

POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

25 JUNE 2020

NEWARK & SHERWOOD DISTRICT COUNCIL'S COVID-19 RESPONSE TO DATE

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 This report includes:

- An overview of the impact of Covid-19 on Newark & Sherwood District Council's (the Council) services to date,
- A summary of how the Council has responded to the challenge of Covid-19 by working differently to continue to deliver for its residents, businesses and communities; and
- An outline of how the Council may adapt as a result of Covid-19.

1.2 The report will be divided into five sections.

Section One: Emergency Planning (3.0, Pg.3)

Overview of the Council's emergency planning

Section Two: Maintaining Existing Services (4.0, Pg.3)

Considering how Covid-19 has impacted services and how they have adapted

Section Three: Launching New Services (5.0, Pg.7)

A summary of additional work the Council has delivered during this time

Section Four: Workforce Adaptation (6.0, Pg.10)

A look at the support that has been available to Council staff

Section Five: The New Normal (7.0, Pg.12)

A high level summary of the plan for transitioning out of Covid-19

2.0 Background Information

2.1 The diagram below gives a summary timeline of Covid-19 and the key impacts on Newark & Sherwood:

January 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The first cases of Covid-19 in China and Asia
30 January 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The outbreak was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern
February 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Nottinghamshire LRF commence preparations for a pandemic
4 March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The Council stood up their Covid-19 emergency planning teams •NSDC's Bronze, Silver & Gold teams met at least weekly
11 March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •World Health Organisation characterizes Covid-19 as a pandemic
16 March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Social distancing measures put in place nationally
17 March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Leisure centres, NCWC and Palace Theatre closed
18 March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Announcement of measures to assist businesses and employees through the Covid-19 crisis including furlough scheme
20 March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The Council create the 'HART' team to help the district's residents through the pandemic
23 March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •20:30 Commencement of nation wide lockdown
24 March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Nottinghamshire recycling centres (tips) are closed
25 March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Nottinghamshire community support and volunteering hub contact number goes live •The Council commence new working arrangements with the majority of staff moving to working from home
26 March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Commence Council Tax reductions of £150 for all households of working age in receipt of Local Council Tax Support
31 March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •First virtual Committee
April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •40 members of staff furloughed •All Committees except Planning and P&F stood down
21 April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •First Recovery Group meeting •Testing for key workers opened up to Council staff
28 April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •NSDC is 9th (top 3% in England) in speed of business grant payments
May 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The Council start to develop safe ways of working for entering properties/ interacting with customers
18 May 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Nottinghamshire Recycling Centres (tips) reopen
1 June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The public can exercise more than once a day •The public can be outside with up to 5 others from different households still abiding by social distancing rules •Open air markets and schools reopened with reduced capacity
15 June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Non-essential retail set to reopen

3.0 Emergency Planning

3.1 This section will provide an overview of the Council's emergency planning process in relation to responding to the Covid-19 emergency. The Covid-19 landscape has been changing rapidly, as such the statistical data about the virus itself has not been summarised in this report. However, throughout the pandemic the Council has used official data, analysis and guidance to inform its actions. Sources have included;

- The [number](#) of coronavirus cases and associated deaths (nationally and by local authority) provided by Public Health England through central government,
- Government [guidance](#) for local government, and
- Coronavirus [data and analysis](#) from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The effect of age, ethnicity, occupation, and deprivation on Covid-related deaths has been observed in the national statistics.

3.2 The Council has [emergency plans](#) in place at all times. In fact, these had been actioned just prior to the pandemic as part of the Council's response to flooding both in late 2019 and early 2020.

3.3 As part of its emergency planning and response, the Council (and all Nottingham and Nottinghamshire local authorities) works as part of the Nottinghamshire Local Resilience Forum ([LRF](#)). The aim of the LRF is *"to establish and maintain effective multi-agency arrangements to respond to major emergencies, to minimise the impact of those emergencies on the public, property and environment of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, and to satisfy fully the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act."*

3.4 Strategic responsibility for emergency planning at the Council sits with the Director of Communities and Environment. The Council also employs a dedicated Emergency Planning (and CCTV) Officer. Business continuity plans are held by each Business Manager. During emergency response and recovery many more Council staff become involved.

3.5 Throughout the pandemic the LRF has convened more than 15 groups at strategic, tactical and operational levels to agree coordinated actions. The Council has contributed to the majority of these groups. The frequency with which these groups meet depends on the stage of the emergency response varying from daily up to weekly. More than 20 Council staff have contributed regularly to these groups – and a system of deputies is in place.

3.6 During emergency response the Council mirrors some elements of the LRF system of governance. The Council have Gold (SLT), Silver (core organisational leads) and bronze (all organisational leads) groups attended by different officers. These groups provide a framework for the cascade of information from the LRF and for operational decisions to be taken or escalated as necessary.

4.0 Maintaining Existing Services

4.1 This section will summarise how Council services have been impacted by Covid-19 and how these services have adapted to continue to deliver.

4.2 Building Closures

Initially the Council made provision for social distancing across its sites. However, following guidance from Government, the Council enacted a series of closures to the public.

Site	Location	Closure Date
Palace Theatre	Newark	18.03.20
National Civil War Centre	Newark	18.03.20
A4T Leisure Centres (incl. Southwell LC)	Across the District	18.03.20
Community Centres	Across the District	18.03.20
All Play Parks	Across the District	25.03.20
Castle House	Newark	25.03.20
Hawtonville Local Office	Newark	25.03.20
Ollerton Local Office	Ollerton	25.03.20
Ollerton Advice and Jobs Centre	Ollerton	25.03.20
Southwell Advice Centre	Southwell	25.03.20
The Buttermarket	Newark	25.03.20
Sherwood Forest Arts and Crafts Centre	Edwinstowe	25.03.20
Newark Beacon Business Centre	Newark	25.03.20
Newark Castle and Gardens	Newark	01.04.20

At the time of writing, all sites remain closed to the public. All Active4Today memberships were automatically frozen free of charge. Although physical sites are not open to the public in many instances services have been delivered differently. Active4Today has continued to provide interactive exercise opportunities via social media, while the National Civil War Centre has prepared and shared a range of resources online. Many services have moved online and our essential services such as customer services, CCTV, housing customer services and Careline have continued to deliver to the same standard.

4.3 Homeworking

England went into lockdown on the evening of Monday, 23 March and by Wednesday, 25 March the Council was able to transition the majority of its staff to homeworking. Council buildings were closed to the public and staff who could work from home with only the minority of staff, around 7%, coming into an office to provide an essential service. Initially, homeworking was only enabled by the introduction of a shift pattern for staff to reduce pressure on the Council's secure network with staff either working 7am to 1pm or 1pm to 7pm, with additional hours worked outside these shifts where necessary. The Council's ICT team were able to increase the bandwidth provision and procure additional homeworking licences allowing for the removal of shift patterns from 22 April. After this date staff predominantly returned to their usual working patterns considering unique commitments such as child care. Access to Council offices has been restricted for elected members as well as officers to ensure safety and to align with government guidance regarding home working.

To maintain a sense of team and ensure that staff working differently felt valued, photos of staff in their home working environments have been shared on social media. Some of the teams recognised so far have included colleagues in Revenues and Benefits, ICT and the housing responsive repairs. Residents have supported staff by commenting saying well done and the posts have been particularly popular.

4.4 **Responsive Repairs**

From 26 March 2020 housing repairs were adapted due to the pandemic. To comply with guidelines only emergency repairs were carried out inside tenants' homes. All communal and external works were carried out as normal using Covid-19 safe ways of working. Lettings were also affected and thus changes in the number of applications were observed.

4.5 **Supported Housing**

In addition to the closures listed above, both Gladstone House and Vale View, in Newark, which provide supported housing accommodation for those in retirement, closed communal areas on 17 March. The Truly Beauty hairdressing salon at Gladstone House was also closed at this time and staff redeployed to additional cleaning. Residents have been supported in their self-isolation throughout this period and the food service has continued with adapted delivery to residents.

4.6 **Homelessness Provision**

The Council urgently procured accommodation for rough sleepers following the lockdown announcement and in response to the strategy set out in the 26 March letter from the Minister for Local Government and Homelessness.

4.7 **Council Tax**

The Council rolled out a scheme for an additional Council tax reduction of £150 for all households of working age that are already in receipt of Local Council Tax Support. This reduction is automatically applied for those residents who qualify, and the Council have begun to issue new bills for the 3,700 plus households who qualify.

4.8 **Recycling and Waste**

4.8.1 On 15 March social distancing regulations were enforced across England and ways of working were reviewed to ensure that social distancing was enabled. The delivery of the waste and recycling service involves three members of staff within one vehicle 'cab' breaching the 2 metre rule. It was established that this was not a safe way of working for our staff and on 27 March the recycling (silver bin) and garden (brown bin) collections were temporarily ceased. This pause was to enable social distancing in the cab as each truck was able to be run with one driver and one operative. During this temporary reduction in service officers re-organised staffing and operating models to ensure safe ways of working. By the 3 April the Council were able to communicate to the public that recycling collections would resume on 13 April. Whilst garden waste collections resumed on 1 June. Customers who renewed or signed up to the garden waste service while it was temporarily suspended are entitled to a reduced subscription for the 2021-22. Bulky waste collections and grass cutting service were also affected, but have since been reintroduced with adapted services. The closure of Household Waste and Recycling Centres by Nottinghamshire County Council was made on 24 March with limited reopening from 18 May.

4.8.2 The temporary suspension of recycling and garden waste collections received mixed feedback from residents. To provide more explanation on why this decision was made an FAQ document was developed. This was available on the website and was used by customer services to respond to queries quickly and consistently.

4.9 **Parks and Open Spaces**

Parks and open spaces owned and managed by the Council have remained open throughout the lockdown period, with the exception of Newark Castle. These parks and open spaces have remained open to enable residents to take their daily exercise. Adaptations were made to ensure these spaces could be used safely. These adaptations included:

- Closure of play areas.
- Fishing was paused at Vicar Water. This was resumed to season ticket holders only on 13 May.
- Signage added to remind park users to socially distance and be considerate of others.
- No team games or large groups activities. Football on Lincoln Road Playing Fields and Sconce and Devon Playing Fields were cancelled. The Council is working with the appropriate clubs to plan for football training restarting in line with guidance.
- Closure of public toilets and cafes. The Rumbles cafes at both Sconce and Devon and Vicar Water reopened with a take-away only service in June having closed in March.
- Events and groups, including parkrun and Spring Forest School have been cancelled.

4.10 **Car Parks**

It was announced on 4 April that all car parks managed by the Council would be free of charge to assist key workers and residents. Initially this decision was set to be in place until 30 June. However, an urgency item was agreed 11 June and is being reported to this Committee, agreeing the extension of this support. From 1 July 2020 until 31 August 2020 the Council will offer 2 hours free parking at all Council car parks, between the hours of 08.00-17.59, and free parking after 6pm, with the aim of supporting the reopening of the economy.

4.11 **Committee Meetings**

The June cycle of Committees was stood down with the exception of Planning Committee and Policy and Finance. On 31 March the Council held Planning Committee online. Its first virtual meeting in lockdown. This was followed by a virtual meeting of the Policy and Finance Committee on 2 April. As an early adopter of remote meetings the Council was featured as a [case study](#) by the Local Government Association. Urgent delegations have been utilised for decision making and the Leader of the Council received daily updates on actions undertaken (these have now reduced to weekly briefings as de-escalation continues).

4.12 **Other Adaptations**

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the whole Council so staff across the organisation have had to adapt. For example, new members of staff such as the Director of Housing, Health and Wellbeing have had to be inducted remotely, and the Towns Fund consultation has been adapted to be a digital consultation with virtual sub-group meetings and online consultation.

4.13 **Communications on the Changes**

- 4.13.1 A communications cell was set up at the beginning of the pandemic to co-ordinate the key messages for the Council's website and social media channels. This new cell included communications staff redeployed from Tourism and Newark Palace Theatre. A summary of all key communications relating to changes in council services as a result of the outbreak of Covid-19 can be found in Table 1 in **Appendix One**.

- 4.13.2 Immediately after central government announced it was putting social distancing measures in place, the Council communicated that it would be closing a number of its sites (see 4.2). This was met with praise, with comments including *“quick action taken”* and *“strong leadership in place”*.
- 4.13.3 On 6 May, over six weeks into lockdown, the Council produced a video with key statistics on how it has responded to Coronavirus and the critical services it has continued to deliver. The responses to the video were all positive. The information provided included:
- 3,264 Coronavirus support related calls taken;
 - 3,100 tonnes of household kerbside waste collected;
 - 560 tonnes of dry kerbside recycling collected;
 - 230 tonnes of debris cleaned from the streets;
 - 160 emergency repairs completed for Council tenants;
 - 66 environmental health reports actioned;
 - 50 anti-social behaviour reports actioned;
 - 3 virtual NSDC committee meetings broadcasted; and
 - 1 prohibition notice served to a local hotel breaching rules.
- 4.13.4 To show solidarity and continual support for key-workers the Council arranged for Newark Castle to light up blue every Thursday evening for the ‘Clap for Keyworkers’. The Council also raised flags thanking the NHS at its sites at Castle House and Brunel Drive in Newark. Both actions were welcomed by residents. A video featuring members of Council staff at different sites clapping for keyworkers was also positively received and was viewed more than 4,500 times on Facebook.
- 4.13.5 All press releases have been covered locally, including regular coverage with Newark Advertiser, Radio Newark and Nottinghamshire Live. The coverage has remained neutral and balanced in reporting style. The enforcement action on a Newark hotel breaching lockdown rules was covered as the lead story on the front page of the Newark Advertiser. The Council has also continued with its regular “As I See It” column in the Newark Advertiser to provide further explanation on what the Council is doing in response to COVID-19.
- 4.13.6 The Council have also worked to keep its members informed. Regular updates have been provided by the Leader summarising the latest guidance and the response of the Council. These updates have been disseminated to Members as well as Parish and Town Councils.
- 4.13.7 Council staff have also been kept up to date on how the Council is responding to the virus including working from home arrangements and hygiene routines at Council offices. More recently these updates have become a weekly update from Chief Executive John Robinson and often include compliments the Council has received from residents and businesses. This links to the workplace culture support the Council has provided to staff summarised in 6.4.

5.0 Launching New Services

- 5.1 The legislative changes brought about by the [coronavirus bill](#) impact on the Council in relation to; emergency volunteers; powers relating to events, gatherings, and premises; registration of deaths and still-births; notification of deaths to coroners; certificates cause of death; and the postponement of elections. Officers have done a thorough job adapting

quickly to learn new procedures and ways of working to enforce these new powers. This section of the report will summarise some of the new services launched due to Covid-19.

5.2 Business Support

5.2.1 The Council's Finance and Revenue and Benefits teams have worked to administer and pay a series of grants. At the time of writing the Council had made 2,126 relief payments to local businesses with a value of approximately £25,115,000. The support packages available are:

- A statutory sick pay relief package for SMEs
- Business Grants of between £10,000 and £25,000:
 - £10,000 grant per business property in receipt of Small Business Rates Relief and Rural Rates Relief; or
 - £10,000 grant per business property in the Retail, Hospitality, and Leisure Sector with rateable value of £15k or less at 11 March 2020
 - £25,000 grant per business property in the Retail, Hospitality, and Leisure Sector with a rateable value of more than £15k but less than £51k at 11 March 2020.

5.2.2 The Council worked quickly to set up and start providing financial support for businesses that had been adversely impacted by Covid-19. The Council was named in the top 10%, in a nationwide league table of local authorities, for the speed with which they were paying out business support grants. The local business community's response to the grants included; *"NSDC I am totally surprised at the speed we received ours, you are doing a fantastic job for us under difficult conditions and cannot thank you enough"* and *"Thank you for the speed of the funding it only took 3 days from applying to it being in my account."*

5.2.3 In addition, the Discretionary Business Grants fund was made available from 3 June. This new fund of just under £1.3m is aimed at small and micro businesses. To be applicable they must be able to demonstrate that they have suffered a significant fall in income because of Covid-19, and have ongoing fixed property-related costs/occupy property or shared office space. The additional funding is not eligible for businesses that have already received financial support from previous grants. Businesses must have been trading on 11 March 2020 and have so far been considered ineligible for grant support. Businesses will be required to provide supporting information and documentation for verification purposes. The broad categories of businesses which are eligible, but not exhaustive, include:

- Small businesses in shared offices or other flexible workspaces,
- Regular market traders, domiciled in the District,
- Bed and breakfast premises which pay council tax instead of business rates,
- Charities in receipt of charitable rate relief (which otherwise would have received Small Business Rate Relief),
- Tourism and hospitality, and day nurseries.

5.2.4 Further information is available on the website at www.newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk/fsb/. The Council's Economic Development team have worked throughout this time to sign-post to other financial support for the business community.

5.3 Tourism

The district's tourist attractions have been closed for the duration of lockdown, and the Council's tourism team has been working to understand the impact of this on the tourism

sector. A survey was undertaken in May. 93 responses were received and the results are being analysed. The Tourism team will then work with stakeholders to understand how to help mitigate the impacts of Covid-19.

5.4 **Public Protection**

5.4.1 The Council's Public Protection team have been working to support and enforce a range of Covid-19 guidance and legislation. They have been supporting businesses to transition to take-away services providing advice on social distancing and food standards. They have also been enforcing on a range of issues from breaking-up illegal gatherings, enforcing against rubbish burning and taking enforcement action on the breach of social distancing regulations. The Community Protection Officers have also been continuing to respond to anti-social behaviour reports. Across the County crime statistics were reduced for March, however, anti-social behaviour increased, and officers have been working to enforce social distancing and specific dispersal orders, to prevent anti-social behaviour and ensure open spaces are used in a responsible and respectful way.

5.4.2 To further support residents with any questions or concerns they may have following lockdown and social distancing guidelines, a Facebook Live video, produced by Radio Newark and hosted on the NSDC Facebook page, was broadcast on 19 March. The Leader of NSDC, Councillor David Lloyd, and Accountable Officer for Newark and Sherwood CCG, Amanda Sullivan took questions. The Facebook Live received more than 3,500 views and was positively received, with one viewer commenting "*well done, very informative.*"

5.5 **Humanitarian Aid Response Team (HART)**

5.5.1 The Council set up HART on 16 March to support the residents of Newark and Sherwood through the pandemic. HART work to:

- Deliver essential food, supplies and medical items to support those who are isolated, vulnerable or shielding within the district. The Government liaised with supermarkets to ensure that basic food packages could be supplied to all those eligible.
- Communicate with residents identified by the NHS as among the 1.5 million told to self-isolate as well as older people and those with income challenges.
- Map the community groups that are already in place and help plug the gaps where there is a need.
- Take referrals from the Nottinghamshire Community Support and Volunteering Hub.

5.5.2 As of the 31 May 2020 566 requests for assistance had been met. These requests included; welfare checks, food and medication deliveries and referrals to community support groups.

5.5.3 Following the launch of HART Councillor David Lloyd took part in a Facebook Live in partnership with Radio Newark. During this live stream, Councillor Lloyd set out all the support available for residents and businesses and was available to answer any questions. The responses to the video were all positive.

5.5.4 HART and the Nottinghamshire County Council Community Response Hub have been regularly promoted. They have been shared using different communication methods to ensure every



person who may be vulnerable or isolated receives the help and support they need. Communication methods have included:

- Social media posts, including infographics and videos
- The website, including an extensive database of local community groups providing support, businesses still offering delivery services and signposting to mental health advice and other services,
- Letters to vulnerable residents over 70 who are shielding,
- Leaflets included in updated council tax statements for those households that qualified for the hardship discount,
- Information provided to tenants in the annual rent statements,
- Newark Advertiser advertisement,
- Interview with Councillor David Lloyd on Lincs FM,
- Regular coverage in local media (print and online) – including Nottingham Post, Newark Advertiser, Mansfield Chad, Southwell Bramley and Radio Newark, and
- Telephone calls to vulnerable residents.

5.5.5 The vital work of the HART team has been appreciated, with comments including: *“We got our food parcel today, we are very grateful - so nice to know there is support out there”* and *“I was very grateful to have my medication collected and delivered. Thank you so much.”* The Council also posted video case studies of staff who have been deployed into critical areas, such as a staff member from Palace Theatre that has been redeployed into HART. These have helped to raise awareness of the Council’s work and have been well received by residents.

5.6 Partnership Working

Council staff have also played a key role locally working with colleagues to contribute to the creation of guidance, lead on a particular issues and represent local authorities at a national level. For example, the Council worked in partnership with Rushcliffe BC to write the discretionary business grant guidance for Nottinghamshire.

6.0 Workforce Adaptation

6.1 This section of the report summarises how staff have been communicated with, and supported, during Covid-19.

6.2 538 contracted staff work for the Council, excluding Active for Today, the majority of staff have continued to work throughout Covid-19. It is the commitment, dedication and passion of these staff that has allowed the Council’s response to be comprehensive and effective, helping people across our district and keeping services running.

6.3 An LGA workforce survey is completed fortnightly by Human Resources. This contributes to a national picture of the impact of Covid-19 on staff in local authorities and will be a useful statistic for benchmarking on the impact of the pandemic moving forwards.

6.4 Staff Survey

6.4.1 In order to understand what it has been like for staff working during the Covid-19 outbreak the Council ran a staff survey. The survey focuses on those staff who have been able, to some degree, to work from home since 25 March 2020 and workshops are being undertaken with the staff who have continued to go into their usual place of work. 313 staff responded to the survey. The data covers the 28 working days between 25 March and

1 May 2020. This survey looked at how the Council, and its staff, have adapted and worked differently during the outbreak. Here are some of the key findings;

- 87% of staff surveyed have been able to work from home. Of those able to work from home 66% rated their experience as good or excellent with the main issues being technology related.
- 45% of staff surveyed use Microsoft Teams. ICT have done an admirable job rolling out this resource ahead of schedule to enable video meetings and conference calls.
- Of those that have been working from home 96% have felt ok or above working from home. Staff were generally positive, however, 19% said they have missed face-to-face interactions and 6% said they have felt isolated.
- 95% of staff surveyed were neutral or agreed that during this time they have felt supported by the Council and able to raise concerns, issues and anxieties.
- Skills staff have developed during this time include; utilising virtual meetings, ICT skills, time management, communication and resilience and adaptability.
- During the first five and a half weeks of lockdown the 313 staff who responded to the survey saved 79,870 miles by not travelling to work. This is the equivalent of driving the length of the UK 143 times.



6.5 Workplace Culture

6.4.1 In these difficult times it is important to provide support and direction as an organisation. Therefore, the workplace culture team was set up to provide a wrap-around package of support for all staff. The internal facing aspect of this package has six work streams. This is a short summary of what this package of staff support has included;

6.4.2 Physical Health

Supporting staff in taking exercise to support their physical and mental health.

- An all staff e-mail 'Stay Safe, Stay Home, Stay Active' encouraging staff to be active and share what they are up to.
- An all staff e-mail launching 'NSDC Steps Challenge' encouraging staff to be outdoors (whilst following official guidance) and be active with staffing logging their steps on together to meet goals. One week staff walked the equivalent of The Viking Way more than twice over!
- The planned launch of a staff cook book combining the favourite recipes of staff to support good nutrition and taking the time to prepare home-cooked meals.

6.4.3 Sense of Council

Actions to maintain the sense of 'togetherness' as a Council.

- Staff have received a weekly update from Chief Executive John Robinson updating staff on the situation and recognising positive progress made.

6.4.4 Managing Staff

Guidance and support for managing a team during Covid-19.

- Guidance for managers on managing and communicating with staff in these difficult times, and tips on how to undertake virtual team meetings.
- Advice for managers taking on new staff during lockdown.
- Guidance for all staff on maintaining data security under new working arrangements.

6.4.5 **Mental Health**

To care for the mental wellbeing of staff by supporting them to undertake wellness exercises.

- Circulation of resources on; managing anxiety, supporting your mental health when working from home and activities you can do at home to manage stress.
- All staff e-mail encouraging staff to engage with 'Every Mind Matters' materials and take care of their mental health.
- Launched a Mental Wellbeing intranet page full of resources and information.

6.4.6 **Sense of Team**

Activities which create a sense of team to maintain connection between teams whilst new working practices are in place.

- Guidance for ensuring a sense of team in these changed times including team game ideas and several quizzes for continuing to foster team spirits and connection.
- Launch of the 'Pet Employee of the Month' for some informal team building whilst recognising that pets are good for our mental health.

6.4.7 **Personal Support**

Actions to take care of staff and support them to access services they need.

- Guidance for managers on providing personal support to staff.
- Staff can access a bespoke pack which acts as a self-help guide for reintegration back into work/life after lockdown.
- Access to an independent confidential counselling, coaching and therapy service. This is available to all employees. Staff are normally limited to six sessions in a rolling 12 month period. However, due to the current situation, additional counselling support has been commissioned and the rule of six sessions in a rolling 12 month period has been relaxed for those who need to make use of this service.
- Staff are able to carry over their statutory annual leave into the next two leave years if they have been prevented from taking this leave due to Covid-19. However, staff have been encouraged to take leave to have some respite.

6.4.8 Staff have been kept up to date with developments by e-mail and the Council have utilised the gov.uk 'notify' text messaging service to send urgent messages to staff. Staff were either sent a short update or directed to a password protected webpage containing important information. Staff appreciated the use of Gov.net and it has been a valuable tool for communicating instantly with staff at any time regarding the changing situation.

7.0 **The New Normal**

7.1 This section of the report gives a summary of the plans for transitioning out of Covid-19.

7.2 **Transition**

7.2.1 In line with National Government guidance the Council are planning to facilitate staff, and members, gradually returning to their usual place of work. This plan is being developed but is not to be used immediately. It is being developed in preparation for a change in government guidance and the current position is still for all staff who are able to work from

home continuing to do so. This will be the case until National guidance changes. Any changes will be carefully managed as 39% of staff have not been into their usual place of work since 25 March 2020 and 23% of staff who have been working from home are concerned or very concerned about returning to an office environment. A series of actions will be in place before the Council will return.

- 7.2.2 There will be practical actions; such as additional cleaning, rotas for staff coming into the offices to allow social distancing and procedures for managing illness. There will also be further actions around staff culture and resources to support staff, both returning to work and staff who have been coming into the offices but will now be re-integrating with the wider Council. These actions will include a video on the social distancing measures in place and resource packs for those who need additional support. The Unions, and business managers are being consulting on these plans to ensure our Council wide return to work is safe and considerate of all needs. This plan will be flexible recognising the concerns, commitments and health needs of staff.

7.3 Post Covid-19

- 7.3.1 The world after Covid-19 will be changed. The impact of this pandemic is unprecedented and the Council must be ready to adapt to what the district needs to recover. The Council will be a leader in the group of organisations who will need to come together to support the district in the process of rebuilding, restoring and rehabilitating the community. This will range from financial support, such as the delivery of national grants, to adapting service delivery and facilitating the development of community resources which have been established or strengthened during lockdown.

- 7.3.2 The district of Newark and Sherwood has shown incredible community resilience during exceptional circumstances. It will be the Council's role to support these communities to bolster resilience and assist the affected communities to help them towards managing their own recovery. It is recognised that where a community experiences a significant emergency, there is a need to supplement the personal, family and community structures which have been disrupted. Therefore, the Council is expecting to continue to provide some of the supplementary support delivered through HART throughout recovery.

- 7.3.3 The Council will also need to reassess itself as an organisation, both in how services are delivered, as highlighted above, but also in how staff work and collaborate with partners to deliver for the community. The Council's recovery group was formed on 21 April and this group is considering these questions.

7.4 The Community Plan

As highlighted above, the Council will need to reassess itself in light of Covid-19. As such the objectives within the Council's Community Plan will need to be re-examined. For example, the work that communities have carried out to build self-reliance and strength will need to be added and work to develop sustainable economies may need to feature more prominently. A strategic review of the Community Plan objectives in recognition of the significantly altered projected income (10.1.2), and the new work streams highlighted above, is being undertaken to enable Members to consider reshaping the Community Plan's objectives and activities in association with this review.

7.5 Flexibility and Change

To ensure sustained business continuity all plans will be developed with in-built flexibility recognising that the transition out of Covid-19 will need to consider preparedness for further lockdown events. This will impact how the Council plan, and budget, for this transition.

8.0 Proposal

8.1 It is proposed that the content of this report, and the breadth of the pandemic response and ongoing recovery, be considered as context for future working.

9.0 Equalities Implications

9.1 As noted in 2.3 in this report, the disproportionate impact of Covid19 upon persons with protected characteristics in terms of age, ethnicity, occupation, and deprivation has regrettably been observed in the national statistics. Due consideration of these, and equalities implications, will be necessary as the pandemic recovery continues to evolve.

9.2 For each new activity referenced an equalities assessment was made and adaptations made as required.

10.0 Financial Implications (FIN20-21/8570)

10.1 Revenue Current Year

10.1.1 The Council has received £1,285,300 in funding from Central Government in order to mitigate the additional cost and income loss pressures as a result of COVID-19. This funding is not ring-fenced and could be utilised in order to mitigate funding shortfalls across both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account.

10.1.2 To the end of May, the Council has seen a reduction in income generated of £0.535m and is predicting a shortfall of £2.085m for the full financial year. This is based on best estimates of the impact the lockdown measures will have on the Councils fees and charges income for the year.

10.1.3 To date £0.335m has been committed in terms of additional expenditure including increasing the Councils ICT licences allowing staff to work from home where this is possible, future commitments relating to the additional cost for garden and recycling waste rounds and other equipment provisions to allow for the safe reopening of Castle House.

10.1.4 The Government have insisted that they will do whatever is necessary to support local councils through this current pandemic. To date, no further funding has been announced, over and above the initial £1,285,300.

10.2 Revenue Future Years

10.2.1 The impact that Covid-19 will have on the national economy will begin to emerge over the coming months. This may have an impact on all elements of the Councils' income streams,

but the extent to which this happens will depend on a number of factors. Officers will continue to monitor the national impact and will review forecasts of future income levels during the setting of the 2021/22 budget.

11.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives

11.1 The Council has a responsibility to plan and prepare for possible emergencies within the district - outbreaks of disease including flu pandemics are a part of this planning. While emergency planning is not a stand-alone objective within the Community Plan, the consideration of recovery will be in line with all Community Plan objectives.

12.0 RECOMMENDATION

That the report be noted as a summary of the pandemic response, and that the context be considered for future working.

Reason for Recommendation

To provide context for future working and decision making.

Background Papers

Nil.

For further information please contact the Transformation & Communications team.

Deborah Johnson
Assistant Director - Transformation & Communications