

# **CABINET**

**21 May 2020**

## **COVID-19 – COUNCIL RESPONSE**

### **Report of the Chief Executive & Corporate Directors**

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#### **Recommendation(s)**

**It is recommended that Cabinet notes the action taken by the Council in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

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#### **Summary**

At the first virtual meeting of Cabinet on 27 April 2020 a report was presented providing Councillors with a summary of the actions that have been taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This report provides a further update to the issues raised in that report.

The Council is committed to ensuring that critical services continue to operate whilst also ensuring the health, safety and well-being of staff, Councillors and residents.

#### **Statutory Powers**

Section 151 Local Government Act 1972

Coronavirus Act 2020

#### **Strategic Implications**

1. The Council is committed to ensuring that the work it does makes a real contribution to the Borough's communities and residents' lives. There has been consistency in this regard to how the Council has responded to the COVID-19 outbreak. The health and wellbeing of those who live and work in the Borough, together with staff is the Council's top priority. The Council has continued to work hard to provide as many services as possible while ensuring residents' safety, in line with the latest advice from the government.
2. The Council's Corporate Action Plan for 20/21 was due to be agreed at the 19 March Cabinet. This item has been postponed for review and actions are being reprioritised in light of the Coronavirus pandemic and listing new actions that the Council will be undertaking. A revised Plan will be developed alongside recovery work for the Council and the Borough.

## Introduction

3. On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organisation (WHO) was informed of a cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China.
4. On 12 January 2020 it was announced that a novel coronavirus had been identified in samples obtained from cases and that initial analysis of virus genetic sequences suggested that this was the cause of the outbreak. This virus is referred to as SARS-CoV-2, and the associated disease as COVID-19.
5. As of 13 May 2020, more than 4.3 million cases have been diagnosed globally, with over 293,000 fatalities. According to the Department of Health and Social Care, as of 9 am on 12 May, 1,406,517 people had been tested in the UK, of whom 226,463 had tested positive. As of 4pm on 13 May, of those tested positive for coronavirus in the UK, 32,692 have died. This figure includes deaths in all settings, not just hospitals.

## COVID-19 Update

6. There have been the following major events and announcements since the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020.

DATE	EVENT
1 April	Local Resilience Forum Business continuity cell created
10 April	Grayson temporary mortuary site opened at the airport
16 April	Renewal of lockdown for 3 weeks until 7 May 2020
21 April	Testing station at Tipner, Portsmouth opened
5 May	First meeting of Eastleigh Recovery Coordinating Group
5 May	Trials of the NHS contact-tracing app start on the Isle of Wight with the app being made available to healthcare and council workers
10 May	The Prime Minister gave a speech on next steps in relation to the easing of the Lockdown

### ***The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Resilience Forum (LRF)***

7. This is a statutory partnership created by the Civil Contingences Act 2004. The purpose of the LRF is to prepare, plan, respond and recover from major incidents within the geographic area. The LRF is chaired by the Chief Constable. In situations such as the COVID-19 virus, a full organisational structure is created. As a Category 1 provider, Eastleigh Borough Council is

an important part of that structure, along with the other district and unitary councils, the two County Councils, blue light services, Environment Agency and the NHS.

8. The Recovery Coordinating Group, chaired by David Williams, Chief Executive Portsmouth City Council, is starting the process to look at how HIOW will recover from this crisis and what steps need to be taken. Natalie Wigman represents the Council on this group.
9. The LRF formed a Business Continuity (BC) cell on 1 April 2020, which will identify and escalate current business continuity issues and also look forward to future BC issues within the context of C-19 Response and Recovery based on BC knowledge, forecasting and experiences of similarly placed authorities.
10. On 10 April 2020 a temporary mortuary facility was established at Southampton Airport to help relieve pressure on hospital and other mortuary facilities across the county. This facility is known as the Grayson site.
11. On 21 April the testing station at Tipner, Portsmouth was opened. This will test over 1000 people per day and is operating 7 days a week. Those eligible for testing are key workers who are symptomatic with signs of infection starting in the previous 3-5 days. Additionally, staff from the NHS and care homes can be tested even if they are not symptomatic.

### ***Council structure***

12. The Council's structure is reflective of the LRF. The overall strategy is to ensure the Council can keep essential services running and continue to provide its services, where practical for residents of the Borough. The work continues to be led by the Strategic Incident Management Team chaired by Natalie Wigman, Corporate Director Strategy and operationally managed by the Tactical group.
13. Originally these groups met daily, however a new working rhythm has been established across the Council with most services being delivered remotely. The frequency of the meetings has been reduced to three times a week with the Tactical Response Team meeting weekly.
14. The Recovery structure has now been established and mirrors that within the Local Resilience Forum and is led by a newly formed Recovery Coordinating Group. (See paragraphs 33-37 below).
15. As work has concentrated on the response to COVID-19, current emergency plans have been adapted to ensure the Council is able to manage successfully should another incident occur in the Borough. The plans which have been updated include the Borough Emergency Control Centre plan, Operation London Bridge (death of a senior member of the Royal family) and the operation of the Prepared Rest Centres.

## Local Response Centre Update

16. The Eastleigh Local Response Centre (LRC) continues to support many residents, 'shielding' them from the virus by helping them to stay at home for 12 weeks. These residents have specific health conditions that make them extremely vulnerable to the virus. The LRC also supports other vulnerable people who want or need to self-isolate, and increasingly residents who are in financial hardship and need to be referred to the Borough's three foodbanks. Tasks of the LRC include food shopping, prescription collection and remote social support. The LRC comprises the Council, One Community, and three community groups that carry out most of the activity 'on the ground': Chandler's Ford Help, Eastleigh Community Aid and King's Community Church. There are also local neighbourhood organisations and town and parish councils who support people in their areas.
17. There are currently an estimated 2,700 people deemed to be 'extremely vulnerable' in Eastleigh borough, about half of whom have registered with the national 'shielding' system and are being supported by friends and family. A further group have registered and have requested the government's centralised food parcels. Around 280 'extremely vulnerable' people have contacted the Council or been referred by Hampshire County Council for local community support from the LRC. The numbers of people deemed 'extremely vulnerable' is gradually increasing as GPs and other NHS bodies identify more vulnerable patients. Hampshire County Council continues to contact these people to check that their needs are being met and referring them for services as appropriate.
18. At the start of May, the LRC organisations had helped over 1,200 residents, with multiple tasks carried out for many of them. There were over 1,200 active volunteers and over 800 inactive volunteers. There are also over 1,600 people in Eastleigh registered as NHS Volunteers; some of these were already volunteering for one of the community groups and subsequently signed up with the national NHS volunteer scheme. Due to the timing of the NHS Volunteers scheme, there has been very little use of these volunteers; at 27 April only 42 referrals had been made to this system (the NHS volunteers in Eastleigh Borough) – a rate that is typical of the rate of referrals nationally.
19. The LRC continues to work with the three foodbanks in the borough, monitoring supply of food and demand (changing numbers of people in need of weekly food parcels). The Council has been successful in assuring the supply of food to foodbanks in the form of donations from shoppers in many of the supermarkets across the Borough. The Council has ensured there are consistent collections of these donations and One Community now operate a food parcel delivery service for Eastleigh Basics Bank so that residents do not need to visit the shop in Wells Place.
20. In the run up to VE Day on 8 May, the Council contacted all the borough's care homes (around 60 venues including residential, nursing and learning difficulties homes) to ask if they needed our support to hold at least a minimal celebration and marking of the event, with soft drinks, savoury and sweet

snacks. The ambition was to ensure that everyone in the borough who wanted to join the nation in this event was able to and those working and living in care homes would feel included. Through the energetic response of the voluntary groups and our own staff, nearly 1,000 residents and staff of around 40 care homes across the borough, were able to join in the national event.

21. The LRC continues to take a proactive approach to identify people who are vulnerable and ensure that the messages about the help available are getting through. As well as a series of written and social media communications, Council staff have also been calling residents to check that they are aware of help available. Over 600 calls have been made and 24 new referrals generated. The calls also serve to remind people that if their existing forms of support fail them (e.g. due to family and friends going back to work) in the future, they are aware that they can get support from the Local Response Centre.

### **Tactical Response Team Update**

22. The Tactical Response Team (TRT) was formed to implement actions passed down from the Strategic Incident Management Team (SIMT) to ensure that services continue to operate. This group met daily for the initial phase of the response. More recently the frequency of meetings has reduced to weekly as services have settled into the new ways of working.
23. The work the group carried out to identify the critical services, key workers and resource capacity continues to be extremely beneficial as the group is able to promptly take informed action where necessary. Managers are aware of the process to follow for raising concerns over resilience and capacity to enable services to continue to be delivered. The TRT is able to quickly identify resources that can support critical services and ensure that they continue to operate. Approximately 25 members of staff have been 'redeployed' to other areas to provide support.
24. The Council has closely monitored staff absence throughout the pandemic and although prepared for the worst, has found that through its quick action has had little staff sickness during phase one of the pandemic. Should there be further waves of the virus, the Council is in a strong position to continue delivering its critical services.
25. The Council's operational offices remain closed; however access is permitted to those staff with an essential need. The Council has a 'Safe System of Work' Policy and for health and safety access needs to be carefully controlled and is being kept under close review.
26. The Council has now processed 1,040 business grant applications and paid over £13.5million in business grants to support local businesses. The Government has recently announced further funding to support certain small businesses previously outside the scope of the scheme. The Council will administer applications for these top-up grants. In addition to this, the Government has recently announced additional support for businesses called 'Bounce Back Loans' which will be administered by the banks.

27. The Council is committed to its employees and has therefore paid all staff at 100% in March, April and May. The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is complicated for publicly funded organisations; however the Council will be applying the furlough rules for casual staff where possible. This will apply where they would have worked on programmed shows and events which would have been funded through additional income generated. This means that all staff will be paid in line with the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme which was running until the end of June 2020. The Government has recently announced that the scheme will continue to the end of October 2020 with new flexibility being introduced from August 2020. It is important to note that although the furloughing scheme should allow the Council to reclaim 80% of the employment costs (based on the current scheme) the Council is committed to paying at 100% so that staff are not disadvantaged.
28. As reported on 27 April 2020 to Councillors, the Council paused a number of non-essential services. It has now found ways to safely deliver some services, for example pest control, whilst ensuring social distancing and the health and safety of staff and residents. A Safe Systems of Work Policy has been developed that includes carrying out a detailed risk assessment before a formal decision is made on whether a service should recommence.
29. The TRT has begun co-ordinating a review of the Council's Contract Register to assess the impact the pandemic has had on contract arrangements and delivery. It is important to note that contractors continue to be paid in line with contracted terms and conditions.

### **Virtual Meetings**

30. The Council successfully held its first virtual democratic meeting, a meeting of the Cabinet, on 27 April 2020 using Microsoft Teams. Further virtual meetings are now being planned with another Cabinet meeting on 21 May and an Audit and Resources Committee on the 26 May. After this the normal democratic cycle will be resumed virtually with Local Area and Scrutiny committees starting in June.
31. The IT Team are now in possession of the new equipment needed for all councillors to have full access to on-line meetings and a delivery and training programme is being developed to ensure all councillors can participate.
32. We are reviewing our public participation procedures following the April 2020 regulations, and planning to provide options for public participation, including joining the Teams Live Events to speak, where technology allows.

### **Recovery Update**

33. In a major incident (which COVID-19 is classified as) there are two main phases, the incident itself and the recovery phase. It is best practice to start the recovery phase whilst still in the incident to prepare for when the incident is over. Therefore, this work has now started both internally to EBC and as part of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) that covers Hampshire and the IOW.

34. It is important to note that the 'incident' may continue for a long time, potentially over 12 months in some form, so this will affect what 'back to normal' looks like and needs to be considered as part of the recovery work.
35. At an EBC level the work has been split into four areas (this has changed since the April Cabinet report which referred to two areas of focus, internal and external only).
  - a. Internal - what needs to be done to get the council back to full-service provision as quickly as possible? This needs to consider social distancing measures and other constraints and the prioritisation of services. As part of getting the Council back up and running consideration will be given to 'how' these services are delivered and what lessons have been learnt from the current situation. This is always an important part of recovery but is of even more significance in this situation due to the length of time the 'incident' will potentially run.
  - b. External - what has the impact of COVID-19 been on the wider community and what role does the Council have in supporting the recovery of the Borough as a whole? This will involve looking at the impact on both micro (local issues) and macro (national and global) issues that may have a local impact and will consider things such as the economy and the impact on the health and well-being of residents.
  - c. Resilience and Response - the purpose of this element of the Council's recovery work is to consider the Council's response to the COVID-19 incident from a resilience and business continuity aspect. Did policies, practices and plans work? What went well? What lessons can be learnt?
  - d. Remember – after an incident of such large and significant proportions it is important that we remember the citizens and organisations from the Borough who have gone above and beyond to help during this period. The other area of remembrance relates to those people who lost their lives as a result of COVID-19.
36. The four areas above differ in size and breadth with the internal and external workstreams being significantly larger and having several workstreams under them. The workstream leads have been appointed and are now scoping the out the detail of the work.
37. The recovery work for EBC is managed through a Recovery Co-ordinating Group (RCG) made up of senior officers which monitors the work at a corporate level.

## Communication Update

38. During the response phase, communications remains focused on warning, informing and reassuring. We have tailored messaging for Borough residents and have also collaborated at LRF level to have a multi-organisational approach to campaign messaging. These include but not limited to:
- 1) Domestic abuse – where to get help
  - 2) Be Scam Aware
  - 3) Stay at Home/Protect the NHS/Save Lives/Anyone can get it, anyone can spread it
  - 4) Every Mind matters
  - 5) Local Response Centre
  - 6) Foodbanks
  - 7) Health and Wellbeing at home
  - 8) Bonfires / smoke nuisance
  - 9) Garden Waste service (continues)
  - 10) VE day from home
  - 11) Stay Alert to Stay Safe/Control the Virus/Save Lives
39. Daily updates continue to be sent to all managers to filter to their teams in team meetings and The Council continues its weekly ‘all staff’ email to staff. A video blog (vlog) from the Chief Executive has been well received and more are planned whilst the Council staff continue to work remotely. Regular resources and links are shared with staff to support their mental health and wellbeing during this time. Councillors receive a twice weekly Coronavirus newsletter and continue to receive fortnightly updates.
40. Communications between staff has increased dramatically with the use of Microsoft Teams – over 200 meetings have been held by video and nearly 6,000 messages exchanged during April. Over 1800 cases for work have been raised between teams using the Council’s Case Management System demonstrating the Council’s ability to continue collaborative work across services.
41. This month a Borough-wide flyer was sent for delivery via Royal Mail which included messages about service changes, support for vulnerable people, financial support and health and wellbeing advice. This was also translated into an audio version for people with visual impairments.
42. An email about support has been shared with local organisations who work closely with vulnerable people and they have shared it with their customers. Additionally, a more general email about Coronavirus with advice and support was sent to around 70,000 residents.
43. The traffic to, reach of and engagement with the Council’s digital communications channels have grown significantly during April. The number of users accessing the Council’s website was almost 50% higher than in April 2019, subscriptions to the Council’s weekly email grew by 16% on the previous month (four times higher than average growth), and there were over

3,000 reactions, shares and comments on the Council's Facebook posts (a 400% increase on April 2019).

44. Planning has begun to support staff, residents and businesses as we look ahead to recovery and communication forms an important part of this function.

### **Parish Councils**

45. The Council is working closely with Parish Councils through this crisis and has been keeping them informed of all the action the Council is taking, passing on advice and information and supporting them where we can. The Local Area Managers are in weekly contact with the Parish Clerks. The Leader of the Council wrote to all Parish Councils on 1 May 2020 asking if they needed financial support and we are currently reviewing their responses to see how the Council can help. The letter is attached as Appendix 1.
46. Parish Council colleagues are keeping the Council informed of the actions they are taking, and a coordinated response to the crisis is being given wherever possible to provide a consistent message to residents.

### **Financial Implications**

47. There continue to be significant financial implications arising from the COVID-19 pandemic which need to be estimated and monitored. It remains unclear when restrictions on normal life will be eased and therefore it is not possible to accurately assess the financial impact either on the Council or the wider community. However, as previously updated, sensitivity work is carried out looking at likely impacts on the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan and the latest iteration is attached at Appendix 2.
48. Managers have estimated the impacts on their revenue and expenditure streams and are reporting changes to these estimates as they emerge. Areas of potential impact include property, increasing bad debt provisions, loss of car parking income and loss of income at our cultural and country park venues. Several services have experienced a loss of income. The most significant cash flow impacts include deferrals of Council Tax payments, Business Rate payments and property rental income. Estimated impacts have been included within the revised Medium-Term Financial Plan. The Council's General Fund Reserve maintains a positive balance, albeit below our preferred £1M target in some years. However, the interest/property reserve will be used to mitigate this position if necessary.
49. Central Government has allocated £3.2bn of additional funding to Local Authorities to deal with the impact of the crisis. Eastleigh received £45,502 in the first tranche and £1,326,468 in the second. This funding will be used to offset the costs incurred by both the Borough Council and Parish Councils where appropriate.
50. A review of the Council's reserves has been undertaken to identify funds which can be released to offset the financial impact of the crisis. This includes

the £1.4M pension annual contribution removed for the next 3 years as per our payment plan from Hampshire County Council.

51. Steps have been taken to limit non-critical expenditure to manage the financial pressures. Any revenue underspend in 2019/20 will also contribute towards the General Fund Reserve to improve the position. The Finance Team were quick to raise additional funds from the treasury market early in the crisis and therefore secured funding with minimal impact from increased borrowing rates that were experienced by some councils as demand outstripped supply. Because of this early intervention the Council has effectively managed all cashflow issues arising.
52. The Asset Management Team are working with tenants to understand business pressures and assess future rental issues. It is hoped that by offering rental payment plans this will ensure the receipt of rental income in the longer term when business recover. Should there be longer term financial impacts, these can initially be offset by bad debt provision and void reserves which total £3.4M. There are also other property reserves of £1.6M and the New Homes Bonus could be drawn upon to be repaid from future income.

### **Risk Assessment**

53. To ensure that risks are appropriately mitigated, a separate COVID-19 specific Risk Register has been developed and continues to be kept under regular review by the Strategic Incident Management Team. Officers are also reviewing and updating their Operational Risk Registers.
54. The Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight has been established to coordinate the function of various agencies with regards to the COVID-19 outbreak. A Business Continuity Cell has been established with the aim of supporting the strategic objective of maintaining critical services. The Council has been identified as one of the organisations key to achieving this outcome. The COVID-19 Risk Register has been shared with the SCG who are looking at interdependencies between organisations and map areas of risk.

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

55. This report does not require a decision and therefore The Equality Act is not relevant. However, Cabinet should be aware that although decisions have been taken during this crisis, the majority have been made with vulnerable and disadvantaged people in mind.
56. In particular, the introduction of the Local Response Centre, the continued service provision for all critical services and the distribution of the hardship grant alongside agreed payment arrangements demonstrate the Council's commitment to equality and diversity.

### **Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

57. This report does not require a decision and therefore there are no proposals to assess with regard to Climate Change and Environmental Implications.

### **Conclusion**

58. This report has been prepared to provide Councillors with details of how the Council continues to response to the COVID-19 outbreak and taken positive steps to:
- ensure that the Council continues to deliver critical services to residents
  - safeguard staff and residents
  - support businesses and the local economy during the pandemic.

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Appendices Attached: 2

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - SECTION 100D**

The following is a list of documents which disclose facts or matters on which this report or an important part of it is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. This list does not include any published works or documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information.

None