

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE BOARD 23 SEPTEMBER 2020

UPDATE ON THE COUNTY COUNCIL'S COVID-19 RECOVERY

Summary

1. Further to the update on 7 July 2020, the Leader and the Chief Executive of the Council have been invited to provide a further update on the County Council's response to and recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19).

Background

2. The council triggered its response phase to the Covid-19 outbreak at the beginning of March 2020 and quickly established a rapid response programme, led by dedicated Silver and Gold Commanders. For most services, including back office and support teams there was an immediate redeployment of duties and staff to support the Council's response to the emergency, with significant effort been made across the Council and partner agencies to continue to deliver our critical services and support the County's most vulnerable residents during lockdown.
3. We continue to learn and with our partners continue to embrace opportunities identified through the pandemic, including sustaining remote and mobile working arrangements for staff; enhancing further our digital and self-service offer for customers, retaining silver and gold governance and building on our Here2Help offer.
4. The Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board (OSPB) is keen to understand the Council's current position and progress with recovery.

Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and County Recovery Planning

5. Recognising the daily and weekly changes to the local and national position, the Council and partners continue to plan and respond swiftly to changes in control measures and infections. The Council is also enabling and planning ongoing recovery and remain in a transition period where response activity continues at the same time as recovery plans start to take shape.
6. The well-established Local Authority Silver Response team continues to meet to oversee key aspects of the emergency response (including distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), supporting school and education settings, vulnerable residents, outbreaks), while short-term recovery activities (including the re-opening of schools, libraries, and council buildings) continue to be assessed and delivered, as required.
7. For medium to long term recovery, Worcestershire has a draft recovery framework, written to align with the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) approach.

Economic Growth and Investment

8. The full economic impact of Covid-19 is yet to be understood, but from national data provided by Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) we can see that the projected decline in gross value added (GVA) across Worcestershire ranges from 26% to 41%. Using this same approach our analysis finds that GVA for Worcestershire is estimated to fall by 36%, with the largest contribution to the fall from manufacturing followed by wholesale and retail, other sectors significantly affected in the county include accommodation, leisure, culture and entertainment.

9. The National Business Impact of Covid Survey, undertaken by ONS between 10 and 23 August 2020, shows 1.1% of businesses remain temporarily closed. Of these they are reporting that 16.3% of staff are fully or partially furloughed.

Economic Recovery Plan

10. Worcestershire County Council has co-ordinated a joint response group; The Worcestershire Covid-19 Economic Response, Recovery and Resilience Group (WCERG). The group includes representatives from all Worcestershire local authorities, Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (WLEP), Chamber of Commerce, National Federation of Self Employed & Small Businesses Limited (FSB), Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), Regulatory Services, National Farmers Union (NFU), Worcestershire Business Central and Worcestershire Ambassadors.

11. The County Council and its partners are taking forward activity and interventions under each area, delivered across the One Worcestershire geography. A vital role is the ongoing communications of Central Government recovery programmes and the delivery of timely and current information through the business support network via the increasingly digital platforms. This is led by Worcestershire Business Central and fully supported through the excellent work of Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce, FSB and the wider business support organisations across the county in a true One Worcestershire approach.

Business Support Programmes

12. A number of business support programmes have been developed and expanded over the last 12-24 months to meet the needs of the local economy which included the launch of our new Here2Help Business Programme in response to the Covid-19 pandemic – a £3m programme designed to assist local businesses to recover, adapt, develop and support future resilience.

Financial Context

13. The Council has received the following support relating to Covid-19

- Covid-19 grant - £29m
- Test and Trace - £2.75m
- Infection Control - £7.45m

- Transport - £1.3m
- Community Hardship - £0.6m
- Support for loss in sales, fees and charges
- CCG grant relating to hospital discharges and avoiding admission to hospital

14. The following areas where Covid-19 related spend / loss of income has occurred include:

- a) Loss of income from clients, services and trading, *e.g. permits for accessing the highways, income from letting rooms in libraries, income for archaeology, income from weddings and naming ceremonies.*
- b) Additional costs associated with supporting care providers, *including in-house services e.g. additional payments for PPE, social distancing, additional staff.*
- c) Additional costs of PPE, Here to Help and Community Support, *including support for the homeless, provision of food parcels and advice, storage units for the PPE.*
- d) Delay in implementation of change programmes, *e.g. organisational redesign, lean reviews and provider negotiations.*
- e) Costs of social distancing, *e.g. in opening the Household Recycling Centres including the highways management issues, work on the buildings owned by WCC including additional cleaning, paper towels, hand sanitisers and implementation of technological improvements to aid homeworking.*

Community Action - Here2Help

15. Here2Help was launched as One Worcestershire's community action response with the sole aim of supporting residents through the Covid-19 pandemic.

16. The purpose of Here2Help is to provide support to people in Worcestershire who are having to self-isolate and/or have additional needs due to the Covid-19 outbreak and cannot get that help and support from friends, family or neighbours.

17. As of the 10 September 2020 there have been over 3500 requests for help made and over 2000 offers of help

18. We are maintaining the Here2Help service to continue to meet the needs of our existing and new users. We are now evolving the service, including flexing our resource to respond to recent increasing Demand through the Local Outbreak Control Team (LORT) and moving the service into the Customer Contact Centre from September 2020, seconding Well-being advisors from Worcestershire Community foundation into this service alongside the focused development of an Integrated Wellbeing Hub that builds on the success and learning of Here2Help.

Worcestershire's Local Outbreak Control Plan (OCP) and Response

19. Public Health in Worcestershire County Council responded swiftly to the Covid-19 pandemic. Publishing a robust Outbreak Control Plan (OCP) which has a Local Outbreak Response Team (LORT) at its centre, responding to outbreaks and working with partners such as Public Health England, Herefordshire & Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) to reduce the risk of further transmission of Covid-19.

20. The LORT is now fully operational, 7 days a week from 9am to 6pm. The OCP has been stress tested at a recent table-top exercise lead by the West Mercia Local Resilience Forum Tactical Command group. A revision of the OCP has been published incorporating the recommendations of the table-top exercise. The OCP will be continually tested and is seen as a dynamic document.

21. The LORT continue to identify and work with high risk settings proactively to reduce the risk of an outbreak of Covid-19. There is ongoing learning, such as the outbreak, in Evesham, where 30 employees were identified as Covid-19 positive from a work force of approximately 340 people. The outbreak was responded to rapidly by all organisations involved and no further positive cases have been reported for over 3 weeks. In response to this incident WRS are now proactively contacting similar businesses to gain assurance around their Covid-19 risk assessments and share learning.

22. In addition to this work, the Public health team have been working closely with all educational settings including schools, early years and further education. Schools have been supported to produce Covid-19 risk assessments which ensure they safely opened earlier this month. The LORT has also provided guidance, support and management processes for suspected or confirmed cases.

23. The LORT is involved in a multiagency response for adult social care settings which includes Herefordshire and Worcestershire CCG, Primary Care, Adult Social Care at WCC and commissioned infection, prevention and control support. This multiagency approach has enabled prevention work to develop alongside having appropriate mechanisms in place to respond to cases and outbreaks.

24. Initially, the daily number of reported cases remained low with small spikes in numbers. An example of this is the increase in cases in Redditch seen the week ending 21 August. As you may have seen reported in the media the majority of cases reported in Redditch that week have been traced back to a family gathering. All people at that family gathering are self-isolating so the risk to the wider community is low. In addition, we are aware of 8 cases in Wyre Forest that are linked to an outbreak at a workplace in Shropshire, again appropriate advice has been given to these individuals and their household contacts. Therefore, risk of ongoing transmission is low.

25. From week commencing 7 September, cases have risen markedly in Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills and Wychavon. This increase in cases has also been observed nationally. This, along with the reopening of schools has put significant pressure on the LORT, which has had to flex capacity from the wider Public Health team and wider WCC. Additional appropriate measures, including collapsing school bubbles, temporary restrictions on care home visits and enhanced communications with key communities.

Overview of Services and Provision

Adult Social Care - Commissioned Services

26. The care market is expected to shrink over the next few months and years as people and providers adjust to the COVID-19 and post COVID-19 world. Occupancy levels in some care homes are currently high and there is a trend for more people requesting care at home. The Council will re-tender for domiciliary care, from the external market shortly on a zoned basis. This is a more efficient approach to delivering care across a large county and allows us to improve the quality of provision. Work also continues to analyse the resilience of the care home sector in Worcestershire and to plan appropriate support and mitigate the risks identified.

27. The Council has financially supported its suppliers during the peak of the COVID-19 crisis but the majority of this support has now ended. Council services are now having to adapt to a new way of supporting people, which meets the guidelines of social distancing and greater personal protection. Inevitably this brings about changes for customers, which they will need time to adapt to; e.g. buildings-based services can no longer admit as many people as before and remain Covid-19 safe. Services are therefore engaging with our customers to bring forward different opportunities for supporting them.

28. Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, intensive work has taken place to support care homes to put in place effective infection prevention and control measures. The "Worcestershire Care Home Hub" was established in March 2020 to strategically lead, co-ordinate and facilitate action across the system to support care homes and prevent infection during Covid-19. The joint working across Adult Social Care, Worcestershire Public Health, Public Health England, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and other health partners enables pooling of capacity and resources, using a proactive and supportive methodology, in order to minimise the number of homes experiencing an outbreak and reduce the absolute number of cases and deaths.

29. The Care Home Huddle meets daily to review the state of the care home market locally, using a risk-based assessment approach to target support to care homes.

30. As at the 8 September, 69 care homes in Worcestershire had experienced outbreaks since the start of Covid-19, with outbreaks remaining ongoing at that time in six homes. New positive cases are generally now being found as a result of the regular whole-home testing which is ongoing in homes for older people and those with dementia and just re-commencing for all other homes. Staff are tested weekly and residents monthly. Recent testing has found that the staff found to be positive are generally asymptomatic, so their weekly tests are invaluable in identifying active Covid-19 cases.

31. Once identified, a thorough process commences to assess risk and manage the situation. This involves the undertaking of a robust risk assessment by either Public Health England, the Local Outbreak Response Team (WCC Public Health) or the CCG Infection Control Team.

32. As well as working at the core of the Care Home Hub and Huddle, the Council has also continued to proactively quality assure services throughout the Covid-19 period and continues to maintain a close relationship with the Care Quality Commission, with daily conversations to discuss and address any quality concerns arising.

33. The number and level of high-risk issues being identified or notified have increased over recent weeks. The Council's Team has also visited where deemed to be necessary, and with appropriate infection control measures in place such as full Personal Protective Equipment etc. The Council's Provider Concerns Process is implemented where required to ensure quality concerns are addressed with robust action plans, working across all partner organisations.

34. The Council continues to oversee county-wide sourcing and distribution of PPE to ensure that care services and other key worker activities can continue safely including procurement of external (non-government source) PPE stock (masks, gloves, aprons, eye protection, hand sanitizer) as well as a storage and distribution hub and online request system providing both same day or next day delivery of emergency PPE – to date over 1.3 million PPE items have been distributed and we continue to support all providers who have urgent PPE needs and are unable to purchase from commercial suppliers

35. Following the review of Worcestershire's Covid-19 infection rates and the wider risk environment, Care Homes were advised, on 8 September of a change to our current visiting advice. In response to the recent localised increase in the number of Covid-19 cases, it has been advised that visiting to care homes in Bromsgrove, Wychavon and Malvern Hills Districts should be restricted to essential visits only.

36. Further advice was provided to care homes in other districts that they should restrict non-essential visitors from these Districts until further notice. However, care home staff members who reside in these Districts can continue to work in care homes and follow existing guidelines.

Registration Services

37. This service has remained open and fully staffed since 23 March. Staff have been working from their usual office base (registration offices), and these premises were re-opened to the public, by appointment in June. During this time the team continue to register deaths by telephone which became possible with the introduction of the Coronavirus Act, 2020. Birth registrations re-commenced on the 10 June 2020 and the team have worked hard to process the backlog of birth registrations c.1600 and are now back on track. Weddings and Civil Partnerships are now also taking place, albeit at a much-reduced rate than previous years with a recent slight increase in the booking of ceremonies.

Urgent Care

38. Adult Social Care continues to work in partnership with NHS colleagues to promote the “ Home First ” way of working to ensure we maximise people’s opportunities to return home after a hospital admission. This is continuing to reduce the number of individuals entering long term Residential and Nursing care due to hospital acquired functional decline.

Adult Social Care

39. Social work teams have seen an increase, over the last few weeks, in activity as people seek support following lockdown. Social Care staff are working proactively to ensure individuals access the care and support they need. Options in some areas remain limited due to the need for services to be Covid-19 safe but alternatives are being identified where possible.

Children’s Social Care and Safeguarding

40. Children’s social care services remained operational throughout the pandemic in order to protect and support vulnerable children. The model of operation changed as set out in the April emergency Covid-19 service delivery protocol for social care and safeguarding services focusing on a risk-based approach to face to face assessments and contacts.

41. The protocol has been updated in phases.

Phase 1 – March – June 20. The initial management and emergency response to community lockdown

Phase 2 – July – August 20. Starting the road to recovery by opening more services and management of workload and workflow in preparation for phase 3

Phase 3 – September – December 20. This phase sets out how to reset services responding to demand, hidden harm and new ways of working. During this phase the impact and learning gained from phases 1 and 2 will be kept under review.

Phase 4 – will be launched January 21

42. The Department for Education (DfE) have monitored performance during the pandemic and Worcestershire has consistently performed well comparatively.

43. The pandemic affected partners’ service delivery arrangements which have had an impact on children’s social care services. Additional low-level contacts have been received at the Family Front Door from families and professional seeking early help for children and young people, many reporting they were unsure of what other agency support was available or accessible during the pandemic and community lock down. These contacts were all responded to in order to provide the information and support required but they did not meet the level 4 safeguarding criteria of social work services.

44. Work is being undertaken via the Safeguarding parentship and directly with Early Help providers to ensure families and professionals do know how and where to access early help and to ensure these are accessible and effective for the families who need them.

45. Arrangements for moving looked after children onto permanency were slowed due to court capacity and community lock down. The number of children leaving our care this year were half of the number in the same period last year. Good safeguarding practice has been in place under our phase 1 and 2 protocols where Children in Need (CIN) and Child Protection (CP) cases have not been closed or stepped down due to the more limited ability to assess accurately the level of risk and the more limited engagement of partners in the lives of those children.

46. This has led to a higher than usual number of children Looked After as well as those subject to CP and CIN remaining open to the service. Phase 3 is designed to address this safely but will take time as new incoming work also needs to be managed.

47. These factors are having an impact on social worker caseloads which we need to monitor closely due to the increased demand seen as a result of schools returning and "Hidden Harm" being identified.

48. Contacts at the Family Front Door have been consistently higher than the same period last year for all contacts and domestic abuse contacts.

49. Close working is underway with key safeguarding partners (police, NHS and education) to ensure that the whole system plays its part in early help and preventative work to ensure that the right referrals come through to the Family Front Door to ensure that the workload is manageable as schools return and referrals increase.

Education

50. On 20 March schools closed to all pupils other than vulnerable children and the children of critical workers. From June schools welcomed pupils back from specific year groups. Worcestershire schools supported a better than national attendance of pupils during the wider re-opening period. However, this was still only 18% of the total school age population in school, with other pupils receiving their education through home learning.

51. Worcestershire Children First (WCF) have led the Education Incident Planning Group, with school leaders from all phases and staff from WCC throughout the pandemic in order to provide guidance, advice and develop processes to support the continuation of education and plan for full return in Autumn term.

52. A comprehensive risk assessment (RA) document has been provided to all schools (maintained, voluntary aided and academies) to support both partial return and full return. The primary purpose of the RA is to ensure the safety of pupils, families and staff. For maintained and voluntary aided schools, WCC and WCF specialist public health, health and safety, education and human resource teams, have reviewed the assessments to support full opening.

53. All schools were open by 7 September 2020 as follows:

Date of return	Maintained	Academy	All Schools
01/09/2020	5	0	5
02/09/2020	42	45	87
03/09/2020	75	62	137
04/09/2020	2	5	7
07/09/2020	1	6	7
	125	118	243

54. Many schools initially opened to specific age groups to plan carefully the implementation of the changes for pupils in line with the preventive measures described in their risk assessments.

55. There has been a positive return to school during September. Figures for 10 September show that 88.3% of pupils are in school compared with the national rate of 83.9%

56. There are positive Covid-19 cases in a small number of schools and the protocol to collapse 'bubbles' of children and staff to prevent transmission are in place. In the event of bubbles needing to self-isolate schools have prepared for and will implement a remote learning offer. Public health support and advice is available to schools through the Local Outbreak Response Team (LORT) supplemented by staff from WCF. Here2Help are assisting those families who need to self-isolate who require additional assistance.

57. The focus in the coming weeks is to ensure that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are fully supported in school and that vulnerable children are back in school.

58. Ofsted will be making visits during the autumn term to a range of schools for the purpose of helping parents and the public to understand how individual schools are returning to the school's normal curriculum.

Education Transport

59. Worcestershire County Council provides dedicated Home to School Transport (HTST) for over 9000 pupils to Mainstream schools, SEND and Alternative Provision through a variety of methods including Coaches, Minibus, Taxi and public transport.

60. Over the summer term the transport team ensured that the provision of dedicated HTST is safe, available and compliant with the most up to date guidance issued by both the Department for Education and the Department for Transport.

61. Continuous liaison with both transport providers, schools and colleges has been essential to achieve this goal and this partnership working has led to various additional resources and procedures being identified that will deliver HTST that is compliant with the guidance and has the capacity required based on pre Covid-19 levels.

62. Additional resources for the delivery of dedicated HTST have been organised in the form of:

- a) 11 new HTST transport contracts have been procured in order to maintain school bubbles and eliminate contracts that currently serve more than one school;
- b) seating plans have been produced for all mainstream dedicated HTST contracts in order to maintain year group bubbles within the school and help assist NHS Track and Trace if required;
- c) guidance has been produced for parents/careers outlining the requirements regarding the recommendation of Face Coverings, hand washing before and after a journey and “Catch it, Kill it, Bin it”; and
- d) guidance has been issued to transport operators confirming the procedures, expected vehicle cleaning regimes and reporting procedures.

63. The DfE have provided an additional £503k in funding to secure additional capacity on the local public transport network to offset the reduced capacity due to social distancing.

Libraries

64. All Worcestershire Libraries closed on Tuesday 24 March in response to the central government announcement. During the closure the focus of libraries was centred around the establishment of Here2Help through the re-deployment of library staff and creation of a Digital Library Hub.

65. The new Digital Library Hub is focused on helping Worcestershire residents to stay active and connected with their communities while living under social distancing restrictions. The Hub brings together a wide range of new and improved digital library resources and services which are accessible from home and which provide opportunities to attend virtual library events and engage in activities that promote reading, learning, business enterprise, job seeking and the development of digital skills.

66. More new digital library services will continue to be created and added to the Digital Library Hub, expanding Worcestershire Libraries’ digital service offer in line with the Library Strategy 2020-2025.

67. Following the relaxing of lockdown, Libraries began to re-open on the 4 July 2020 in line with the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) guidance. The final 2 libraries will re-open from 14 September this includes use of study space, public computers and borrowing books and other resources. albeit with social distancing measures in place.

Countryside and Greenspaces

68. All the countryside sites such as country parks, picnic places and nature reserves have been busier over the summer than in a ‘normal’ year which follows the national picture of greenspace use increasing as parks and nature reserves are being valued more by the public. Visitor behaviour has generally been good, although much larger volumes of litter and disposable barbecues are being left.

69. The Cafés at Waseley Hills and Worcester Woods opened on the 1 June for takeaway. The café at Worcester Woods Country Park will open for indoor trade from mid-September. The café tenants have risen to the challenge and prepared really well.

Gypsy Sites

70. Gypsy site management is back to normal with officers dealing with maintenance issues and visiting unauthorised encampments.

School Crossing Patrols

71. School Crossing Patrols have all returned to duty now schools are open; some have slightly altered hours due to staggered start and finish times in schools. Many schools are taking up Bikeability training this term after courses had to be cancelled in the summer term.

Town and City Centre Regeneration

72. Given the Covid-19 situation the work to identify development activity and major sites continues, particularly where the combination of co-ordinated local public sector resources in partnership with the market can provide a focus that delivers external investment and the economic growth to support the county, through a pipeline of game changers, critical to the Worcestershire economy.

Major Infrastructure Projects

73. 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, and confidence to be able to safely finish work started.

74. Where possible on-site work continued, including; Worcestershire Parkway Platform 2 works and snagging, and Kidderminster Station internal and external works, seasonal and critical survey works and inspections. Non-construction work on infrastructure projects continued throughout the period e.g. design works, business case development, planning development.

75. Further advice was received at the end of April from Transport Minister, Baroness Vere, regarding Highway maintenance and improvements together with guidance from Highways Sector Council. On receipt of this, contractors worked through plans for how to restart construction works. Following this, work progressively resumed on the major infrastructure schemes, in line with the guidance. The initial focus being to get the schemes up and running and to then understand the impact of Covid-19.

76. Work continues to progress well on many infrastructure schemes including; Southern Link Road, Congestion Schemes, Town Centre Improvements such as Pump Street, Worcester, Pershore Infrastructure Improvements, A38 Bromsgrove and Churchfields (Kidderminster).

Strategic Planning and Development Control

77. We have continued to progress planning applications and post planning approvals for significant infrastructure projects in the county and we are working extensively with the district councils as they review and update their local plans.

Digital Connectivity

78. The opportunities created by digital connectivity projects to be working with partners at the forefront of innovative new technologies continues to be progressed, recognising the potential productivity growth this can bring for Worcestershire and new health and social care models that can support the current delivery challenges, not least Covid-19 related. The team have been exploring new models for delivery, including over the summer months entering applications into '5G Create' and working with partners on how Worcestershire can continue to drive forward and lead in this field.

Highways

79. Core Highways work continued throughout the Covid-19 response period. Larger surfacing and footways works were impacted due to Covid-19. Revised guidance enabled this to be reviewed and restart allowed, with the vast majority of works back underway in June.

Transport

80. Our internal Fleet team continued to support a number of specific Covid-19 response activities including receipt, storage and distribution of food parcels, support for delivery of medical supplies and support for other transportation matters.

81. Transport continued to be provided for children of key workers and have worked closely with colleagues in WCF and with all Worcestershire's schools to support the September return to school.

82. There has been extensive work with public transport operators based on the latest Department for Transport (DfT) Guidance and to improve public confidence in bus services. A Covid-19 Bus Services Support Grant of £336k has been received from the DfT. We have worked with operators to establish we can best support them with these funds.

Waste Management and Prevention

83. The Waste Management Service has continued to operate throughout the Covid-19 response period with the key waste facilities and the Landfill site remaining fully operational. Throughout the period there has been regular dialogue with the Waste Collection Authorities in Worcestershire, including discussion and support to maintain collection rounds.

84. Following the introduction of the “lockdown” on 23 March, all Household Recycling Centres (HRCs) in Worcestershire were closed. Seven of the eleven HRCs re-opened on 11 May, operating to strict safety arrangements which needed higher levels of resourcing, including traffic management. Two further HRCs opened on 28 May, a further one on 6 June and the final site, with a booking system, on 27 July. We constantly monitor and react to the changes necessary to maintain these facilities.

85. The sale of subsidised compost bins has slowed down significantly over the years however, this has increased significantly during the Covid-19 lockdown.

Flood Risk Management

86. Following the reduction in Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, works in relation to a large number of smaller scale highway adaptation and flood and drainage schemes have resumed, with social distancing protocols being followed. Many are focussed on key flood spots which arose or were re-enforced during the 2019/20 flood events.

Transformation and Commercial

87. Transformation activities paused in March 2020 due to Covid-19 as teams were redeployed to Covid response activities. Covid-19 continues to have an impact on Programme Team Resources, until recently, approximately 60-70% of the team resources was deployed to supporting Covid response.

88. Across the Transformation and Commercial teams, working closely with Public Health, Emergency Planning, service teams and others, through Bronze, Silver, Gold, Regional and National Covid-19 command arrangements established formal governance and workstreams across the required response.

Human Resources, Organisation Development and Engagement

89. With a clear focus on ensuring the Council’s workforce were and have continued to be supported through the pandemic, the Council, immediately designed and issued a medical disclosure survey for all employees to ensure we could effectively support our vulnerable and at-risk employees. This activity identified 681 employees who have been supported to remain safe during this unprecedented time. With arrangements made for alternative deployment if people have been unable to undertake their normal duties, an example is deployment of frontline care workers to the Access Centre and Here2Help service.

90. An individual risk assessment has been introduced enabling managers and employees to have a pragmatic and supportive conversation, to understand personal levels of risk, and continue to mitigate these appropriately.

91. Changes have been made in order to deliver different ways of working to deliver training, using virtual platforms to continue learning and development and supported wider organisational communications through video learning production. A new fast track induction course has been created and delivered for care staff. This has been delivered to 93 new recruits, providing much needed resource at a critical time.

92. Fortnightly update sessions are held with all trade unions including school representatives. At these sessions an update is provided on the Covid-19 Response and offer an opportunity for Unions to raise any issues or concerns. Close collaboration has enabled the Council to move at pace and ensure swift resolutions. It has built on our established and positive relationship with the unions, which has been invaluable at this uncertain time. The trade unions have been unanimous in their support of our approach and feedback has been positive.

Stakeholder and Employee Engagement

93. Throughout the pandemic we have provided accurate and up to date advice and information that Worcestershire residents, elected members and our staff can trust. We continue to proactively deliver important messages to help to contain the virus and to give residents the information that they need to stay safe and well. There has been a 300% increase in the number of media calls that we have been receiving daily during the crisis.

94. The Council's social media reach increased to more than 6 million social media users between March and May. When they were surveyed more than 80% of our staff said that communications provided during the pandemic had been very useful.

95. To inform the County recovery efforts and to ensure a consistent approach to engaging with residents, District and County Councils have agreed to roll-out a standard set of questions to local residents exploring their views regarding concerns for the future, and insight into potential changes in behaviour that we may observe as a result of Covid-19 . A joint approach to this is favourable as it enables a countywide comparison and limits resident survey fatigue.

96. District surveys run from September through to the start of November, so we should expect a full set of results towards the end of November 2020.

Property and Health and Safety

97. Intensive work has been undertaken to support the reopening of buildings including schools. Corporate buildings have been risk assessed and are being adapted to ensure they are Covid Secure.

98. Staff must only use buildings that have been Covid-9 assessed and have signed certification in place, and only if they cannot work from home – This remains the case for the foreseeable future.

99. 40 building spaces are now open (out of 50) with a Covid-19 secure certificate and County Hall building access is being monitored on a daily basis with reporting to support test and trace in terms of who has accessed buildings in place for County Hall. A full list of open buildings is provided at Appendix 1.

Digital Support

100. Substantial work was undertaken to mobilise the workforce to work remotely. This included providing staff with the IT equipment and tools to work from home as well as scaling up the council's IT infrastructure and systems to support a remote workforce.

101. In addition, new digital services were launched within the first 4 days of the Covid-19 Lockdown to support staff and our communities, with 18 launched to date. These include:

- **Nimrod (Test and Trace management system for Public Health)**
- **Community response app (Here2Help):** matching requests for help from vulnerable residents with individuals, businesses, and volunteer organisations.
- **Here2Help website** – offering advice and support for the community
- **Volunteer redeployment app** – Enabling redeployment to fulfil Covid-19 work.
- **Covid-19 – one stop shop:** for advice and guidance for residents, business, care workers, schools and early years. Coordinating information on the shielded cohort.
- **Libraries Digital Hub:** Showcasing digital services provided by our library service
- **Personal Protective Equipment Requests:** PPE dashboard and requests
- **Household waste site booking system**

Purpose of the meeting

102. Members are invited to consider and comment on the information provided and agree:

- any comments to highlight to the Leader and Chief Executive of the Council
- whether any further information or scrutiny work is required at this time

Supporting Information

- Appendix 1 – Full List of Open Council Buildings (attached)

Specific Contact Points for this report:

Paul Robinson, Chief Executive

Tel: 01905 844125 Email: PRobinson@worcestershire.gov.uk

Andrew Spice, Strategic Director of Commercial and Change

Tel: 01905 844354 Email: ASpice@worcestershire.gov.uk

Pauline Harris, Programme Manager

Tel: 01905 846235 Email: PHarris4@worcestershire.gov.uk

Samantha Morris /Alyson Grice, Scrutiny Co-ordinator/Overview and Scrutiny Officer,

Tel: 01905 844963 / 844962 Email: scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Strategic Director of Commercial and Change) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- Covid-19 Response Cabinet report 4 June 2020
- Report to OSPB on 7 July 2020

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website.](#)