception area and have continued to serve customers where they have presented in crisis.

Unsurprisingly, we experienced significant increases in customer contact, particularly in relation to the wider impacts of the pandemic on our services alongside requests to access new schemes, such as the Resident Support Scheme and Business Support Grants. This culminated in 15,686 calls during March, which for business rates related queries alone was an increase of 1192%.

Homeworking for Customer Services had not previously been explored due to system restrictions. However, the pandemic was the trigger to fully test the capacity and capability of the new telephony system and home working has been successfully rolled out, whilst retaining high performance levels, despite the increase in demand. As lockdown restrictions are being lifted in other sectors, we have now reintroduced an appointment system for reception and early feedback is that this has been welcomed and all appointments are being fully utilised.

3.10 Business Support Grants

Initial Scheme

Early in the pandemic, the Chancellor set out a package of temporary, timely and targeted measures to support businesses through the disruption caused by COVID-19. In summary those for us to administer included the following:

- A 12 month business rates 'holiday' for all retail, hospitality, and leisure businesses in England. This is known as expanded retail discount
- A 12 month business rates 'holiday' for children's nurseries
- Small business grant funding of £10,000 for all business in receipt of small business rate relief (SBRR) or rural rate relief
- Grant funding of £25,000 for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses for properties with a rateable value between £15,001 and £51,000

There was also an expectation that local authorities would implement these schemes without delay and all payments due should be made by the end of April if possible.

The Revenues and Benefits Team were quickly geared to deliver on the business rates holiday and these were applied immediately, and affected businesses notified. This totalled £1.8m across the Borough. Similarly, the retail, hospital and leisure business grants were relatively straightforward to administer and we have paid over £9m to nearly 500 businesses.

However, the Small Business grant of £10,000 presented significant challenges as most of the eligible businesses had never been required to make business rates payments as they were in receipt of SBRR and therefore we did not hold banking information to facilitate payments.

We set up a secure process for the businesses to provide banking information, but this required us making contact in the first instance. Given that there were

approximately 1500 businesses, many of which were themselves closed due to the pandemic, this presented many challenges. At the peak of this work, we redeployed 20 people from many of our services. At the date of writing this report we have now paid out over £14m in Small Business Grants to over 1400 businesses and in total we have paid out over 95% of all grant funding.

As a consequence of the funding announcement, we have also seen an increase in businesses applying for SBRR. Where these applications are successful and we have clear evidence that this was the case for the qualifying date of 11 March, they are still being paid on a discretionary basis with sign off by the Head of Finance. We therefore expect to continue to make payments from this fund for some weeks.

Discretionary Scheme

Further to the initial announcements, we were awarded an additional £1,092,000 to support businesses across the borough as part of the Government's Local Authority Discretionary Grants Fund.

This scheme aims to provide support for businesses through the in addition to the Small Business Grant and the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Grant Funds, businesses must have been trading on 11 March 2020 and not have received any other government funding (except the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme).

The grant awards start at £500 with a maximum potential grant of £25,000.

Our local scheme prioritised five main areas:

- Small businesses in shared offices or other flexible workspaces
- Regular market traders with fixed building costs
- Bed & Breakfasts which pay council tax
- Charity properties in receipt of charitable business rates relief
- Suppliers of the retail, hospitality and leisure sector who were not considered eligible for the previous grants

Applications were invited for this scheme from 1 June and closed on 14 June. We have so far received 333 applications and initial eligibility check is being carried before a team of assessors will determine the grant awards. Initial payments are expected to be made within two weeks of the closing date.

The impact of these schemes on services cannot be underestimated. Many staff worked through weekends and as set out previously, early in the scheme our Customer experienced an increase of 1192% of enquiries for business rates.

4. Exemptions in accordance with the Access to Information procedure rules

- 4.1 Report will be taken in open session.

5. Financial implications [AW]

- 5.1 The impact of Covid-19 on the finances of the council is significant and wide ranging. I have summarised the current risk profile and potential losses in the table below. There is also the potential for a further tranche of government funding support to assist with pressures arising from Covid impacts and also in relation to leisure centre pressures, but this has not been confirmed. The RAG rating is based on the likelihood of the impact being incurred; green is more sure, through to red, which is a

possibility, but much less certain. This is used as the basis for reporting to Central Government.

- 5.2 The overall table comes to a worse-case scenario risk £3.4m general fund losses after current government funding is taken into consideration. A best-case scenario, if further funding from central government is made available for leisure centre costs and lost income, would be general fund losses in the order of £1m-£1.5m.
- 5.3 With the exception of Garden Waste, these all involve varying levels of estimation and are forecasts for the year and may well change as further information is obtained as the year progresses.
- 5.4 The table does not include HRA losses as it is too early to estimate the impact on rentals, but it is reasonable to assume there will be some reduction in rent collection in year and potential bad debt increases.

Key to table 1

RAG rating (of being incurred)	Risk Range
	High Risk (Range £1.6m to £2.2m)
	Medium (£150,000 to £300,000 – excluding Council Tax and Business rates)
	Low Risk (£100,000 to £590,000)

Table 1: Costs/Loss of income in 2020/21	Extra costs	Lost income	Comment	RAG rating
Commercial rents, Loss of rental due to rent loss "Holidays granted" to support tenants		£190,000	Loss of rents 3-6 months, Might recover some as rents rephased, so may end up as timing into next year.	Green
Leisure Centre Mgt fee Qtr year fee+ costs cover	£565,000	£935,000	This could lower as negotiations are ongoing, but is highly likely in the range £1m to £1.5m	Green
Lost interest		£90,000	Cash needed for cash flow, so less invested	Green
Car parks		£200,000	Three months loss of income slow return	Green
Garden waste		£130,000	Two months service moved to following financial year	Green
Crematorium income, assume project will slip.	£100,000		Now not expected to complete in year.	Green
Extra audit costs due to new income and payment risks	£25,000		Audit Assurance needed on grants paid out	Amber
Agency Staff overtime	£50,000		Some used for waste	Amber
Housing (including homelessness)	£150,000		Assume we do not put those given shelter back on streets	Amber

Table 1: Costs/Loss of income in 2020/21	Extra costs	Lost income	Comment	RAG rating
Environmental and regulatory services (including excess death management)	£75,000		Might be lower	Amber
IT costs	£80,000		Potential as costs of homeworking and some extra kit	Red
Trade waste		£100,000	Best Guess if business fail and close	Red
Other fees and charges		£80,000		Red
Bad debts increase	£120,000		General Fund impact	Red
Planning income loss		£150,000	Assume fees down as slow down in application	Red
Finance/ corporate services	£60,000		Overtime/Agency	Red
Loss total	£1,275,000	£1,825,000		
Business Rate (includes preceptor element)		£8,240,000	Lockdown easing may uncover more business that fail as government support withdrawn. £7.4m now covered by retail relief	Amber
Council Tax (includes preceptor element)		£1,200,000	Assume increase in non-collection/Bad debt and increased support for hardship.	Amber
Collection Fund		£9,440,000		
Covered by Government funding				
Extra S31 for retail relief		-£7,435,000		Received
Council Tax hardship fund		-£535,000		Received
Covid-19 pressures	-£1,182,222			Received
Total	£92,778	£3,295,000		
Combined lost income and extra costs	£3,387,778			

6. Legal implications [FA]

6.1 None arising directly from the report.

7. Corporate Plan implications

7.1 This report contributes to all aspects of the Corporate Plan.

8. Consultation

8.1 None for the report although trade unions, partners and the voluntary sector have been consulted during the coronavirus pandemic as appropriate.

9.

Risk implications

- 9.1 It is the council's policy to proactively identify and manage significant risks which may prevent delivery of business objectives.
- 9.2 It is not possible to eliminate or manage all risks all of the time and risks will remain which have not been identified. However, it is the officer's opinion based on the information available, that the significant risks associated with this decision / project have been identified, assessed and that controls are in place to manage them effectively.
- 9.3 The following significant risks associated with this report / decisions were identified from this assessment:

Management of significant (Net Red) risks		
Risk description	Mitigating actions	Owner
None		

10. Knowing your community – equality and rural implications

- 10.1 The coronavirus has affected all elements of our communities. We have considered the impact of each of the service impacts and new initiatives and developed our approaches accordingly to ensure no one group is disadvantaged as a result.

11. Climate implications

- 11.1 The impact of the coronavirus pandemic has been far reaching and inevitably the changes in service delivery will impact on the wider environment. These are set out more clearly within the Recovery Strategy.

12. Corporate implications

- 12.1 By submitting this report, the report author has taken the following into account:
- Community safety implications
 - Environmental implications
 - ICT implications
 - Asset management implications
 - Procurement implications
 - Human resources implications
 - Planning implications
 - Data protection implications
 - Voluntary sector

Background papers: None

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Executive member: Councillor S Bray