

**CABINET**  
**22 October 2020****UPDATE ON THE COUNTY COUNCIL'S COVID-19 RESPONSE  
AND RECOVERY**

---

**Relevant Cabinet Member**

Mr S E Geraghty – Leader

**Relevant Officer**

Paul Robinson – Chief Executive Officer

**Recommendations**

1. **The Leader and Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Finance recommends that Cabinet:**
  - (a) **Notes the current status position of the Local Resilience Forums;**
  - (b) **Notes the current status of the Economic and Community Recovery;**
  - (c) **Notes the current status of the Local Outbreak Control Planning and Response activities;**
  - (d) **Notes the individual directorate status updates;**
  - (e) **Notes the financial summary and agrees to a £15 million addition to the updated Capital Programme at Appendix 2; and**
  - (f) **That any future draw down from this additional fund be brought back to Cabinet for decision and any approval, having considered all facts and due diligence.**

**Introduction**

2. This report provides a broad overview of the activities being led or supported by the Authority in respect of COVID Response and Recovery. The report covers three distinct areas:
  - a. Specific project, forum and support updates covering LRF, Economic Recovery, Business Support, Here2Help, and Local Outbreak Response Plan (LORP).
  - b. Services and Directorate Status Updates
  - c. Capital Programme – Proposals on Revisions
3. The local and national context in respect of our COVID-19 is changing daily, with a corresponding impact on our approach and planning. Any update provided, outlining our progress in respect of both response and recovery activities reflects the position at the time of writing.

## **Background**

4. 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 being made across the Council and partner agencies to continue to deliver our critical services and support the County's most vulnerable residents during lockdown.
5. 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.

### **Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and County Recovery Planning**

6. 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.
7. 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.

### **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.
12. The Council set its 2020/21 Capital Programme as part of the February 2020 Full Council meeting to establish its budget and council tax precept. Since that date the Council, its residents and businesses have been responding to COVID-19 and the full economic and social impacts brought with that. The way the high street and business will operate over the coming years is now being challenged and the County Council, working with all partners needs to have flexibility to enable prompt decisions to be made that help facilitate the continued state and hopefully growth of our local economy.
13. Whilst we continue to lobby Central Government for funding with success seen over recent months, for example the investment in our roads and transport, the Council recognises it may need to engage in the economic environment to facilitate recovery. As part of this the Council needs to recognise the potential need for further borrowing and an increase in the capacity within the Capital Programme it has set to aid the economic recovery arising due to COVID. The ability to increase the Capital Programme in year is reserved to Full Council and thus this paper asks Council to consider and approve a modest increase in order to achieve that goal.
14. Whilst the impact of COVID-19 has been managed nationally with schemes such as the Business Rates Relief scheme and the furlough scheme, the slow easing of these will mean that over the coming months the whole Country and world faces significant challenges to maintain its economic position. In Worcestershire we are fortunate to have a diverse economy, as well as a growing focus around industries that have been less affected, including technology. However, we have to anticipate that the virus will impact on local jobs and businesses. As such we have begun to think about what the County Council can be engaged in to strengthen the local economy for the future.
15. The Council has already developed a strong economic plan, working with partners such as our districts and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). Our initial response to COVID-19 included re-focusing £3.5m of our Open For Business funds to support the recovery. We have also led the call for bids to Government to secure further capital schemes (EA flood scheme at Tenbury as an example), as well as transport schemes, including the Getting Building Funding announced for Worcestershire in the summer.
16. We recognise that as well as investing in technology and skills, we also need to focus our efforts on ensuring that the County is agile and flexible to new opportunities, including the way and where people work. Key to that will be our transport infrastructure hubs. Our capital programme already had plans to spend £5 million across 2019-23 across our rail stations in the County. This report proposes increasing that to £20

million, with the additional £15 million funded from borrowing as and when any future decision is taken by Cabinet on consideration of a full and robust business case.

17. We have already seen a significant shift in where and how people work and believe there are new opportunities to grow our local economy through smaller transport nodes in the County that will enable easier access to new workplaces and allow greater productivity. They also have the potential to draw in further Government and third-party development funds, from which is often leveraged more local wealth and employment. Such schemes can enable less road congestion and a wider employment resource, both of which are often key factors to attract new investment.
18. The Council has a fiduciary duty to maintain the on-going viability and delivery of services in making these decisions and as such will need to enter into any ventures following rigorous due diligence and assessment of any financial and/or social impact against any commercial gains or losses. As such whilst Council is asked to increase the Capital Programme this would be funded from borrowing that would only be drawn down following thorough business cases and due diligence to the economic worth of such schemes. These would be presented and considered at Cabinet in every case, and as such be subject to the usual constitutional conditions. Therefore, no decisions to spend are taken by this report and recommendation.

### **Business Support Programmes**

19. 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.

### **Community Action - Here2Help**

20. Here2Help was launched as One Worcestershire's community action response with the sole aim of supporting residents through the Covid-19 pandemic.
21. 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.
22. As at 10 September 2020 there have been over 3600 requests for help made and over 2000 offers of help.
23. 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**

24. The Local Outbreak Response Team (LORT) continues to work collaboratively with partners such as Public Health England, Herefordshire & Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) to respond to outbreaks of COVID-19 and reduce the risk of onward transmission.
25. Worcestershire Children's First (WCF) are providing additional capacity to support schools with pastoral care of students when Public Health are required to close a bubble/partial bubble or isolate pupils and staff. Public Health and WCF are working closely together to provide a coordinated response to schools, which includes both direct Public Health action related to cases or suspected cases of COVID-19 but also advice for more general queries.
26. The OCP has recently been stress tested at 2 tabletop exercises. The first explored outbreaks across the range of educational settings and the second explored an outbreak at St Paul's hostel. Both exercises were given extremely good feedback and the learning from these 2 events will be incorporated into the next revision of the OCP.
27. A task and finish group has been set up to provide a unified front door for COVID-19 queries coming into WCC. The aim of this work is to produce a system which reduces the demand on the LORT by redirecting enquiries that are not related to positive cases or outbreaks to other relevant teams within WCC. This group is also developing a model for contact tracing to be done in Worcestershire which compliments the national Contact Tracing Advisory Service.
28. The LORT deals with many suspected cases, confirmed cases and outbreaks of COVID-19. The majority of these incidents come from schools and adult social care settings, although demand is also generated from workplaces and other settings for vulnerable people. With the increase in cases in Worcestershire the LORT has seen a huge increase in demand, so work is underway to review to capacity and request additional resource funded through the Public Health Test and Trace grant.
29. Overall, the rate for Worcestershire is currently below the All England rate and the rate for the West Midlands. However, we know that the England rate is skewed by extremely high rates of COVID-19 in the northern regions.
30. An increase in cases has been seen across Worcestershire. Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest currently have the highest rates of COVID-19 confirmed cases. Enhanced communications have been activated for all of the northern districts which border high prevalence areas such as Birmingham. This includes advance messages from elected members, local social media posts, young people messaging and high alert posters.
31. The LORT are working closely with WRS who are supporting backwards contact tracing in areas of concern. This technique has recently been used in Wyre Forest, where tracing the movements of individuals in the 2 weeks prior to infection provides an insight to where they are likely to have contracted COVID-19. The information from this work allows Public Health to identify common exposures which can be targeted for interventions and it also gives an overview of the behaviour of the population. These data then allow specific communications to be issued to remind people of the importance of following COVID-19 guidance

## SERVICE STATUS UPDATES

### Overview of Services and Provision

#### Adult Social Care - Commissioned Services

32. 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 low 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.
33. 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.
34. 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 at the outset of lockdown to strategically lead, co-ordinate and facilitate action across the system to support care homes and prevent infection during Covid-19, and it will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. 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.
35. 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.
36. As at 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.
37. 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.

38. 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.
39. 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.
40. 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
41. The observed rapid rise in Covid-19 infection rates in Worcestershire has meant that Care Homes have been advised that visits should be restricted to essential visits only in all Worcestershire Care Homes. This is reviewed regularly.
42. Care home staff members who reside in Worcestershire and beyond continue to work in care homes following existing guidelines. All staff working in Worcestershire Care Homes are swabbed weekly to enable rapid detection of virus.

### **Registration and Coroner Services**

43. 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 10 June 2020 and the team have worked hard to process all of the backlog of birth registrations and are now back on track. Weddings and Civil Partnerships are now also taking place, albeit at a much-reduced rate than previous years which have been adapted to respond to latest Government guidelines.
44. As of 12 October, we are running two Coroner courts to help manage the backlog of inquests.

### **Urgent Care**

45. 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**

46. 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**

47. 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.

The protocol has been updated in phases.

Phase 1 – March – June 2020. The initial management and emergency response to community lockdown

Phase 2 – July – August 2020. Starting the road to recovery by opening more services and management of workload and workflow in preparation for phase 3

Phase 3 – September – December 2020. 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 2021

48. The pandemic affected partners' service delivery arrangements which have had an impact on children's social care services.
49. Contacts at the Family Front Door have been consistently higher than the same period last year for all contacts and domestic abuse contacts. 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.
50. Work is being undertaken via the Safeguarding partnership 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.

51. Child protection numbers are now above Statistical Neighbours and England averages. This is most certainly a reflection of our Covid protocol where children were not removed from child protection plans April – June 20 due to the more limited ability to complete direct work and incorporate partnership contributions to the social work assessment. Maintaining child protection plans in place for these children during Covid-19 and specifically during the early national lockdown and school closures is in our view safe practice.
52. 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.
53. 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.
54. 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.
55. 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.
56. 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.
57. The DfE have monitored performance during the pandemic and Worcestershire has consistently performed very well comparatively. The latest DfE analysis is detailed below:

WORCESTERSHIRE CHILDREN FIRST		Covid-19 Key Performance Indicators - Phase 3								
No.	Indicator	06/09/2020	13/09/2020	20/09/2020	27/09/2020	04/10/2020	Stat. Neigh.	Region	National	
1	Households self-isolating due to Covid-19	17	22	37	35	41				
2	Children Looked After	826	828	836	835	836				
3	Number of Children subject to a children protection plan	641	633	628	609	602				
4	Number of Children in Need plans (local definition) excluding short breaks	697	712	726	730	709				
5	Children Looked After contacted by their Social Worker in the last 4 weeks	73.7% (609/826)	70.8% (586/828)	71.9% (601/836)	67.7% (565/835)	65.7% (549/836)	59.18	59.5	69.09	
6	Children Subject of a Child Protection Plan contacted by their Social Worker in the last 4 weeks	94.2% (598/635)	96.3% (605/628)	96.4% (595/617)	96.3% (579/601)	97.6% (580/594)	94.5	93.19	69.09	
7	Children in Need Contacted by their Social Worker in the last 4 weeks	64.5% (1307/2028)	62.2% (1291/2077)	66.5% (1404/2110)	67.4% (1400/2076)	68.5% (1378/2013)	50.9	58.74	62.87	
8	Children Becoming Looked After in the Period	6	6	10	2	4				
9	Contacts/DA Contacts at Family Front Door resulting Social Work Intervention	19.0% (55/290)	25.5% (114/447)	22.7% (97/428)	23.6% (126/534)	19.1% (82/430)				
10	% S17 Assessments at Family Front Door meeting threshold for Social Work Intervention	19.6% (9/46)	12.1% (7/58)	33.3% (18/54)	9.0% (9/100)	13.0% (12/92)				
11	Number of open S17 Assessments at Family Front Door	444	458	458	450	437				

\* Benchmarking data from DfE Fortnightly Survey Wave 9 (8th September)

58. Whilst Covid19 has impacted on the speed of which we have been able to progress the innovative development work of our plan this has remained part of our business

planning and June 2020 saw the launch of our Get Safe one year on work, September we launched our Positive Outcomes programme (POP) for student social workers and we have continued to make positive progress identified in our evaluation work on our Strengthening Families first edge of care work.

## **Education**

59. Following Government guidance, all children and young people, in all year groups, returned to school full-time from the beginning of September 2020.
60. Worcestershire Children First (WCF) provided all Local Authority (LA) maintained schools (including voluntary aided) with a review of the Risk Assessment addendum form including additional questions to highlight risks in relation to Public Health, Health and Safety, Accommodation and Staffing). The Risk Assessment addendum was made available to all settings, schools and colleges. In addition, WCC Health and Safety team will be visiting all maintained schools during the autumn term for compliance assurance testing.
61. Through this process one site, Lea Street in Kidderminster that provides a setting for the Beacon Pupil Referral Unit Outreach provision and the Medical Education Service, has required additional interim measures to make it suitable and safe to be used. Interim measures in relation to the water supply have been put in place. This requirement resulted in a one-week delay in return to the site for children and staff and the provision of the temporary water and toilet facilities.
62. As a part of the continued offer of support for all education settings across the county, specialist teams are now offering to support Academies in their infection prevention and control processes. A checklist, based on the Risk Assessment addendum and latest guidance, has been created by specialist teams and has been shared with academy schools to support them to conduct a self-assessment. Any queries or concerns raised through this process can then be discussed and addressed through a webinar and series of surgery events that will be available for all schools and include learning from outbreak case examples.

## **Reopening Attendance Rates**

63. Full reopening commenced from 1 September 2020. Feedback from the Education Planning Group of phase leads reported a positive experience for staff and children and a relatively smooth start to the term in logistical terms.
64. Data is collected by the Department for Education (DfE) on a daily basis. Of the schools reporting to the DfE they had opened, 99.1% on 13th October reported as being fully open, compared to a national average of 99.7%. Head teachers across both maintained and academies reported high levels of attendance, and DfE reporting figures show a 91.6% attendance rate in Worcestershire schools compared to a national average of 89.3% (on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2020).
65. Special schools reported a lower return for children with very complex needs (80% attendance rate on 1 October 2020) a multi-agency approach is being taken to ensure planning and support gets children back into school and ensures provision of education is appropriate. Mainstream schools have been asked to make a return detailing any

child with an EHCP who has not returned to school and to provide details of how provision is being met.

### **The handling of outbreaks in schools and other settings**

66. Worcestershire County Council Public Health team has 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 local outbreaks in settings and communities 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 as well as the national Test & Trace service. The LORT is now fully operational 7 days a week from 9am to 6pm.
67. The LORT recognised an increase in volume of enquiries from the first week of September as schools returned which impacted on resource capacity. Additional resource was mobilised immediately to assist the LORT and enable the Public Health professionals to focus on infection prevention and control. Through this period, key improvements have been made to the process for schools contacting the LORT, including the refining of the school notification form to create a more streamlined experience for schools.
68. A key role of the LORT is to support schools in the event of a positive case. Upon notification of symptomatic or confirmed positive Children and Young People (CYP) or staff, the LORT undertake a risk assessment, support testing, provide infection prevention control and self-isolation advice, contact tracing and public health action to prevent any further transmission within the setting or wider community. In schools, this has involved support and advice when school bubbles have to be collapsed to prevent further transmission. To further support education settings, the LORT notify the Education COVID Response Team when a bubble is collapsed so that a Liaison Person can be identified to contact the school and offer further support, advice and guidance. This process has been well received by schools. The process has been refined following each bubble closure and support is now offered to the school to identify issues and offer suggested solutions around themes such as free school meals, vulnerable learners, media enquiries, communication for parents and support for staff.
69. WCC has committed to supporting schools and settings to stay open and provide education in a safe and appropriate way. Additional resource has been earmarked to support the Liaison Person role to assist schools with practical measures when outbreaks occur and to coordinate the learning and feed this back to schools; along with being the education link to the District Incident Management Team meetings that have been established to develop a district specific system wide approach to the management of COVID-19 across each district council region within Worcestershire.
70. In the event of children needing to self-isolate schools are required to initiate remote learning for children and young people to be able to access education provision at home. This may be in the form of online learning, remotely delivered lessons and resources to use at home. The DfE has committed to provide additional IT devices for schools to distribute to children and young people who do not have access to equipment at home. Schools are expected to continue to provide food for children and young people self-isolating who are eligible for free school meals.

71. Ofsted carried out pilot visits to a small number of schools in Worcestershire during September. Since the beginning of October Ofsted are carrying out a series of visits to a range of schools including: all schools that are subject to a category of risk as judged by Ofsted and a sample of schools that have converted to academy status under a directed academy order but have not been inspected since conversion and a sample of schools judged as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. These visits are not inspections but intended to be collaborative conversations that consider how children have returned to education in particular vulnerable children, what attendance and behaviour patterns schools and settings are finding and how they are supporting vulnerable children and families and how remote learning fits with delivery of the broader curriculum. Inspections under the Education Inspection Framework are expected to resume in January 2021, this is being kept under review by Ofsted.
72. The Education Incident Planning Group continues to meet weekly as the group of phase leads representing education leaders in Worcestershire. This group is also supported by separate task groups for specialist provision, alternative provision and early years. The weekly bulletins for early years and education settings continues to be published including guidance updates and Worcestershire resources. The Education Incident Planning Group have also taken part in outbreak scenario planning led by WCC Emergency Planning Team and taken part in planning for tiers of intervention under the Contain Framework.

### **Education Transport**

73. Following significant planning throughout the summer, the transport team have ensured that the provision of dedicated home to school transport is safe, available and compliant with the most up to date guidance issued by both the Department for Education and the Department for Transport. Measures introduced include addition of extra buses, creation of “closed” services which would have been open to the public and coordinated seating plans.
74. Dedicated Schools Transport for Mainstream and SEND pupils has been operating relatively smoothly from the start of the new term. Reports from operators indicate that most pupils have adapted to the seating plans. From Tuesday 6 October young people in year 7 and above are required to wear face coverings on home to school transport unless exemptions apply to them. This measure has been changed to respond to the growth in positive cases and an achievable control measure that promotes a continuity of approach.
75. Monitoring of train use and management of peak services and stations focused on Hagley and Worcester and during the first week of term we received reports from West Midlands Trains (WMT) detailing their management of any issues. Reporting continued throughout early September as colleges returned and additional carriages were on hand to be deployed where needed.
76. 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 and we should receive a further allocation shortly.

### **Libraries**

77. 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.

78. 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.
79. 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. Digital membership is still proving popular although take up has plateaued since the significant increase in April 2020.
80. Following the relaxing of lockdown, Libraries began to re-open on 4 July 2020 in line with the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) guidance. The final 2 libraries re-opened on 14 September and include browsing, use of study space, public computers and borrowing books and other resources. albeit with social distancing measures in place.

### **Countryside and Greenspaces**

81. 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.
82. The Cafés at Waseley Hills and Worcester Woods opened on 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**

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

### **School Crossing Patrols**

84. 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**

85. 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**

86. 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.

87. 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.
88. 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.
89. 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**

90. 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**

91. 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 working with partners on how Worcestershire can continue to drive forward and lead in this field.

### **Highways**

92. 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**

93. 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.
94. 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.

95. 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**

96. 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.
97. 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.
98. 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**

99. 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**

100. Transformation activities paused in March 2020 due to Covid-19 as teams were redeployed to Covid-19 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-19 response. We are working to reduce this but anticipated a high-level for commitment for the foreseeable future, particularly as we enter a second wave.
101. Resourcing continues to be a challenge across all teams, with significant resource committed from both the Programmes and MIAR teams. We continue working closely with Public Health, Emergency Planning, service teams and others, through Bronze, Silver, Gold, Regional and National Covid-19 command arrangements establishing the formal governance and workstreams across the required response, leading on reporting, programme management and coordination, Covid-19 commercial and sourcing activities etc.
102. At this point in time, a number of resources are committed from across the Transformation and Programmes team, Commercial Team and MIAR function. These include a number of Project and Senior Programme Managers and the Head of Corporate Programmes, along with specialist resources from the commercial team

support bespoke sourcing activity. Consequently, this will continue to impact on the pace of wider change and commercial programmes.

### **Human Resources, Organisation Development and Engagement**

103. 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.
104. 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.
105. 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.
106. 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**

107. 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.
108. 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.
109. 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.

110. 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**

111. 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.
112. 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.
113. 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**

114. 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.
115. 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**
116. More recently, we have begun a migration to Microsoft Team in place of MS Skype and Zoom. This offers us a great level of functionality over Zoom, as well as enhanced security. Being cloud based, it is also less resource intensive on our internal infrastructure than skype and offers a greater level of resilience as a result. MS Teams is currently funded under our EA at zero additional cost.
117. In addition to a change in applications, network resilience has been enhanced and capacity increased. We have extended the capacity of existing connections and

installed new connections where appropriate. These will also connect to different points on the BT backbone, as well as some connections utilise alternative backbones (Janet for example in schools), enhancing over-all resilience.

## Financial and Legal Status Update and Implications

118. The Finance function has started to chase the collection of debt again after a brief pause to help with resources around the initial response and ensure payments to providers, in particular care providers. The team have also worked with schools to secure recovery of lost deposits for items such as school holidays.
119. 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
120. 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.*
121. Overall, the level of spend on COVID related support is forecast to exceed the grant and other government support by circa £7 million. However, an announcement of £1bn additional funding for local government was made by the Prime Minister on 12 October 2020. We are awaiting the allocation and any conditions associated with those funds. This will hopefully address some of the shortfall. Otherwise the plan is to utilise underspending on the minimum revenue provision and other actions as reported to Cabinet in September 2020 in order to achieve a balanced budget. Funding or allocations for 2021/22 remain unknown and announcements are not expected until mid to late December 2020.
122. Any proposals for in-year changes to the budget or policy framework are required to be considered by Council. If agreed, the increase in the capital programme will provide a

framework against which specific proposals can be considered by Cabinet, as set out below.

123. This addition would be an in-principle extension of the Council's borrowing limits and will be monitored through regular Treasury Management reporting to Cabinet and Council. At this stage the additional sum of £15 million proposed is within the overall borrowing limits of the Council.
124. Under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 any Cabinet decisions to draw down this fund need to undergo robust financial assessment about the nature and pay back of the scheme. At the moment the Treasury is in consultation regarding the potential for the Public Loan Works Board (PWLB) application to commercial deals which could affect this, and as such the nature of the scheme be it commercial or regeneration will be key to the rate of borrowing and impact on the assessment. If the scheme were to be at risk of a negative return this would impact on future years budgets and as such any mitigating actions would need to source at the point that was recognised. Otherwise it is expected that a scheme will pay back the full cost of any borrowing and have no impact on the revenue account. Each proposal brought to Cabinet will clearly identify this implication.

## **Legal**

125. The Council has responded to the pandemic in accordance with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and the Coronavirus Act 2020 and associated Regulations and Guidance. Reports will be brought for member decision as appropriate if changes to services are proposed on a longer-term basis.

## **Equality Duty Considerations**

126. The Council will continue to have due regard to proactively addressing the three elements of the Public Sector Equality Duty in all relevant areas – in particular the planning and delivery of our services. The Council will continue to assess the equality impact of all relevant transformational change programmes and will ensure that Full Council has sufficient equalities assessment information to enable it to have due regard to the three elements of the Equality Duty when considering any changes to the budget. The Council will continue to ensure best practice is followed with regard to these requirements.

## **Risk Implications**

127. In respect of the capital programme, there is always a risk that investments can lead to uneconomic decisions which require greater impact on the revenue account in order to repay borrowing. To manage this risk individual proposals will be brought to Cabinet for it to consider the implications following full due diligence and identify mitigating measures were this to arise.
128. The Treasury are presently consulting on the use and application of the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB). This could impact on the individual decisions taken, however that will be reflected in the report on any proposals to Cabinet.

## **Supporting Information**

Appendix 1 – COVID-19 Property Update

Appendix 2 – Amended Capital Programme 2020-2023

## **Contact Points**

### County Council Contact Points

County Council: 01905 763763

### Specific Contact Points for this Report

- Richard Taylor (Chair of COG) – Assistant Director – HR and Engagement – Contact number - 07711486229
- Michael Hudson – Chief Finance Officer – Contract number - 01905 845560

## **Background Papers**

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Chief Executive) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report.