

**ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL  
19 JUNE 2020****COVID-19 RESPONSE APPROACH FOR ECONOMY AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

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**Summary**

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Panel is to receive an update on Economy and Environmental Services as a result of the Coronavirus Pandemic (Covid-19).
2. The Update will include areas such as the impact on services, the workforce, support provided by the Council and early thoughts about how future services may have been influenced.
3. The Council's overarching Scrutiny Board has requested all the Overview and Scrutiny Panels and the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) to look at how services have been affected, and to report back to the Board. Now, as the Council begins to move into recovery and out of the response phase, the Scrutiny Panels and HOSC are keen to discuss with Directorates about the impact on services and staff and how they have been able to respond.
4. The Director for Economy and Environment and the Cabinet Members with Responsibility for Highways, for Economy and Infrastructure and for the Environment, have been invited to the meeting.

**Background**

5. The Worcestershire County Council response included activating the Corporate Emergency Response Framework, setting up Gold, Silver and Bronze arrangements to meet the COVID-19 response requirements, which in turn are aligned to the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) structures of Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) and Tactical Co-ordinating Group (TCG) Coordinating Groups. The Mission being: "to preserve life, prevent the spread of infection and maintain critical Council services".
6. To ensure a collaborative and effective Local Authority response for Worcestershire, a COVID-19 Response Structure was developed. This remains in place (with some updates) as COVID-19 Response activity continues. This structure ensures that Gold and Silver response activities are co-ordinated and supported through a number of workstreams, e.g. Logistics, Community Action, Management of the Deceased.
7. Representatives of the Economy & Infrastructure Directorate Leadership Team and Senior Management Team have taken-up active leadership roles as part of the COVID-19 Emergency Response activity. This included:

- Gold Commander: John Hobbs, Director of Economy and Infrastructure
- Silver Commander: Rachel Hill, Assistant Director for Economy, Major Projects and Waste  
Transport Logistics: Paul Smith, Assistant Director of Highways and Transport Operations
- Political Liaison: Andy Baker, Transport Planning and Commissioning Manager
- Emergency Planning Team Management: Ian Bamforth, Highways Operations and Public Rights of Way Manager

8. This enabled the countywide response activity to be firmly established with a clear “battle rhythm” in operation. The Gold and Silver Commander roles have been occupied by the same individuals since the beginning of the emergency response to maintain consistency of approach and overview and to allow for robust arrangements to be established, ongoing delivery and continuity.

9. Staff representatives from across the Directorate have supported specific areas of response activity, e.g. food distribution, supporting businesses, project support.

## Highways

10. Highways reactive and safety critical works are ongoing and have been throughout the lockdown period, including gully emptying. All customer enquiries continue to be responded to in the usual way, although direct contact was significantly reduced during the initial response period. This provided time to catch up with the huge amount of flooding enquiries received.

11. The footways programme has been prepared with works commencing in June and the number of gangs increasing from July through to the end of the financial year. The Surface Dressing programme is now well underway, and Members are receiving weekly updates, in addition to the daily whereabouts (if applicable in their Divisions). There was a short delay in starting this programme, due to the contractor pausing works due to COVID-19.

12. A “Siding-out” programme is in place, with the support of the Parish Lengthsman, to ensure that footways are kept as wide as possible. We reviewed the Lengthsman activities during this period in line with Government Guidance to ensure safety when working in the public highway.

13. The Winter Service period officially ended in April and work has already started on the preparatory work for the next season including a review of this season’s activities.

14. Grass cutting began on 4 May and the first cut should be finished by mid-June.

15. There are two mini- patching gangs on the ground (one more than usual) and they will be responding to the small permanent patches and small areas of surfacing.

16. Our Streetworks teams are vigorously challenging utilities’ applications, paying particular attention to social distancing rules, ensuring that pedestrians can move about easily. The same applies for our own works (where practicable) and there are

additional signs on site to remind people to adhere to the Government advice.

17. Street Lighting works have continued, where possible, throughout the response period, with operatives working alone or where necessary travelling separately. Replacement of larger units involving two operatives working in close proximity has not yet resumed.

18. Development Control experienced a slight downturn during the lockdown in terms of the design-auditing activity, workloads have now returned to pre-lockdown levels. Discussions regarding the re-opening of sites with developers are well underway and the site supervision service has recommenced inspections of live works.

## **Major Infrastructure Projects**

19. Following the Lockdown announcement on 23 March 2020, the majority of construction work on Major Infrastructure Projects was temporarily suspended and sites safely closed down. This was due to; supply chain matters, resourcing, being able to socially distance, confidence to be able to safely finish work started.

20. Where possible on-site work continued, including; Worcestershire Parkway – Platform 2 works and snagging, Kidderminster Station – internal / external works and seasonal / critical survey works and inspections.

21. Non-construction work on infrastructure projects has continued throughout the period where possible, e.g. design works, business case development, planning development.

22. Further advice was received at the end of April from Transport Minister, Baroness Vere, regarding Highway maintenance and guidance provided from Highways Sector Council. On receipt of this, contractors worked through plans for how to ReStart construction works. This required establishing new practices regarding social distancing, preparing Risk Assessments and Method Statements, mobilising the supply chain and workforce (some furloughed), re-establishing sites, confirming and agreeing plans.

23. Key work is now well underway or planned at most locations including; SLR4, Churchfields, Pinvin, although there are some elements of the supply chain still to remobilise. Communications are carried out to support restart and new work, and this will continue as plans progress.

24. At this stage the full impact of COVID-19, in terms of any pause in works and the effect of new ways of working, on programmes and costs is not known.

25. Worcestershire 5G: Flooding and COVID-19 lockdown prevented final testing of the project and this also impacted on other final reporting deliverables. An extension has been agreed with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to the end of June. With more recent government announcements, plans are now being actioned to re-commence testing at Malvern Hills Science Park (MHSP), subject to satisfaction of a number of factors.

26. 'Fake News' linking 5G and COVID-19 has slightly increased the number of enquiries into the safety of 5G and contact requesting information. Attacks on civills gangs building fibre broadband and those installing masts and attacks on infrastructure have been seen across the country. No attacks on infrastructure or gangs working on our projects have been reported. During a protest in London in early May, branded 'burn the masts day', we requested additional security on MHSP site for the day, no issues reported.

## Transport

27. Our internal Fleet team has supported a number of specific response activities including:

- Receipt, storage and distribution of 400+ food parcels;
- Support for delivery of medical supplies;
- Support for transportation of Waste Collection Operatives.

28. Transport has continued to be provided for children of key workers. Liaison with operators takes place on a regular basis to identify their capacity regarding vehicles and drivers. The same applies to our in-house fleet to ensure that we always have an up to date, accurate forecast of assets available to undertake service provision.

29. We are working extensively with public transport operators to identify those services that will provide a benefit for commuters e.g. adding additional vehicles on key commuter routes based on the latest DfT Guidance, with a view to increasing services back up to 70%-80% pre COVID-19 levels. To support this, we can confirm that our principal operators in the north and south of the county offer contactless payments, with smaller operators to follow within the next eight weeks. This would mean that 90% of the bus services in Worcestershire would be able to offer contactless payments.

30. We are working with operators to improve public confidence in bus services through, e.g. cleaning regimes, social distancing and better information. There will also be additional signage at bus stops to highlight social distancing. We will also be using our infrastructure, Real Time Information points and other information points to disseminate messages to the public regarding social distancing.

31. A COVID-19 Bus Services Support Grant of £336k has been received from the Department for Transport (DfT). This is to support services through this challenging period. We have also been granted early access to funding for supported bus services of £468K. Whilst these might at first seem like considerable sums, they are to deal with the immediate issue and short/medium term issues to support the bus industry, based on the dramatic downturn and likely slow recovery.

32. In March, we took the decision to maintain 100% of the contract payment for operators and maintain the levels of concessionary and Severncard reimbursements. This was to protect the economy based on our evidence that the operator market is fragile; we know that there are parts of the county which have poor commerciality and a reducing number of operators. We are in regular liaison with operators and, in line with national trends, patronage has reduced by circa 90% on public transport. There are, however, slow signs of recovery, which have been assisted by our financial support and funding from DfT for the bus industry on a national basis.

## COVID-19 Emergency Active Travel Fund

33. Funding for this will be allocated in two phases and indicative allocations for Worcestershire include Phase 1 of £271 000 and Phase 2 of £1,082 000. Phase 1 is for the immediate response as part of recovery, whilst Phase 2 is to support long term actions based on our established transport policy. We are already looking to progress works and defining detailed criteria.

34. There are 28 Active Travel corridors and 6 Active Travel Networks included in LTP4. For each of these, we will review investment in walking and cycling links to create a safe and comprehensive network linking residential areas with key trip attractors such as rail stations, town centres and employment locations. Many of these schemes are underway and in various stages of development and some have already been delivered. We are currently conducting feasibility studies for two schemes which we hope to deliver sooner than planned, subject to our submission for the Emergency Active Travel Fund being successful.

## Waste

35. The Waste Management Service has continued to operate throughout the response period with the key waste facilities of EnviroSort, EnviRecover and the Landfill site remaining fully operational.

36. Throughout the period there has been regular dialogue with the Waste Collection Authorities in Worcestershire, including discussion and facilitation of contacts regarding support to maintain collection rounds.

37. Immediately prior to the “lockdown” announced on 23 March, Worcestershire Household Recycling Centre (HRCs) experienced their busiest weekend of the year, with usage similar to that of an Easter weekend. Following the introduction of the “lockdown”, all HRCs in Worcestershire were then closed reflecting the overall position of “Stay at Home” other than for food, health or work reasons.

38. On 7 April 2020, the Government published ‘Coronavirus (COVID-19): advice to local authorities on prioritising waste collections’. This ‘*non-statutory guidance*’ included some details relevant to HRCs. Having considered both the Regulations regarding travel and the non-statutory guidance relating to waste collections the conclusion was that the Regulations take precedence and therefore the HRC’s should remain closed, as under the Regulations residents are not permitted to travel to them to dispose of their waste. This also recognised the local Waste Collection Authorities in Worcestershire were maintaining their recycling and residual waste collections. Where they were running the service, some were seeing a fall in requests for bulky waste collections and were maintaining their garden waste collection services where it was possible to do so (depends on resourcing).

39. In relation to incidents of fly tipping, none of the local Borough, City or District Councils in Worcestershire advised of any significant increases beyond that normally experienced at this time of year.

40. In April Defra reviewed the “non-stature guidance” and in advance of receipt of that the Waste Service team worked with the Council’s contractor and partners to

consider what matters, circumstances and considerations could enable the reopening of HRCs.

41. Preparations assumed that the 'lockdown' was to be lifted in some form and with social distancing remaining in place. Arrangements included:

- A reduced number of HRCs open to enable sufficient staff to provide the extra resourcing required to open and operate the sites safely.
- Only a limited number of residents would be allowed on site at any one time.
- A 'supermarket style' system would be implemented, with a 'one out, one in' access policy.
- No assistance would be provided on site.
- No walking in of waste would be allowed.
- No compost sales.
- Alternate parking spaces / bays would be blocked off.
- Access to each skip would be by one resident at a time.
- The deposit of some materials may not be possible if the re-processor is unavailable as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.
- The Commercial Vehicle and Trailer Permit scheme would remain in operation.
- Opening hours would be as normal.
- Communication of the new arrangements would be required.
- Significant queueing on the highway would be likely and may require the support of Highways in terms of traffic management and the Police to assist with dispersal.
- Increased levels of correspondence and complaints would be expected, and arrangements would need to put in place to ensure these can be responded to.
- Consideration of use of a booking system or similar (pros and cons).
- The precise timing of the reopening following any change in "lockdown" needs to be considered.

42. On 7 May 2020 Worcestershire County Council confirmed plans to open 7 of the 11 Household Recycling Centres in Worcestershire as of Monday 11 May 2020. This recognised the need for higher levels of resourcing in order to operate the sites safely in line with the new social distancing requirements.

43. Work was undertaken with Highways and the Police to consider the impact of the centres and queuing on the Highway. Various traffic management arrangements were introduced. Communications were carried out, including social media, to inform residents of the plans and the restrictions.

44. The HRCs opened as planned as of 11 May 2020. Arrangements and traffic management have been adjusted as required recognising the very high numbers of people using the facilities.

45. Following the opening of 7 of the Household Recycling Centres (HRCs) in Worcestershire as of 11 May, it was important to understand how the new operating arrangements would work. We have continued to work with our contractor to reopen more Household Recycling Centres (HRC's), thereby increasing the total capacity available for residents to dispose of their household waste. This should assist in relieving pressure on the sites already operational and also the highways network. To reopen more HRCs (beyond the initial 7) has required additional

resourcing recognising the new social distancing and operating measures at each of the locations. The HRCs in Droitwich and Worcester West were selected as the next to be made operational as they have a combination of reasonable off-road queuing, longer opening hours and size, which combined provides for safer operations and greater capacity, alleviating some of the pressure on the other centres that have already reopened.

46. On Wednesday 27 May, the County Council announced that two further HRCs would be operational as of Thursday 28 May – Droitwich and Worcester West.

47. On Thursday 4 June the plans for opening of the Upton HRC were announced, including a two-week period of extended opening for this location. This means that 10 of the 11 sites in Worcestershire are now open and operating in line with the new social distancing requirements. The sites are:

- Bromsgrove (Quantry Lane)
- Droitwich (Hanbury Road)
- Malvern (Newlands)
- Pershore (Hill & Moor)
- Redditch (Crossgates)
- Stourport (Bonemill)
- Tenbury (*please note this is part time – normal hours apply*)
- Upton (*please note this is a part time site with some extended opening for a two-week period*)
- Worcester East (Bilford Road)
- Worcester West (Hallow Road)

48. We continue to work with our contractor and highways colleagues to agree a plan to enable the opening of the HRC in Kidderminster. Due to the restrictions in place to ensure social distancing measures can be adhered to, less vehicles are allowed in to the HRCs at any one time than before these measures were introduced. As the location of the Kidderminster site is on near local businesses and parked vehicles and has a shared use access, there is no space for queuing vehicles. This means we need to continue to carefully consider the right operations plan to progress how the site could be safely opened.

49. Residents are encouraged to check the website for full details of the social distancing measures, opening times and other restrictions before they visit the HRC.

50. The sites have been very busy since re-opening and so residents may have to queue for a long time before they are able to access the site as only a limited number of cars will be allowed in at any one time. We have worked with colleagues in Highways and will have traffic management in place where possible and will monitor this to try and keep disruption to the network to a minimum.

## **Recovery**

51. Work continues as part of the wider Recovery work, including Economic Recovery. This will be covered in future reports to Cabinet on 25 June and to Scrutiny.

## **Purpose of the meeting**

52. Members are invited to consider and comment on the information discussed and agree:

- any comments to highlight to the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board
- whether any further information or scrutiny work is required at this time
- whether there are any comments to highlight to the relevant Cabinet Member/s

## **Contact Points**

### Specific Contact Points for this report

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## **Background Papers**

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager (Interim Monitoring Officer) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- Agendas and minutes from Covid-19 Response Report to Cabinet on 4 June 2020 [Agenda for Cabinet on 6 June 2020](#)