

CABINET
25 JUNE 2020**COVID-19 RESPONSE & RESTART UPDATE**

Relevant Cabinet Member

Mr S E Geraghty

Relevant Chief Officer

Chief Executive

Recommendation

1. **The Leader and Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Finance recommends that Cabinet:**
 - (a) **Notes and endorses the action taken by the Council in relation to Covid-19 restart planning to date;**
 - (b) **Notes the revenue expenditure incurred by the Council to date, receipt of further Government grant and that further updates will be presented to Cabinet in due course;**
 - (c) **Approves the setting up of a One Worcestershire central PPE store hub for care providers and charges to care providers at cost only, and any other costs claimed from Government.**
 - (d) **Uses the information in this report as the background for reporting to Council about the urgent decisions taken at the meeting of Cabinet on 26 March 2020.**

Background

2. Officers reported the Council's response to COVID19 to Cabinet earlier this month (4 June 2020 - [Link](#)). Our response included activating the Corporate Emergency Response Framework, setting up Council's own internal Gold, Silver and Bronze arrangements aligned to the LRF structures of Strategic (SCG) and Tactical (TCG) Co-ordinating Groups. The Mission of Gold being: "to preserve life, prevent the spread of infection and maintain critical Council services".
3. The Cabinet report set out in detail temporary changes to policies and working practices enacted to respond to the initial response to protect lives and prevent further spreading of infection. It also made reference to Records of Officer Executive Decisions in Appendix 2 of that report.

4. The following sections and paragraphs set out how the Council has been responding to COVID-19 since that first report and focuses on the initial recovery phase. A separate paper on the Council's Economic Recovery plans has been tabled on the same Cabinet agenda.

➤ **Safeguarding vulnerable adults**

- *Support for Care homes*
5. Worcestershire's COVID-19 Care Home Support Plan was published on 29th May 2020. This sets out how key partners across Adult Social Care, Worcestershire Public Health, Public Health England, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and other health partners are working together to support care homes. The support plan includes current and future plans for co-ordination of infection control measures, testing programmes, training, HR support, and co-ordination and distribution of PPE. Examples of specific areas of action include:
 - Development and issuing to providers of regularly updated health and infection control guidance, in the form of easy-to-use action cards.
 - Procurement, storage and distribution of PPE stock via an online request system providing either same day or next day delivery of emergency PPE free of charge.
 - Early availability of testing for symptomatic residents, with subsequent rollout of a local programme to enable large scale testing for all residents and staff in COVID-positive homes
 - Priority access to next-day testing for symptomatic and asymptomatic care home staff through the Worcestershire single point of contact led by Worcestershire County Council Human Resources department
 - Proactive roll-out of Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) training offer to all homes
 - Roll-out of iPads to all care homes in Worcestershire, enabling online GP consultations and the use of technology to reduce social isolation
 - Proactive support for the mental health and wellbeing of care home managers and deputy managers
 6. The establishment of a Care Home Hub and daily "Huddle" meetings at an early stage of the COVID-19 outbreak has enabled a system-wide approach to be put in place and embedded with collective accountability from all partners across Worcestershire. Governance from the Care Home Hub through to Worcestershire's Silver and Gold Command ensures the system has oversight and confidence that actions are being implemented.
 7. Positive ongoing feedback obtained from care home providers evidences that this approach is helpful and valued. Impact of the actions taken is also evidenced in the data. We have seen a decline in the number of infections, outbreaks and deaths in care homes related to COVID-19.

8. The Care Home Support Plan will continue to be updated as we progress through the phases of the COVID-19 outbreak.

- *Support for other adult social care providers*

9. Planning for the recovery phase is also underway in relation to other commissioned adult social care provision. The new block contract which was commissioned with a home care agency is now fully operational and the future commissioning strategy for domiciliary care is being updated to ensure that current and future needs arising from COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 can continue to be met.

10. Discussions are taking place with externally commissioned day services in relation to a potential phased re-opening of services as national lockdown conditions are eased. While there is no current expectation that external day services should re-open, commissioners are working with providers on a service by service basis. Providers are being advised to carry out a thorough risk assessment for their service which will inform their decision-making. Individual risk assessments will also be needed, with social worker input, for adults and their families who may be considering a return to services.

11. Commissioners are also working with other services areas and partner organisations to review the next phase of the COVID-19 response, and considering how commissioned services need to be organised to respond to future changes to work patterns, for example the embedding of a “7-day working” pattern.

- *Meeting the Needs of Those in Receipt of Care and Support*

12. All operational teams reviewed all people currently in receipt of care and support funded by the Council within the first 3 weeks. This identified those people who were considered to be at higher risk of carer breakdown or other pressures due to the withdrawal of services by providers, the loss of community support, the restrictions imposed by ‘lockdown’ or by virtue of being in the ‘shielded’ cohort. Any person who was considered at high risk has been offered weekly ‘welfare check’ calls.

13. Where a person requires additional support or a change in the way it is delivered, this has been provided. In some cases, people and their families have declined to use services due to understandable concerns about the risk of Covid-19 infection. Again, support has been provided to enable this to happen in the best way possible under the circumstances, including providing alternative care arrangements. All arrangements will be reviewed at the declared end of the pandemic.

14. For self-funders in care homes whose capital has fallen below the £23,750 threshold, the Council has continued to fund their care home placement and has not followed the usual process where it explores where there is a better value placement available. This approach was adopted to: reduce the risk to people of transferring from care home to care home; to minimise the impact on the care home market; to reduce family anxiety caused by a potential care home move in

such challenging times. All these 'self-funding pickups' have been notified that these arrangements will be reviewed within 6 months.

- *Care Act Easements*

15. The Coronavirus Act 2020 allowed all Councils to apply 'easements' to the Care Act, which effectively permitted the Council to turn its duties under the Care Act into powers, so long as its actions remained compliant with Human Rights legislation. Advocacy and safeguarding duties were exempted. The guidance required the Council to take specific governance steps if it wished to apply easements.
16. To apply easements, the Council has to demonstrate that there has been either a significant impact on its workforce or a significant increase in demand, due to Covid-19. The Principal Social Worker has reported weekly to the designated Director of Adult Social Services on these. As neither of these scenarios have applied to Worcestershire County Council, no easements have been sought or applied and, based on current predictions, it is highly unlikely that any will be.

- *Safeguarding*

17. The Council has continued to respond to safeguarding concerns reported. Although referrals fluctuated during April and early May, there was no discernible pattern to reflect -a reluctance of people to refer. This included domestic abuse referrals. Some concerns were raised - due to people being in more restrictive arrangements as a result of providers implementing a blanket approach to social distancing. These have been addressed on a case by case basis and guidance issued to all providers.

- *Hospital Discharges*

18. The Government introduced new hospital discharge guidance on 19 March 2020. This was designed to create capacity in hospitals in advance of the anticipated demand from Covid-19 cases and to ensure that people were discharged rapidly and safely to maintain flow. The core of this approach was a 3 hour discharge 'window' from the point someone was medically determined as no longer requiring acute care to the point of discharge, and to shift fundamentally the focus to assessing post-hospital care and support needs after discharge and not whilst in hospital.
19. The Council with NHS partners enacted these changes. This included: operating a 7 day 8 am to 8 pm service in hospitals; seconding additional managers and staff from community teams; block purchasing care home beds; increasing the capacity of Pathway 1 (support at home). In addition, the Government suspended all CHC assessment processes. Locally, the NHS and Social Care system decided: Community Hospitals would no longer offer reablement and this would be provided at home; any person who was assessed on the Rockwood score as having severe frailty or above would be discharged direct to a Community Hospital, otherwise they would go home. Whilst these changes were dramatic to existing local discharge processes, it should be noted that they are wholly consistent with best discharge practice.

20. The Council also contracted with two local hotels (Cadmore Lodge in Tenbury and Stourport Manor) to provide safe accommodation for people who were discharged 'home' but unable to immediately do so due to infection risk to other household members. As the initial wave of cases has dropped this contract will end on 30 June. We have also contacted Stourport Manor to accommodate homeless people and we continue to review the need and use alongside our district colleagues.
 21. The impact of these changes has seen: a significant drop in the number of people at the end of each day who no longer need acute care but who are still in Acute Hospital (from approx. 50 pre-Covid to approx. 10 per day now); reduced length of stay in acute hospitals by 1.5 days on average; a significant reduction in length of stays exceeding 7 days (circa 50%); reduced average length of stay in Community Hospitals from 24 days to 14 days. However, it should be noted that demand never reached the levels predicted: approximately 50% of all hospital beds remained vacant even at the peak; the number of people discharged home with support remained at 12 per day whilst capacity was in place for 50 people to be supported; the proportion going home with no support was 85% compared to the national planning model of 50%.
 22. The Health and Care System, via the Service Improvement Board, is actively considering how to enable effective and safe discharges going forward, subject to revised national guidance.
- *Worcestershire's Outbreak Control Plans*
23. The NHS Test, Trace and Isolate (TTI) service was launched on 28th May 2020. A national contact tracing service aims to identify people who are contacts of people with a confirmed Covid 19 diagnosis and instruct them to self isolate at home for 14 days.
 24. As restrictions begin to ease, social distancing, good hand hygiene and a contact tracing system will help to limit the spread of infection, protect our health and social care system and enable some return to normal life.
 25. The national TTI system will identify local outbreaks of Covid 19 rapidly. Regional Public Health England will continue to respond to outbreaks, however, Local Authorities will have a role in providing local management in more complex situations, prevention of outbreaks across settings and practical support for people who are isolating.
 26. Every Upper Tier Local Authority in England is required to create a local Outbreak Plan, lead by the Director of Public Health (DPH), by the end of June and WCC will be allocated a share of £300m to fund these.

27. Plans should cover 7 themes set out nationally and can be locally developed and refined through a new local Covid 19 Health Protection Committee. This committee will go on to oversee management of outbreaks, ensure that appropriate resources and SOPs are in place for outbreak management and reflect on learning to identify improvements for future outbreak management.
28. A Member led 'Covid 19 Local Outbreak Engagement Board' will be developed as a subgroup of the existing Health and Wellbeing Board to provide effective public communication and democratic oversight of the management of outbreaks.
29. A communications and engagement plan will drive campaigns around prevention, testing and the importance of following guidelines and will support provide responsive communication to members of the public in response to clusters and outbreaks

➤ **Safeguarding and educating our children**

- *Schools and settings*

30. Schools and settings were closed to most children from 20th March 2020, remaining open only for children of critical workers and vulnerable children. Schools continued to work with children remotely to ensure that education continued although in a different way. DfE cancelled GCSE and A level examinations for 2020 and Ofqual set out the process for schools and colleges to award grades for young people.
31. The Prime Minister announced on 10th May that phased wider opening of schools would resume from 1st June at the earliest. The guidance stated that early years, reception, year 1 and year 6 children would be the first to be welcomed back to school. This was in recognition of the transition faced by these year groups. The guidance stated that year 10 and year 12 pupils should have face to face teaching in schools from 15th June with an ambition for more primary and special school year groups to return before the end of the academic year.
32. Unfortunately, the government guidance did not recognise the three-tier nature of part of Worcestershire's school system. When the guidance was received from the DfE we made representation about this, as did Head Teachers from the schools affected. We talked to local MPs who also wrote to the Secretary of State advocating on behalf of schools and pupils concerned. The DfE responded that they expected all mainstream schools to follow the guidance and start with the three year groups have specified. The Middle School Heads group in the county discussed the position for Worcestershire considering the guidance and agreed that they would follow this.
33. The Worcestershire Education Incident Planning Group for COVID-19, consisting of WCF, WCC and school leaders from all phases, have agreed a set of basic principles some of which have been in place throughout this COVID response period and some relate to the basis of working towards recovery. These were approved by the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills:

- The highest priority and consideration is the safety and wellbeing of Worcestershire children, young people, families and staff
 - Reducing the risk of infection and following PHE/DFE guidance is key to any risk assessment and related actions
 - We want to support a collaborative approach across Worcestershire schools and settings, governors and trust boards, Worcestershire County Council, Worcestershire Children First, DfE, Trade Unions and other key stakeholders
 - We want to support a sustainable and progressive approach to wider reopening
 - Increasing the attendance for vulnerable children along with children of critical workers will continue to be a priority
 - The re-opening and inclusion for all children in Reception, year 1 and year 6 will be risk assessed and decisions about phasing, timing and management made, based on the outcomes of risk assessments
 - An inclusive and therapeutic approach to reintegration will be taken, and particularly for those children and young people who may find a return to school or setting challenging
 - Schools and settings will assess building capacity and spaces and utilising protective measures decide on group sizes up to 15 pupils in the first instance
 - Schools and settings will work with partners to support children and their families, for example health services, Here2Help and social care
 - We will continue to reflect, assess, learn and share with our schools, settings and from other examples
34. WCF produced a detailed risk assessment framework for schools to use to ensure that they were considering all reasonable action to take to ensure that they could safely welcome more pupils. This included:
- **Theme 1: Protective measures and hygiene**
 - **Theme 2: Accommodation / site usage**
 - **Theme 3: Safeguarding**
 - **Theme 4: Staffing**
 - **Theme 5: Governance**
 - **Theme 6: Communication**
 - **Theme 7: Pupil and staff well-being**
 - **Theme 8: Learning**
 - **Theme 9: Vulnerable learners**
 - **Theme 10: Suppliers**
 - **Theme 11: Transport**
 - **Theme 12: Costs associated with expanded opening**
35. Decisions about when and how to open were the responsibility of head teachers, governing bodies and trust boards. For maintained schools where the County Council is the employer there is a broader health and safety duty to fulfil. A team

of public health, health and safety, HR and WCF education staff have reviewed the completed risk assessments for the 94 Local Authority Maintained Schools (Community and VC) with one or more of the three year groups affected in order to support the decisions for the governing bodies.

36. On 1 June 2020 more than 75% of the primary aged year groups were open with 60% of early years settings. More were planning to open in following weeks. This has been a considerable achievement by the county's early years and schools in light of the amount of work required in a short period of time.

37. Work continues to support schools to take more pupils before the end of the academic year. Space and staffing capacity continue to be limiting factors to the numbers of pupils who can be accommodated whilst complying with required protective measures and hygiene requirements.

- *Home to school transport*

38. Transport are continuing to work closely with colleagues in WCF and with all Worcestershire's schools to identify the current transport needs and the potential requirements for the wider reopening of schools on 15 June. This will take into account any reduced capacity due to social distancing guidelines for vehicles.

39. We are currently managing the number of pupils requiring transport within our current resource, however, as this number grows, this will become more challenging requiring additional resource to meet social distancing guidelines. Estimates for additional costs will be met from the Covid-19 grant and are captured in financial returns to Government.

- *Safeguarding*

40. The social care and safeguarding service has worked under the Covid 19 service delivery protocol introduced from the beginning of April which set out the approach to delivery in light of the need to minimise community spread of the virus and cope with the reduction of staff capacity. From 1st June the service delivery protocol has been updated to phase 2 'road to recovery'. This is designed to allow the service to:

- Resume key safeguarding service activities regarding the assessment, planning and decision making for children subject to plans and ensure we have timely and effective assessment and interventions for those identified as in need of support or protection.
- Adapt and respond to the "Recovery and Re-set" agenda of the Government in the context of minimising the spread of infection and protecting our workforce
- Respond to the views and wishes of Staff and Managers in how we can effectively deliver our services in the medium term and prepare for long term delivery learning from the Covid19 initial periods.

41. The major changes to the original protocol are:
- Resumption of direct 'face to face' work with children to support well-informed professional judgements about support and protection planning
 - Family Front Door management of contacts and referrals will resume in a co-located office-based setting at County Hall in order to support effective multi-agency information sharing and decision making.
 - Supervised family time has been held 'virtually' during the pandemic in order to reduce risk of transmission. In the light of the revised government guidance face to face family time will be reintroduced for those children who are not shielded or living with those who are shielded.
 - Direct work will resume with children and young people where the level of concern is increasing to the consideration of legal proceedings including pre proceedings.
 - To support workflow required to help prepare for the full opening of services:
 - Review child protection conferences will resume (virtually) where assessment is that the threshold for significant harm is no longer met and Children in Need (CIN) cases which have been identified as having no evidence of concern will be updated and closed following senior manager review. Other CIN cases will remain open with Keeping In Touch calls and visits according to assessed needs.
 - Community short breaks for children with disabilities were halted at the start of the pandemic with the alternative option of crisis home support. It is now time to plan for the reopening of these services in order to support these families.
42. This impact reintroduces more direct work with children, more staff accessing county office bases to support effective management oversight and multi-agency working. This will be reviewed following six weeks to inform the next phase of recovery, whilst incorporating positive ways of working that have been effective during the pandemic.

➤ **Infrastructure recovery**

- **Flood recovery**

43. It is easy to forget with everything going on that back in February 2020 we saw the wettest February on record in the UK and the fifth wettest month since records began in 1862. The River Severn reached its highest ever recorded level at Barbourne in Worcester, and the river was at flood warning levels for longer than ever before – there was an equivalent of more than 100 London double-decker buses of water passing through Bewdley every minute for 24 days. 682 residential properties and 258 businesses in Worcestershire were seriously impacted by the flooding.
44. On 13 March the River Severn at Bewdley was still at flood warning level and only 10 days later the Government announced the beginning of lockdown due to COVID-19. In practice the flood recovery started during the response period in February with welfare visits to affected residents and businesses, but the COVID-

19 virus and associated lockdown has hampered flood recovery efforts since mid-March.

45. In response to this, Worcestershire's residents and businesses affected by the recent flooding are being given the opportunity to discuss their questions and concerns with local flood recovery experts from May and into June through a new virtual platform. Worcestershire County Council and the district councils have been working with the National Flood Forum to set up a 'Virtual Information Trailer' which will offer help, support and advice to those who have been affected by the floods in line with current COVID-19 guidelines. The project is being funded by the Environment Agency and has been extended to cover Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council which also experienced devastating flooding.
46. The Council also responded quickly by setting aside the Worcestershire Flood Support Scheme of £250,000 to support residents and businesses most affected by the funding events. This money is in addition to Government support that targeted the most affected areas. Initial tranche of funding has gone to residents in those areas not able to claim Government funds and the remaining funds will be managed locally within each divisional area affected, informed by the National Flood Forum consultation and targeted at community and related support activity to ensure it has the most impact.
47. With some reduction in the COVID-19 lockdown, works in relation to small scale flood and drainage schemes are restarting this month. Many focussed around key flood spots and mitigating issues that have arisen during the 2019/20 flood events.

- **Highways**

48. Core Highways work has continued throughout the COVID-19 response period. Larger surfacing and footways works were impacted due to COVID-19. Now revised guidance has enabled this to be reviewed and restart allowed, with the vast majority of works back underway in June.
49. Work is being carried out in accordance with the DfT Project Safestart and Department of Business, Industry and Energy guidance on highways works as agreed with Public Health England (PHE). This includes; Teams/gangs going to site spaced in vehicles, use of PPE, spacing of 2m wherever practical when outside, reducing risks (though guidance recognises this is not always possible and details mitigation measures).

50. The prioritisation of works has been based around:
- Core safety critical works, throughout the County.
 - General capital and reactive and cyclic works.
 - Essential works to ensure we maintain the Highways Asset effectively over the next 3 to 6 months as much as reasonably practicable in light of COVID-19 impacts, and to reduce the rate of deterioration of the Highway, where practicable. This will also ensure we reduce the growth of safety critical pothole repairs and keep roads running as safely as practical for critical services and essential journeys.
 - Improving the safety of the Highways network, at high priority locations.
 - Completing works which will help reduce the impacts of future severe weather events, such as flood spot works, tree management etc.
51. The following work is being completed within that framework therefore as priority:
- Highways Safety Inspectors operating as field workers and continue to complete the Safety Inspections regime as per monthly's (A roads), quarterlies (mostly B's and some C's) and Annuals (unclassified).
 - Pre-patching for Surface Dressing was restarted on 2 May, focussed initially in rural areas, moving into some carefully defined urban areas. Patching will continue through the whole year to improve asset condition and in preparation for Surface Dressing works next year.
 - Surface dressing initially started in rural areas on 11 May. Due to commence in the urban areas on 22 June. Aim to complete by the end of July.
 - Other surfacing works (e.g. full surfacing, not patching works) commence in July.
 - Grass cutting is on schedule for completion of the full first cut by mid-June (subject to weather and any other issues). Visibility splays are being checked and reviewed and sign clearance matters where identified are being sorted.
 - Lining and cats eyes works were impacted due to flooding and to some degree COVID-19, but now increased to meet requirements regarding safety critical lining, defects, Surface Dressing lining, other surfacing lining, double yellow lines.
 - Gullies have of course been significantly impacted by flooding. Resources have been increased to focus on all key identified flood spots (in excess of 120) and a major clearance of rural gullies (having suffered significant impacts from the five months of flooding). Any public enquiry and member identified issues are all being investigated and resolved as necessary.
 - Safety critical defect repairs are being completed on schedule (1 hour, 1 day, 1 week and 4 weeks as required).
 - Footways works has restarted with the number of gangs increasing as of July. Work will then continue through rest of year (subject to weather).

➤ Major Infrastructure Projects

52. In accordance with recent guidance from Transport Minister Baroness Vere, work has resumed on most major infrastructure schemes. Contractors are required to comply with the Highway Sector's recently issued Site Operating Procedures which require personnel with symptoms to stay at home and sets out clear hygiene and travel procedures for those attending site. This has meant that our major projects are continuing to be delivered including:
- **Southern Link Road** – feedback from users of the footbridge during these times have found that this facility is extremely popular with walkers, cyclists, and joggers which has seen increased activity. Further work continues and whilst recent events of both flooding and COVID 19 will impact on the project plan a Community Liaison Group (CLG) has been established to keep local communities abreast of the work and to enable local members to raise comments or concerns.
 - **A38 Bromsgrove** – work continues to improve this highway and in particular bidding and lobbying for future funds has not stopped and remains a key focus despite efforts being diverted to respond to COVID 19 this remains a high priority.
 - **Town Centre and Congestion Schemes** - work has resumed on major infrastructure schemes across the County.

➤ Transport

53. Our internal Fleet team continues to support a number of specific response activities including:
- Receipt, storage and distribution of 400+ food parcels (these are slowly beginning to lessen);
 - Support for delivery of medical supplies;
 - Support for transportation of Waste Collection Operatives.
54. Transport has continued to be provided for children of key workers and with effect from 1 June reception, years 1, 6 and 10. With effect from 1 June, we are operating 61 mainstream contracts (transporting 154 pupils) and 119 SEND/Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) (transporting 146 pupils). Liaison with operators takes place on a weekly 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.
55. The Transport Service continue to work with schools to ensure that the information provided is accurate and timely to ensure an effective response, and further information is included on this later in this report.
56. There has been extensive work 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. Some services are

now back up to 70%-80% based on mileage and trip numbers from the pre COVID-19 levels. However, operators are still in ongoing discussions with DfT regarding funding for this increase and this is also heavily influenced by social distancing as vehicle capacity on all services is significantly reduced. We continue to work with smaller operators regarding contactless payments.

57. We are working with operators to improve public confidence in bus services to promote social distancing and ensure that there is clear guidance for the public at key locations.
58. A COVID-19 Bus Services Support Grant of £336k has been received from the DfT. Over the last few weeks, we have been working with operators to understand the specific detriment to services and how we can best support them with these funds.
59. In May, the Department of Transport also announced additional funding for active travel response to recovery post COVID-19. The funding is divided into two phases, Phase 1 is for the immediate response as part of recovery, Phase 2 is to support long term actions, in line with our Transport Strategy, LTP4. Full details of phase 2 are still to be confirmed. The allocations for Worcestershire are:
 - Phase 1 £271,000;
 - Phase 2 £1,082,000.
60. A package of proposals for Phase 1 has been developed which supports the delivery of active travel routes and policies set out in Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4). The focus of the interventions is on key commuting routes supporting permanent future upgrades through small scale works such as changes to the white lines and signing.
61. In addition to these proposals we will work with partners if they wish to provide additional cycle parking. We will also provide information on active travel routes and “bikeability” training to promote safer cycling. Also, we are working with partners to explore the potential for them to consider a cycle hire scheme for travel to work or education.
62. We continue to maintain 100% of the contract payment for operators and concessionary and Severncard reimbursements. At the outset, patronage was reduced by circa 90% on public transport but indications are that we are seeing a slight increase and work with operators continues.

- **Broadband, 5G and Connectivity**

63. Superfast Worcestershire continues the drive to ensure Worcestershire is one of the best-connected counties in the UK. Had the current COVID-19 situation arisen even two years ago many rural residents and businesses would have found it far more difficult to have followed government advice to stay at home and stay safe without decent connectivity to allow them to work, access key public service, shop and entertain themselves. The earlier investment decisions by central government and local government have made a difference, still

recognising there are gaps to solve and the aspiration to reach full gigabit capability is more important than ever.

64. The Worcestershire 5G consortium has continued to explore the potential of 5G connectivity in improving productivity across Industry 4.0 and Advanced Manufacturing. The funded project ends in June 2020. The team are also exploring new applications into 5G funding programmes including '5G Create' and how Worcestershire can continue to drive forward and lead in this area of innovation.

➤ **Waste collection and our HRCs**

65. Following the opening of seven 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.
66. On Wednesday 27 May, the County Council announced that two further HRCs would be operational as of Thursday 28 May. On Thursday 4 June the plans for opening of the Upton HRC were announced, including a 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.
67. 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 HRC at any one time than before these measures were introduced. As the location of the Kidderminster site is 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.
68. We continue to encourage residents to check the website for full details of the social distancing measures, opening times and other restrictions before they visit the HRC.
69. 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 sites as only a limited number of cars will be allowed in at any one time. We have worked with colleagues in Highways and have had traffic management in place where necessary, although some of these measures have been removed in line with demand.

➤ **Management of our workforce and assets**

- *Our workforce*

70. We continue to build on our workforces willingness to focus on delivery of COVID-19 response which has demonstrated the can-do attitude, adaptability and versatility of our employees. The majority of the workforce have been able to and continue to work from home proving the concept that teams can work from home effectively and be productive.
71. We have been able to introduce a number of short-term policy and condition changes including seven day working patterns adopted in many areas to cope with demand. We may want to consider future permanent adoption of some provisions for future new ways of working as we move to recovery.
72. We have seen several examples of innovation and creativity in the workforce e.g. HR creation of CAP forms to link national testing programme to local requirements and logistics working with Piston Gin for production of hand sanitizer – fast thinking, innovative ideas.
73. HR, OD and Engagement have continually encouraged and promoted social time with teams, non-work related meetings and made resilience training available to all WCC staff (led by Psychologist) to promote employee well-being. This has been supported by regular guidance issued on ways of working including signposting to national support programmes and working from home guidance supporting the workforce in their roles
74. As we move to recovery we need to design and move to a more comprehensive future fit mental health and wellbeing offer. This links to the identification of clinically vulnerable and extremely clinically vulnerable employees. This pandemic has identified the importance of understanding the demographics of our workforce. We need to consider what we know, what we don't know and how we can use this profiling in future as part of workforce planning and our health and wellbeing offer to staff.
75. We have focused on regular dialogue with our recognised Trade Unions (Teachers and NJC) throughout the pandemic. This supports the introduction of a new Trade Union framework introduced pre pandemic – quite simply it has worked effectively and has led to avoidance of any disputes. This new approach has been instrumental in the wider re-opening of schools and will be key to our future ways of working.
76. At the forefront of recovery and reset is our building risk assessment processes. Our HR and Health & Safety team has been working continuously to identify future capacity for our building to ensure social distancing compliance. This will ensure we can protect our workforce including reviewing individual risk assessments for clinically vulnerable employees.
77. Our priority now is to design a new workforce strategy for our future workforce. This strategy will need to focus on our three-year plan setting out our organisational workforce priorities including creating the right conditions,

wellbeing, resilience, working environment, leadership, skills for the future, recruitment and retention of talent, digitalisation and workforce transformation.

78. As an immediate response to COVID19 the Council sourced and procured external (non-government source) PPE stock (masks, gloves, aprons, eye protection, hand sanitizer) in order to support demand from WCC staff and care providers. A storage and distribution hub was set up and an online request system implemented providing either same day or next day delivery of emergency PPE where requests were validated. Emergency PPE is currently being provided free of charge. Over 500,000 items have been distributed to date.
79. Going forward working with our local partners, and providers, it is proposed that the County Council will run and manage a One Worcestershire Storage hub for PPE for our care providers to maximise economies of scale and purchasing power in buying this equipment. A storage facility will be leased and managed by the County council with these costs sought to be recovered via Government funding, however the PPE itself will be charged at actual purchase cost to providers.

- *Our buildings*

80. A longer-term strategy is being developed to open all of our buildings at first to staff and later the public. This section sets that out across the wide range of buildings we run.
81. Work has been completed at County Hall to implement 'Covid Secure' work areas in accordance with the central government issued guidance. This work has consisted of implementing one-way systems, marking with stickers which desks can and cannot be used, signage requiring single occupancy of lifts, restrictions on use of meeting rooms, system for limiting occupation of toilets, additional cleaning etc. In addition, a protocol and video have been produced for staff who need to use County Hall and other office buildings as to how to act in order to maintain social distancing and avoid interaction with others.
82. These restrictions significantly reduce the capacity of County Hall to approximately a maximum of 175 staff. The central government guidance remains that staff should work at home if at all possible and it is only staff who are in critical roles that cannot be done remotely that should be allowed to attend offices.
83. As there has been no announcement yet from central government on re-opening buildings to the public then County Hall and all other buildings remain closed to public access.
84. A process for re-opening other Council buildings has been developed that includes a risk assessment process to ensure that all physical alterations and ways of working are identified and implemented prior to re-opening. This process also includes ensuring that any compliance work, e.g. water testing for legionella, is also undertaken. A prioritised list of buildings has been produced with target opening dates, where these are known and will be updated as information is received from central government.

- *Our commercial estate, including farms*

42. Where the Council has a commercial tenant, it is the tenant's responsibility to implement any changes required. Where there are common areas such as receptions, toilets etc that are the Council's responsibility these will be risk assessed and changes implemented as needed.
85. Our farm tenants are in the main continuing to operate as normal. A small number of farms are predominantly horticultural cropping and reliant on European labour and this element is being monitored. Although farms were excluded from the general opportunity to request a rent freeze during the pandemic, all tenants were encouraged to discuss any financial concerns regarding paying their rent and no farm tenants have contacted the Council for assistance with reduced rent payments or rent-free periods.

- *Libraries*

86. Guidance currently indicates that Libraries could reopen in early July 2020. The key principles underpinning Worcestershire's library re-opening will be steered by the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) taskforce for Recreation & Leisure and is likely to be in three phases as follows:

87. *Phase 1: 6 July 2020 for 2 or 3 weeks* - Will see 6 main libraries open:

- The Hive
- Redditch
- Kidderminster
- Bromsgrove
- Malvern
- Evesham

The service offer for Phase 1 will comprise:

- Reserve and Collect Service (home library items only)
- Book returns (into quarantine)
- Managed access to Public Network Computers
- Possible library Service At Home (LSAH) depending on availability of volunteers

Current advice from Public Health England is that returned books should be quarantined for 72 hours, after which time they pose no risk for transmission of the virus.

88. *Phase 2: end Phase 1 to end August 2020* - will incorporate additional libraries that have sufficient staff available to open the library, manage entry to the building and support social distancing. At present they include:

- Droitwich
- Pershore
- Stourport
- Tenbury

The service offer for Phase 2 will comprise:

- Self-service browsing and borrowing service

- Signposting
- Normal reservation service (depending on availability of van deliveries)
- Book returns (into quarantine)
- Managed access to Public Network Computers
- Managed use of space for wi-fi

In Phase 2 when we include self-service browsing and borrowing, stock will be touched as customers browse shelves. This is no different from retail settings and normal hand hygiene and avoiding touching the face will mitigate risks of transmission of the virus.

89. Re-opening protocols have been shaped by Libraries Connected Toolkit, as well as the County Council's Public Health and Health and Safety professionals, to ensure safe social distancing environments for staff and customers. A standard Risk assessment has been prepared – with local adjustments as required at each location. Phased re-opening will be adopted to support social distancing, gauge public response and demand for services, refine safe operating procedures and ensure a sustainable service offer. Work will continue to develop a comprehensive and high-quality digital library service offering as an effective and attractive alternative to physical library visits.
90. Re-opening plans also include emergency plans for closing in response to the possibility of a second wave of Covid 19 and have also ensured that requirements to sustain the Here2Help service, with appropriate levels of support continuing, can be met.
91. *Phase 3: 1 September 2020 until further notice* - Depending on the extent to which social distancing guidelines can be relaxed and availability of staff and volunteers, Phase 3 will see a re-opening of all libraries where there are adequate staff and/or volunteers.

Service offer for Phase 3 will comprise:

- Self-service browsing and borrowing service
 - Signposting
 - Normal reservation service (depending on availability of van deliveries)
 - Book returns (into quarantine)
 - Managed access to Public Network Computers
 - Managed use of space for wi-fi
 - Possible LSAH depending on availability of volunteers
 - Library events and activities that can be delivered safely
 - Mobile Library - subject to social distancing restrictions and driver availability
- *Museums*
92. Museums have an important role to play as the country returns to a new normal, offering a safe way for residents to leave their homes and with a proven wellbeing impact. Preparations are being made to safely reopen Worcestershire County

Museum at Hartlebury Castle to the public on the first date allowable under government direction (currently set for 4 July 2020).

93. All preparations are made, in partnership with our site partners, Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust (HCPT) and all risk assessments and procedures completed. This includes appropriate cleaning regimes, protocols for visitors, including social distancing and signage which will direct visitors on a one-way route through the Castle
94. Museums Worcestershire will use a strong, simple message for its reopening publicity, aimed at welcome, reassurance and communication of the measures in place. We will apply for Visit Britain's coronavirus-safe kite-mark.
95. HCPT will take on the welcome and admission role, as they are able to sell timed tickets online as well as take admissions fees using contactless payments in the bothies. HCPT will be opening for grounds-only visits from 30 May with a donation system in place. This does not require any change to the lockdown position of the County Museum and its staff.

- *Registrars*

96. Worcestershire's registration service has continued to register deaths, via the telephone, during the pandemic. The team have worked with Health and Safety and Public Health to ensure that appropriate adaptations are in place to ensure ongoing adherence to social distancing guidance remains, when services start to come back online.
97. The suspension of Birth Registrations and Notices of Marriage was removed on the 31 May 2020. Neither the service or the General Register Office was aware of the plan prior to the announcement meaning initial plans have had to be brought forward to implement the appropriate adaptations to premises. This includes access to building, appropriate facilities for users, screening in the offices, signage and guidance to ensure ongoing adherence to social distancing. The service resumed birth registration on 10 June 2020.
98. Notices of Marriage will be undertaken for urgent requests (marriages overseas etc). Remaining Notices will resume once further guidance has been received around Marriages/Civil Partnerships. Not all locations will be able to complete birth registrations due to the co-location with services that are currently closed and therefore inaccessible to the public. This includes Malvern and Evesham where the service is co-located with libraries. Bromsgrove is planning to re-open as the physical layout differs and subject to suitable access control. There are plans to increase availability of appointments in the other offices to compensate
99. No announcement has been made as yet about the recommencement of our other services including notices of marriage and citizenship ceremonies. It is envisaged that small ceremonies will be allowed during phase 2 in July and resource capacity is available and planned to be available at this time.

- *Social Care Day Centres*

100. Worcestershire County Council is responsible for and runs 9 day services, for people with Learning Disabilities, these have all been closed since March and all service users have been contacted and alternative support has been put in place, as required.
101. During Phase 2 in early July some of the centres will start to re-open – the capacity within these services will be determined by ensuring that social distancing guidelines can be practiced, during service users' attendance. This will mean that fewer people can initially return to their day service support and these will be prioritised by need – noting that all service users have been risk assessed and those with the highest risk of carer breakdown will be prioritised for day service support in the first phase.
102. Changes to service delivery, put in place during the pandemic, have given rise to different ways of working and support, being provided in people's homes or by staff and/or volunteers in the community, close to people's homes. Consideration is now being made to how the service may be improved and/or re-designed to continue with local and community-based support in the future.

- *Home Care*

103. Worcestershire County Council's home care service has continued, throughout the pandemic, with staff re-deployed from other areas of the People Directorate to ensure appropriate capacity to domiciliary care provision given in people's homes and in the County's prisons.
104. The service is now planning to introduce the Community Reablement service, due originally to go live in April 2020 – it is envisaged that this service will be promoted and be in place from the Autumn.

- *Residential Settings*

105. The Communities Division are also planning innovative approaches to enabling family and friends to visit residents in our residential settings, including proposals for visitors to be allowed to meet with residents outside, with social distancing guidelines in place.

- *Procurement*

106. Government have issued their latest Procurement Policy Notice (PPN) reference 04/20 ([Link](#)) to apply 1 July to 30 October 2020. This is guidance to public sector bodies around procurement and contract practices during COVID19. A key element of this is that the Council review it's arrangements with all contractors and look to transition and exit any arrangements agreed in the initial response to COVID19. The guidance does still require prompt payment to suppliers, but it also calls for an audit trail of decisions and an open book approach with providers to assess what support was provided by the Council to ensure no supplier made a profit as a result of the Council's variations to its contract or payment terms. The Council will be carrying out a full review of its contract portfolio and working with Internal Audit to review payments and awards to ensure value for money.

The Council will also be developing a transition and exit appropriate to the need and risk.

- IT

107. The IT team are very aware of the importance of effective and resilient IT systems and networks and continue to enhance both building on recent investment and network development, this includes:

- Network Performance / Resilience:
 - In addition to our primary Internet Data Circuit located within County Hall, a secondary Internet Data Circuit has now been installed at Wildwood. This now ensures we have a fully resilient internet connection that we can failover to in the event that County Hall becomes unavailable. This is critical in ensuring our remote working system remains available and so that the increased number of cloud hosted systems we now have would still be available for staff.
 - We have now upgraded a key link within the system from a 1 Gigabit per second to a 10 Gigabits per second link. This has added further resilience to our network infrastructure enhancing the performance of our remote working system.
- Liquid Logic – our social care system
 - Improvements to Liquid Logic have also focussed on improving the resilience of the system. We have worked with Liquid Logic to implement a third application server to improve the memory and increase the number of users who are able to access the system at any time. We have also applied a number of fixes to issues that were causing issues on the system. Post go live support has been a priority for our users in the first 2 months and we have now migrated to business as usual support.
- Video Conferencing
 - Throughout the Covid-19 crisis we have seen a dramatic increase in the amount of Lync video conferencing meetings being undertaken by staff. This has placed a huge load on the servers. To address this issue the Council has begun to roll out the Zoom Video Conferencing to all WCC machines. This is being configured in such a way to avoid impacting our own network performance. Work is underway with the rollout and we expect to complete this work later in June. Our own Cabinet was successfully run using Zoom on 4 June 2020 and other councillor meetings have also been and will be run using this tool to ensure democratic governance is maintained as well as being open and transparent. In addition the technology is being used to support over 200 school admission appeals.

- Learning & Achievement Insourcing
 - The IT & Digital Service have undertaken a significant amount of work over the last 2 months to ensure a smooth IT transition for the staff transferring back to the Council. Some of the key activities were:
 - 96+ Laptops and 46 mobiles configured and handed over to staff
 - Migration of all Education Services website content over to the WCF website
 - Transfer of various IT systems (CPD-Online, Tempus, Estore)
 - Migration of data to WCC network drives and required permissions applied
 - Information Audit and Information Sharing Agreements created / updated

- Covid-19 Digital Response
 - We have continued to add additional functionality to the Here2Help system to aid the Council in matching volunteers with residents who have raised requests for help. These areas include:
 - Specific dashboard for the Volunteer Coordination Team to enable to undertake additional checks (e.g. a Health check, request an ID check and DBS check)
 - Specific dashboard for HR to progress requests for DBS checks.
 - Matching of offers of help can now be on district, town, village or ward and parish.

➤ Governance

108. Regulations under the Coronavirus Act enable the Council to hold formal meetings remotely, enabling Councillors to take part and vote whilst social distancing. Members of the public are able to watch these meetings on-line as these are broadcast via YouTube.
109. Due to the resources involved in responding to the virus, and in one case due to a lack of business, meetings planned to be held in late March, April and May were cancelled. Most are now resuming where there is a business need, including Overview and Scrutiny. Cabinet and Directorate briefing meetings are also being held to enable representatives from the political groups and relevant scrutiny leads to be kept informed.
110. Whilst social distancing requirements remain in place the ability to hold meetings remotely will enable the democratic function to continue. Changes to procedure rules during this period have not been suggested and the Council is maintaining the ability for public participation at its meetings. Officers are constantly reviewing the situation.

Legal Implications

111. The Council has responded to the national emergency in accordance with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, including participating in the Local Resilience Forum and working as 'One Worcestershire' with the District Councils to support residents and continue to provide services.

112. As reported to the Cabinet meeting on 26 March, the Coronavirus Act 2020 had just received Royal Assent. This changed requirements for certain service delivery and enabled changes to be made to current policy approaches, with a potential impact on finances. Various aspects of the Act have been implemented through Regulations and guidance has also been issued. Cabinet in March authorised officers to take appropriate action in relation to the coronavirus pandemic, including authorising expenditure and making temporary changes to Council policies arising from the Act, associated legislation, national guidelines and Government directions.
113. With the rapid development of the virus and the Council's response, notice of these decisions in March could not be given on the Cabinet Forward Plan, and it was not possible to convene a meeting of the Council to agree to the changes to the budget and policy framework. In accordance with constitutional requirements, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board was consulted and agreed to these decisions being taken as urgent. Cabinet is required to report to Council on the reasons for acting outside the policy and budget framework and the information presented here forms the basis for that report to the July Council meeting.
114. Officer decisions have been reported on the Council's website: http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/downloads/download/1403/officer_executive_decision_making_-_record_of_officer_executive_decisions_2020

Financial Implications

115. The situation remains largely unchanged from that reported to Cabinet on 4 June 2020 - the County Council has received £25.5 million in grant allocations from Government against which it expects to spend £15m by the end of June 2020.
116. Looking beyond June we still expect to incur significant costs in relation to ongoing or suppressed demand. We are also forecasting higher costs in response to ongoing social distancing measures in areas such as transport. However without clarity and the potential for changes we are not able to place reliable forecasts on this. We are assuming however that Government will continue to work with us and support financially our recovery work, that includes overheads from the PPE Central Store and Hub discussed in this report which we estimate will be less than £0.1 million but we do expect to spend around £1 million on PPE and thus need to assure we recover costs where appropriate in line with any Government guidance.
117. In addition, the Council continues to work with the local CCG and NHS England to recover additional. We have now submitted three claims totalling £1.6 million and our working assumption remains that all such costs will be funded 100% from the NHS £1.3 billion allocation.
118. The s151 Officer with his peers continues to liaise with MHCLG and the County Council Network (CCN), regarding our future need. At this stage that is very hard to predict, and Finance continue to model and work with Government over our future need, including the impact on our Council Tax and Business Rates income / bases. This will be reported to Cabinet throughout 2020/21.

119. In addition, of the £600 million funding made available for Care Homes and to manage infection control in our providers of adult care of which the Council received £7.5 million, we have so far paid out over £3 million. In line with guidance 25% has been withheld and will be distributed in consultation with Public Health to support infection control and protection measures required and determined locally.

Risk Implications

120. A risk register has been maintained by Silver throughout the process and reviewed, with any escalation to Gold as appropriate.

Joint Equality, Public Health, Data Protection and Sustainability Impact Assessments

121. The response and recovery is being led with the Director of Public Health playing a key role in both the Council's Gold governance arrangements and the LRF engagement. Full assessments of risk and actions are being carried out on a daily basis and further information has been included within the body of this report.

Supporting Information

No further information

Contact Points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Chief Executive) the following are background papers in support of this report

Cabinet Paper 4 June 2020 -
<https://worcestershire.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=131&MId=3167&Ver=4>