

## **THE COUNCIL'S ONGOING RESPONSE TO THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC AND LEARNING POINTS**

<b>Head of Service:</b>	Gillian McTaggart, Head of Policy, Performance & Governance
<b>Wards affected:</b>	(All Wards);
<b>Urgent Decision?(yes/no)</b>	No
<b>If yes, reason urgent decision required:</b>	
<b>Appendices (attached):</b>	Appendix 1 – Key dates and timeline Appendix 2 - Emergency Structure Chart Appendix 3 – Data on Emergency Response

### **Summary**

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Council's emergency response to the Covid 19 Pandemic and identify some of the high level learning points.

### **Recommendation (s)**

#### **The Committee is asked to:**

- (1) Comment on the contents and learning points within this report identifying the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on Council's operations, the additional services provided and the support provided to residents and businesses highlighting achievements and key challenges.**

### **1 Reason for Recommendation**

- 1.1 The Council's emergency response has been in place for over a year, since a major incident was declared in Surrey on 19 March 2020 and the first national lockdown commenced on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020.

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- 1.2 A report on the Council's Emergency Response which outlined the key components to our initial response, was reported to the Strategy & Resources Committee on the 2 July 2020. This report provides an overview of the entire pandemic to date, outlining in particular the Council's further response covering the latter two national lockdowns and two local tier restriction levels. This report also captures some of the key achievements and learning points from our emergency response to date.

## **2 Background**

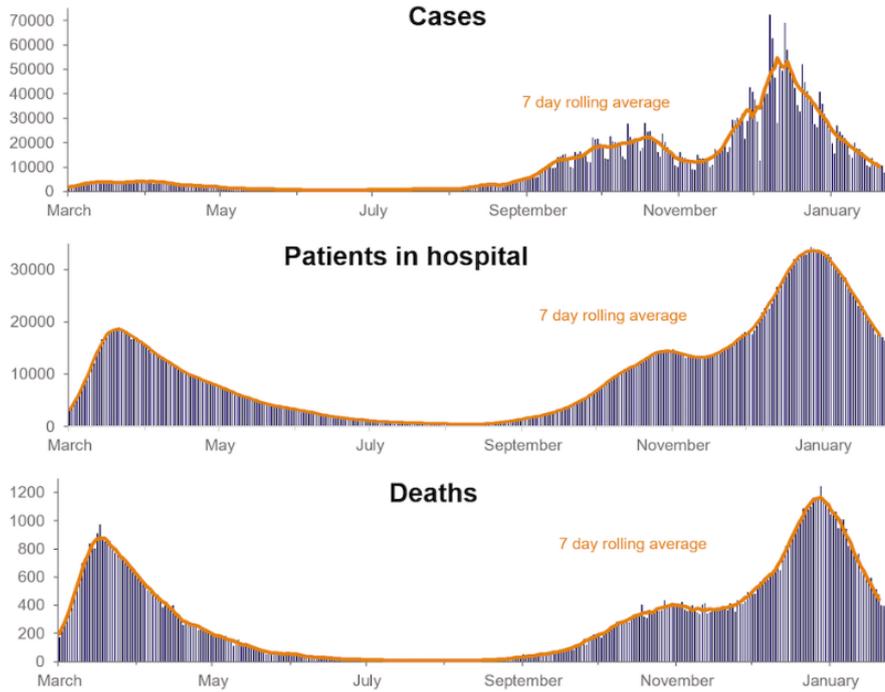
- 2.1 The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 sets out the legislative framework for responding to an emergency with a clear set of roles and responsibilities. Under this framework, the Council is a Category 1 provider with a duty to assess the risk of emergency and have in place emergency plans.
- 2.2 The Council had an approved Emergency Plan and a range of supporting plans including the Pandemic Plan that was updated in February 2020 specifically to address the Pandemic response. This plan was shared with all staff on the intranet. It was clear from the early stages that Covid-19 was a new public health emergency, different to anything experienced within the borough for a significant time. The Council faced a number of unrepresented challenges and overwhelmingly, staff stepped up and supported our response. The approach required considerable flexibility and agility across the Officer team with individuals taking on new and different roles to support the emergency response. The Council moved at pace to assess the impact of the pandemic and have continued to deliver a comprehensive response to this crisis since it took hold.
- 2.3 Our teams have worked hard to support those most in need, delivering existing services, many new services, some within days of the announcement such as the new business grants. The impact of having to work at pace and often without any prior warning as to the direction of travel, created additional pressure and strain across the organisation.
- 2.4 The Council's response to the pandemic has met these challenges face on but over the course of a year, with finite resources, teams have suffered from fatigue. The effect of Covid is likely to be long lasting having a multi-faceted impact, further reviews may be necessary as we return to business as usual assessing how this may look and feel. There will be more challenges in dealing with backlogs, on-going austerity, reforms and the reintroduction of normal governance. The recovery stage was commenced after the first lockdown was lifted. We started the recovery stage with a move towards business as usual in June, however due to the ongoing nature of the pandemic we have not been able to move to a full recovery stage, instead implementing work in phases after each change of restrictions was introduced by the government.

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**3 Key Dates and timeline**

- 3.1 Since July, we entered a second national lockdown on 5 November to 2 December and a third lockdown on 5 January. The Council was placed into a High Tier under the first local restrictions in June and was placed in Tier 4 under the second local Tier system on 20 December 2020. The majority of these changes were introduced without any prior warning or information resulting in teams having to respond at very short notice with limited information. Some of the key dates and timeline are identified in Appendix 1.
- 3.2 The Surrey County Council (SCC) Public Health Data Intelligence Team has provided regular updates on rates of transmission and we have used this as our trusted source of data collected. They have developed these reports over time and produce a daily intelligence report covering the rates in each borough and district and a more detailed bi weekly report with more complex information.
- 3.3 There are been many fluctuations in rates of transmission across Surrey. As at the 19 March 2021, since the beginning of the pandemic, there have been 69,155 Covid cases across Surrey, with 2,395 deaths.
- 3.4 The first of three charts below show the 7 day rolling average for COVID-19 cases (by specimen date), patients in hospital with COVID-19, and deaths within 28 days of a positive COVID test (by date of death) in England from the start of March 2020 to the middle of February 2021. The graph shows that hospital occupancy and deaths rise in spring 2020, dip during the summer, begin to rise again in September, and then rise sharply around December before falling after mid-January 2021

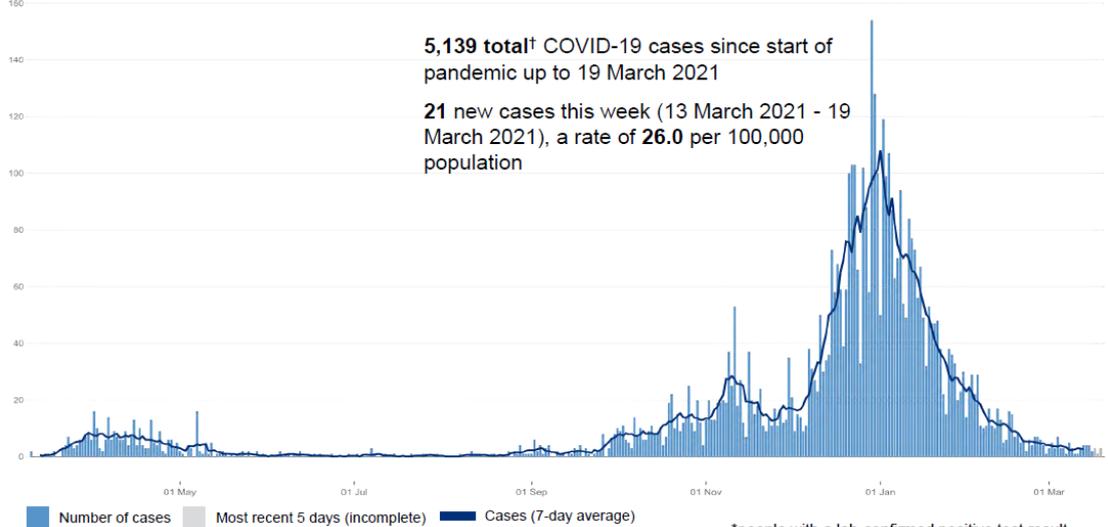
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- 3.5 The rates in Surrey followed this overall path. The data for the latest week (12 March to 18 March) identified **31.9** cases per 100,000. The overall average peaked at over **900** per 100,000 for 7 days during January 2021.
- 3.6 Within our borough the daily rates are charted below.

**COVID-19 cases\* in Epsom and Ewell up to 19 March 2021**

Daily cases by specimen date, Epsom and Ewell, up to 19 March 2021



22/03/2021

\*people with a lab-confirmed positive test result  
†cumulative number of cases  
Source: [GOV.UK, COVID-19 in the UK](https://www.gov.uk/covid-19)

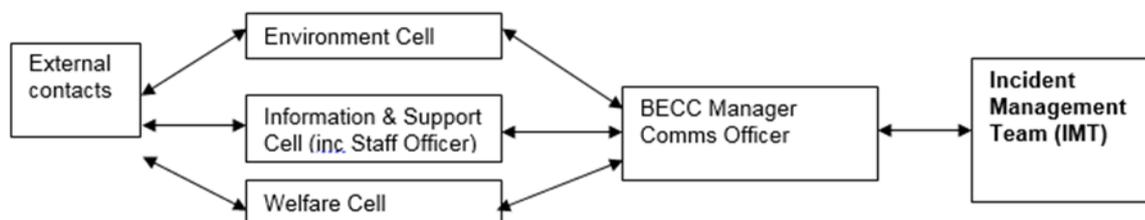
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- 3.7 Both the third national lockdown and the introduction of the vaccine programme has had a major impact of the reduction of the Covid positive cases. It is anticipated that the rates of transmission have now plateaued and there will be fluctuations across the County as we restrictions are eased.
- 3.8 The table below (source NHS England, covid -19 vaccinations )shows the number of individuals who have received the 1<sup>st</sup> dose and 2<sup>nd</sup> dose covid vaccine by date 8 December to 14 March . The vaccine programme is being rolled out at pace and those in cohort 8 & 9, are now receiving their invites to receive the vaccine.

Area	Under 55	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80+	Total
England	6,169,566	1,992,909	2,605,480	2,550,300	2,675,711	1,970,143	2,696,677	20,660,786
South East	931,825	308,575	434,787	417,420	451,242	339,685	478,281	3,361,815
Surrey	118,523	45,619	57,632	53,714	56,456	43,354	65,819	441,117
Elmbridge	12,150	4,668	6,432	5,843	6,053	4,587	7,336	47,069
Epsom and Ewell	8,855	3,654	3,792	3,400	3,811	2,796	4,030	30,338
Guildford	14,345	4,952	6,081	6,146	6,417	4,731	7,125	49,797
Mole Valley	8,554	4,640	5,330	4,907	4,969	4,056	6,103	38,559
Reigate and Banstead	18,046	6,276	7,345	6,397	6,825	4,946	7,548	57,383
Runnymede	7,790	2,917	3,828	3,570	3,693	2,892	4,475	29,165
Spelthorne	8,105	3,110	4,689	4,271	4,474	3,547	5,461	33,657
Surrey Heath	9,682	3,749	4,874	4,258	4,455	3,506	5,124	35,648
Tandridge	9,208	4,184	4,899	4,411	4,590	3,576	5,183	36,051
Waverley	11,585	4,256	6,148	6,292	6,890	5,572	8,606	49,349
Woking	10,203	3,213	4,214	4,219	4,279	3,145	4,828	34,101

## 4 Co-ordinating the Council's Emergency Response

- 4.1 Following on from the declaration of the major incident the Council set up the governance arrangements agreed within our Emergency Plan. These mirrored those in place for the Surrey Local Resilience Forum (SLRF) with strategic (gold), tactical (silver) and operational (bronze) levels. Our governance arrangements are laid out in Appendix 2 and are summarised below;

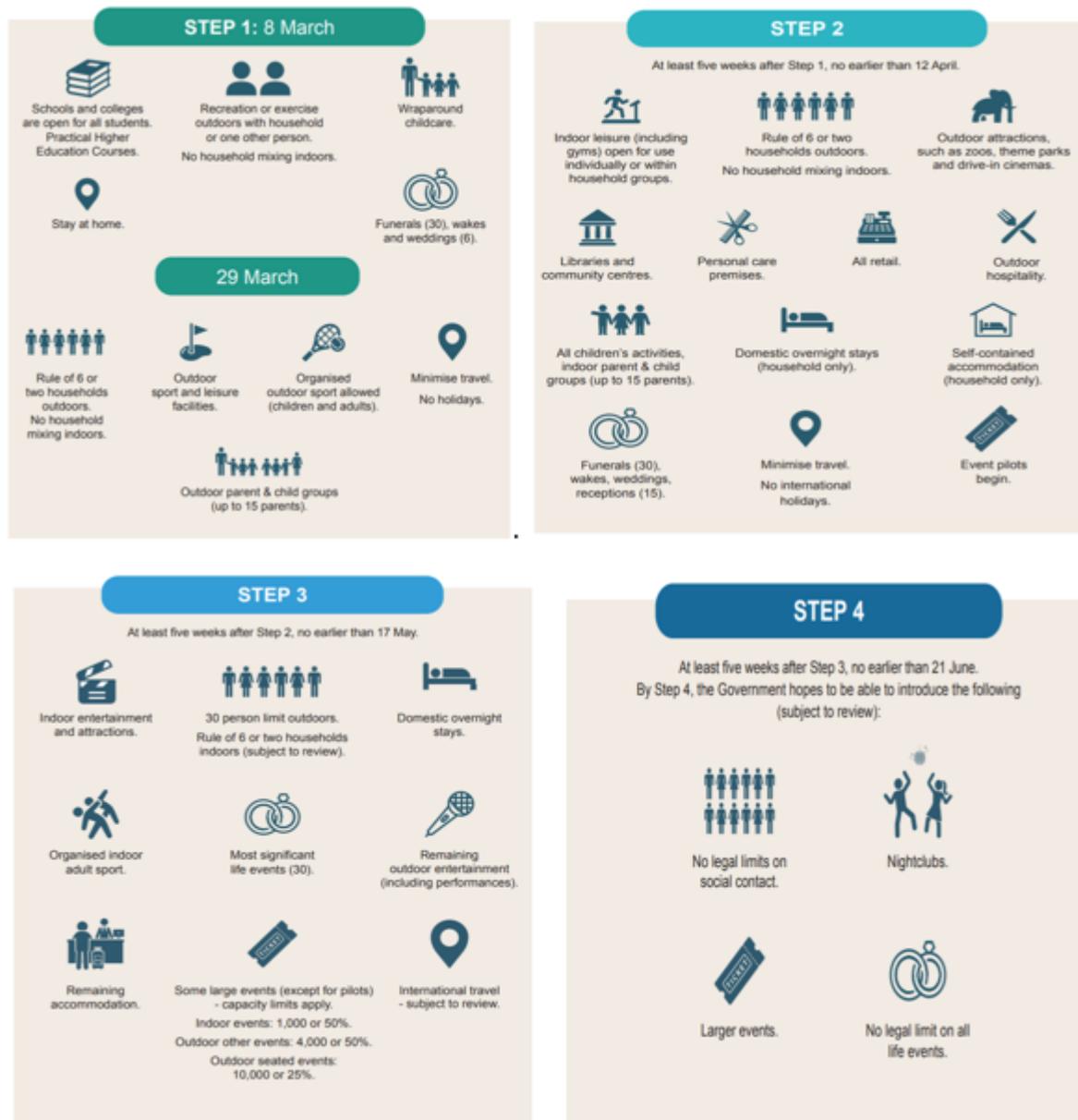


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- 4.2 The SLRF is the mechanism to set out a coordinated response in a local emergency through response and recovery stages. They support a multiagency approach working with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Implementing its command and control structure enabled decisions to be made at short notice and at pace. The availability of officers in the initial few weeks was varied due to the impact of Covid 19.
- 4.3 Officers covered a large number of teleconferences operated by the SLRF. In the early stages it was a challenge to cover all cells as there were many meetings. This settled however the response continued. The format of the cells have been regularly reviewed and updated by the SLRF.
- 4.4 The Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) or gold command has continued to meet throughout the pandemic, initially daily and now weekly and continues to be chaired on rotation by the Chief Constable, Chief Fire Officer or Chief Executive at SCC. They receive regular updates from all the cells in operation including health surveillance, PPE, excess deaths, vaccination sites, and testing programme. They have received one off requests for example for support of the surge testing at Woking and Egham and to provide food to children in the October half term when the national support programme ended. The Group also covers non Covid issue such as the normal winter pressures, Brexit and flooding. The major incident status has remained in place throughout although there are plans in place to stand this down as we move through the roadmap set out by government.
- 4.5 The Road Map is depending on 4 test measures being met and the dates provided are the earliest dates with schools returning on the 8<sup>th</sup> March, mixing of households or 6 people and outdoor sports returning from 29<sup>th</sup> March. Indoor leisure, all retail, libraries and community centres from 12<sup>th</sup> April, 30 people mixing outdoors, large events and accommodation etc from 17<sup>th</sup> May and the legal limits on social contact being removed and weddings and larger events returning from 21<sup>st</sup> June. As detailed below

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- 4.6 The Covid Management Group replaced the original Tactical Coordinating Group to have a greater focus on health. This group is now chaired by health and public health representatives.
- 4.7 The Multi-Agency Information Group (MIG) brings together communications colleagues across all Surrey districts and boroughs, external partners such as Surrey Police, Surrey Heartlands, universities, and specific Government organisations such as the Government Communications Service and the Department for Health. This group have been instrumental in ensuring key government messaging has been communicated in an efficient and timely way and has taken significant resource, impacting significantly on the work of our small communications team.

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- 4.8 A number of other groups / cells have been supported by the Council throughout the emergency including the Welfare cell and the Testing cell. The Council also sit on the Surrey Downs non clinical vaccination cell to provide support to the vaccination programme.
- 4.9 The Council have helped to identify suitable sites to roll out testing and vaccinations. Assisting the SLRF in identifying a site for mass vaccination at Epsom racecourse. This has resulted in number of Council owned venues being used to support the delivery of testing and vaccinations. We have supported the setup of a community testing site for asymptomatic testing at Bourne Hall, which is also part of the local testing programme that will support the return to work. Also we agreed and assisted in setting up the Local Testing site for symptomatic testing in the Upper High Street for residents to have a local service with easy accessibility. .
- 4.10 The Member's communication cell was initiated in March and received regular updates throughout the emergency with meetings called as needed. This ensured that we could disseminate information really quickly and provide a co-ordinated approach. The Members Update has also been used to disseminate information with Covid specials to keep Members updated. Members within the comms cell also shot video footage to reassure residents outlining the guidance as local level restrictions altered.
- 4.11 The Council made the decision to stand down the Incident Management Team and the Borough Emergency Command Centre at the end of June and move into a business as usual approach The BECC was in place for a total of 98 days and operated with a number of staff. Three officers held the role of BECC Manager. Over 25 staff assisted within the BECC. Resourcing of the BECC and administrative support was a challenge especially due to large number of staff who were shielding or living with someone that was shielding When the first lockdown was eased a debrief session was held and also a number of training sessions held to ensure that if required the BECC could be fully staffed
- 4.12 At the end of December the Council's Emergency Planning Advisor and Business Continuity Advisor retired. This role has been outsourced to Applied Resilience. This company currently provide emergency planning services to six other districts & boroughs as well as a range of other organisations.
- 4.13 A Pandemic Co-ordinating Group, initially set up prior to the first lockdown was re-established and is a forum to co-ordinate workloads, prepare plans, and highlight changes and any requests or support. This group includes officers from Environmental Health, Housing, the Contact Centre, Venues, Communications, Parking and Operational Services.

## **5 Maintaining Essential Services and Business Continuity**

- 5.1 Despite the focus on the emergency and interruptions to some services and facilities, we have continued to deliver Council services and have even made some service improvements for our residents. All services had in place a business continuity plan. Planning is carried out through well-established processes and significant work was undertaken in 2019 and early in 2020 by the Emergency Planning & Business Continuity Advisor to ensure the plans in key areas were up to date. The business continuity plans are not intended to cover all eventualities, but instead, to provide a base for dealing with incidents. The plans provided a good base but do need to be developed and adjusted as we move to a more business as usual approach and reflect on the learning point's changes to service delivery and the way in which we operate.
- 5.2 Some teams have experience significant resource pressures especially those that are very small. Some teams have been particularly impacted at different stages of this virus. This includes Housing, HR, Communications, Corporate Health & Safety, ICT and Environmental Health. Workloads have had to be reprioritised and new processes established. Staff have been redeployed to where most needed. Many of the Venues staff have redeployed and provide support for the High Street Taskforce.
- 5.3 Some key data is provided as an overview in Appendix 3.

### **Legal & Democratic Services**

- 5.4 The Legal & Democratic Services Team have continued to deliver services with a significant change to the way committee meeting have been held during the pandemic and going forward are planning for the elections on the 6 May for the Police & Crime Commissioner and Surrey County Council. The first virtual committee meeting was held on 13 May 2020 after legislation was approved. Following on from this over 63 committee meetings have successfully been held virtually to date. The Democratic Services Team have also provided support to the local test and trace programme within the Borough. This has supported the national agenda.

### **Remote working and technology**

- 5.5 Due to the government guidance that staff had to work from home where possible, ICT supported a huge shift to remote working. A small amount of additional equipment was purchased but mostly officers' personal equipment was utilised. The shift to home working overnight for half of our workforce created a range of issues that needed to be addressed with staff provided with sustained support by the ICT Help Desk. Over 150 staff are now supported daily to work remotely.

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- 5.6 Across many services digitalisation has accelerated with new ways of working identified. Services for residents have also been digitalised during the pandemic such as the new Abivus system which has gone live, with further modules being rolled out currently.
- 5.7 We have made the most of existing and new technology with the introduction of remote meetings and virtual committee meetings. These are effective and can be built into future working. A Remote Working Procedure is currently being developed to support staff and the new ways of working once we return to a more normal approach.

## **Contact Centre & Business Support**

- 5.8 The number of calls handled at the start of the lockdown was 10,300 in the first month an increase of 37%. The number of calls handled has fluctuated and tends to rise immediately after an announcement by central government. Over the course of the year we have seen an increase of 10% in calls overall. With Reception closed except for a short period we have also seen a large increase in online forms and emails. Normally we process 70 per day but this has increased to 170 to 260 per day.
- 5.9 Reception was open to visitors for 8 weeks for 3 half days per week and a successful triage system was in place supported by some redeployed staff. The majority of requests were directed to online including parking permits and any cash payments were directed to banks or post office. This has shown that Council business can be successfully managed digitally without the need for face to face interaction.

## **Housing & Homelessness**

- 5.10 The Housing Team seen an increase in demand and supported 65 people through the “Everyone in” programme. This provided decent accommodation to help alleviate the spread of the virus. The Housing Team support by redeployed staff have also undertaken over 1,000 welfare calls to support the needs of the families in temporary accommodation.
- 5.11 The Council bid for and received £157,000 of funding from the government’s next steps accommodation programme to help with the next stages of rough sleeping. This funding has been allocated as follows:-

Extended emergency accommodation costs - £84,287

Single Person Homeless Support Worker - £40,000

Landlord incentive payments - £12,000

Rent in Advance - £10,500

Deposits - £10,500

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- 5.12 In addition the Council bid for and received a further £15,000 Cold Weather and Protect + funding and has an allocation of £24,000 Rough Sleeper Initiative for assessment beds.
- 5.13 The team have developed new skills to work remotely and delivered support to a number of residents. An additional post has been recruited to support the Team and it is expected that the workload of the team will also be impacted as the furlough scheme ends and the ban on evictions is lifted.

## **Environmental Health**

- 5.14 The Environmental Health Team have provided support to businesses and residents to ensure compliance with guidance .The team have worked with public health when required and as part of the test and trace programme an additional Environmental Health Officer has been funded for one year . They have provided a range of guidance to business including developing an innovative and informative video about compliance for close contact businesses. The support for business especially focused where there was lower rates of compliance. This included a video to support close contact businesses who were inconsistently applying the guidance.
- 5.15 The team has experienced a 25% increase in requests for support. In addition, 190 complaints associated with Covid-19 have been investigated by the Team.

## **Cemetery**

- 5.16 During Covid the cemetery extension has been completed providing increased capacity for additional burials. This has proven to be timely when there have been excess deaths due to the impact of the pandemic. Additional equipment was hired and additional staff brought in to deal with the peaks in demand and ensure demand could be met.

## **Operational Services**

- 5.17 The Operational Services Team focused on priority services throughout the first national lockdown, focusing on the collection of waste supporting the most vulnerable with enhanced shopping services and meals at home. . Services such as grounds maintenance, countryside and parking were initially suspended. Parking services were reintroduced on 15 June when non-essential shops reopened. The Countryside Team reintroduced working with volunteers in the summer but this ceased when further restrictions were introduced.

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- 5.18 The markets have continued to operate through the pandemic, initially only essential food items but in addition the farmers market operated every Sunday from June, then the Vegan market was reintroduced. The Antique and Brocante market did open on 15th November but was subsequently stopped due to a further lockdown. The success of the markets during this time has been evident with residents seeking to shop locally. This will be an important success to build upon as part of the recovery.
- 5.19 Throughout the pandemic we have provided over 37,000 meals at home and support vulnerable residents through our community services.

## **HR & Comms**

- 5.20 Since March 2020, the Communication Team has delivered
- 5.20.1 96 Members Updates
  - 5.20.2 111 Staff Updates
  - 5.20.3 30,000 views per issue on E-Business newsletters
  - 5.20.4 2 covid special Borough Insights
  - 5.20.5 1.8 million Engagements through Social media posts (twitter, facebook, Instagram and linkedin)
- 5.21 The Team were bolstered by the addition of a temporary Communications Manager, as well as communications support from the Marketing Officer and the Playhouse Marketing Manager.
- 5.22 The HR Team have supported the many changes in our operating model ensuring that staff receive guidance, have updated protocols and advice. They have also worked closely with managers and occupational health to support staff who themselves are classed as extremely clinically vulnerable and clinically vulnerable.
- 5.23 The initial focus was on keeping staff safe and minimise any risk, providing teams with a range of guidance. Many officers who were directly impacted or families were directly impacted needed advice and support. .
- 5.24 During the pandemic staff have shown tremendous dedication, commitment and at times worked additional hours to ensure our response is robust. It has been important to ensure that morale across the teams has been kept up. The Members, Chief Executive and Leadership Team have sought to ensure staff have been continuously recognised and thanked through letters and staff updates to capture and celebrate this dedication.

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- 5.25 The level of absence between 1 March 2020 and 30 September 2020 was unprecedented. In addition to Covid-19 related absence, a significant number of employees were moved away from their normal roles to support the Council's emergency response, for example the BECC, Community Hub, Meals at Home, etc. Despite this, the Council continued to deliver priority services with limited impact. The table below shows COVID-19 related absence 1 March 2020 – 28 Feb 2021

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Total number of FTE days lost (March – Sept )</b>	<b>Total number of FTE days lost (Oct – Feb)</b>
Covid-19 Sickness	286	181
Covid-19 Self-isolation	196	56
Covid-19 Clinically vulnerable	2648	46
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>*3130</b>	<b>*283</b>

*\* Whilst the HR team has worked with managers throughout the pandemic to maintain accurate employee attendance records, it should be noted that it has not been possible to capture all Covid-19 related absences.*

- 5.26 Throughout June and July 2020 the HR team worked with the Council's Occupational Health provider to carry out risk assessments for 58 employees who were identified as having increased vulnerability to infection or poorer outcomes from Covid-19. These assessments identified personal demographics which may present a risk to the individual employee, for example underlying health conditions, age and ethnicity. As a result of these assessments, 55 employees were supported to safely return to the workplace.
- 5.27 In providing support to the organisation during the pandemic there have been many factors for the HR team to consider, including the impact of the lockdown and ongoing restrictions such as social distancing, self-isolation and shielding.
- 5.28 Some employees are fearful about contracting the virus and anxious about family and friends. Some have suffered bereavements, often without the chance to say goodbye or attend funerals.
- 5.29 Many of our employees have continued to work in essential and key roles in a range of challenging circumstances, with some working longer or more irregular hours to allow for effective social distancing. For some staff who were redeployed to support the emergency response, there has also been the requirement to deal with backlogs of "normal" work.

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- 5.30 The continuing threat of the virus means that some employees continue to work whilst retaining caring responsibilities, whilst many are dealing with other personal and financial circumstances that may have an impact on their mental health.
- 5.31 There are also fears about job security, particularly where Council services remain suspended and many employees have ongoing concerns around attending the workplace, including using public transport and staying safe in the work environment.
- 5.32 The HR team continue to provide advice and support to the organisation where an employee tests positive, including liaison with Public Health England as necessary and safeguarding the health/dealing with the anxieties of colleagues.
- 5.33 Normal employee relations case work and recruitment has been reinstated and the Team continue to support all the Divisions in ensuring workforce needs are met.
- 5.34 To support the return of services, the HR Team have also arranged for the vaccination of key staff as determined by the government Health & Social Care Cohort. In addition they have supported the roll out of asymptomatic testing for staff.

## **6 Additional Support for Local Businesses and Residents**

- 6.1 Our key responsibility is to protect our community especially those that are vulnerable whilst maintaining priority services.
- 6.2 For the business community we are committed to supporting businesses with a range of initiatives

### **High Street Task Force/Reopening High Streets**

- 6.3 Following the government guidance that non-essential shops could reopen on 15 June, the Council worked with partners on local safety measures to support safe trading environments in the Borough's high streets and retail areas. The Council established a High Street Taskforce and received £71,000 in funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)
- 6.4 An information campaign was launched in early 2021 to help businesses to understand all the new guidance. Many of the Venues team have supported the High Street taskforce with a dedicated resource to foster a safe shopping environment. The marketing campaign has included digital screens, newspaper ads, and posters on bus shelters, lampposts and buses.

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- 6.5 The taskforce has also carried out audits of retail and footfall to support the return of high streets. Their role have been extended to provide support at parks and open spaces in the Borough that have seen a marked increase in usage and received complaints regarding noncompliance.
- 6.6 As this report is being written a stand up plan is to be developed to support the return of non-essential retail and highstreets and retail on 12<sup>th</sup> April.

## **Business Grants & Rate Relief**

- 6.7 The Revenue & Benefits Team has had a central role in allocating the new national funding programmes to businesses.
- 6.8 In March 2020, the government announced the financial support for small businesses and businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors in the form of two retail grants and a small business grant. The Council paid out 499 grants to small businesses equating to £4,990,000. A further £5,015,000 was issued to 239 Retail, Hospitality and Leisure businesses.
- 6.9 Since the initial lockdown, there were 10 further grants to be processed and paid by the Team. In May, the Local Restrictions Grant (LRSG) was introduced, to assist small businesses that did not qualify for the other grants. Local grants have then ceased when national grants apply. The Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) to support larger businesses was introduced on the 31 December to provide for local authorities when under national or local tier 3 restrictions. The Table below identifies the total amount of grants paid to date.

<b>Grant</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Amount</b>
<b>Retail grant (10K) one-off</b>	64	£640,000
<b>Retail grant (25K) one-off</b>	175	£4,375,000
<b>Small business grant one off</b>	499	£4,990,000
<b>Local Discretionary grant</b>	72	£549,500
<b>Additional Restriction Grant</b>	60	£315,361
<b>Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) Addendum (Nov lockdown)</b>	322	£378,392
<b>Local Restrictions Support Grant (Sector)</b>	2	£3,250
<b>Local Restrictions Support Grant (Open)</b>	51	£40,665
<b>Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) Addendum (Post 2 Dec – Tier 2/3))</b>	6	£6,302
<b>Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) Addendum Tier 4</b>	307	£314,347

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<b>Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) Addendum (Post 05/01/21)</b>	307	£776,385
<b>Closed Business Lockdown Payment Scheme (one-off payment from 05/01/21)</b>	307	£1,553,000
<b>Christmas Support payment for wet-led pubs</b>	12	£12,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,184</b>	<b>£13,954,202</b>

- 6.10 In addition to the grants scheme, the government introduced a series of business rate relief to further support businesses. This included expanded retail and nursery discounts. To date the Team have processed and paid nearly £15 million in expanded rate relief, £430,000 in nursery relief and £15,000 in pub relief.

#### **Test & Trace Payments**

- 6.11 In November, the government introduced the test and trace isolation payments and to date the Team have paid nearly 80 payments to individuals.

#### **The Community Hub, Volunteers and supporting Vulnerable People**

- 6.12 A number of volunteers supported the emergency response, they provided a number of key roles in the Community Hub, contacting those shielded, carried out welfare checks and prescriptions runs. The Community Hub was set up from scratch on 24 March. Demand for the Community Hub services in the first lockdown was very high with both internal and external calls made. Over 10,000 calls were made in the first lockdown. We also carried out 460 welfare checks and coordinated a further 80 Police welfare checks.
- 6.13 The data on Clinically Extremely vulnerable has been released in stages in the first lockdown it was released in three cohorts. A small number of newly shielded were added between August and November 2020. A further tranche was released in February split between those under 70 and those over 70 as follows;

<b>Category</b>	<b>No of CEV residents</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Up to end of June (first lockdown)</b>	<b>2266</b>	<b>3 cohorts (24<sup>th</sup> March, 13<sup>th</sup> April &amp; 4<sup>th</sup> May 20)</b>
<b>Newly Shielded in local restrictions</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> August to 30<sup>th</sup> November</b>

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<b>Tranche 1&amp;2 – 3<sup>rd</sup> lockdown</b>	<b>1417</b>	<b>17<sup>th</sup> February 21</b>
<b>Total CEV's</b>	<b>3847</b>	

- 6.14 The final cohort was only recently released by the government with over 1.7 million new shielded people added nationally, with 1,417 added to our list after moderated by Surrey county Council.
- 6.15 The Community Hub was stood down after the first national lockdown on the 30<sup>th</sup> June. The systems and process to deliver the Community Hub were all fully documented and reviewed in the first lockdown and this was vital when asked to re-establish the Hub on the 5 November when the second lockdown commenced.
- 6.16 At the start of the second lockdown, the Welfare cell agreed that across Surrey, text messages would be issued to each new cohort with details on how to register to the National Shielding Support System (NSSS). Calls for our residents requiring support were triaged through our Contact Centre. The Health & Wellbeing Officer has operated the Community Hub with support from redeployed staff and volunteers as needed. The demand in the second lockdown (and third) has been lower as many residents had subsequently established support networks, obtained priority shopping and pharmacies arranged the delivery of prescriptions. However when support has been required, they have been more complex and time consuming. A further 600 calls have been made to those requesting support since the second lockdown was introduced we have made 43 referrals to the food bank, befriending and medication deliveries.
- 6.16 One of the challenge in March 2020 was dealing with the large and varied number of offers of assistance. The volume and speed of offers did overwhelm us and we could not respond to all offers immediately. We operated a system using the Central Surrey Volunteer Agency (CSVA) who were very supportive and who had a number of preregistered and pre checked volunteers.
- 6.17 We have worked with a range of partners including Age Concern, the Foodbank, and the Brigitte Trust, this was key in our ability to deliver services quickly and provide services to the most vulnerable elderly.

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## **Covid Champions**

- 6.18 CSVA are also managing the Covid Champions supporting the Borough in informing the harder to reach groups and provide support to the community. The Covid Champions are a network of organisations in our community who are sharing the messages from Public Health, gathering feedback and attending regular virtual meetings. CSVA are working with 14 organisations without a communications team providing a weekly update to support the public health message.
- 6.19 We are proud of the work undertaken and value working in partnership with volunteers and voluntary organisations.

## **7 Financial Impact**

- 7.1 The impact on the Council's financial position for 2020/21 is significant. The initial costs of the emergency response were captured through a specific code and governance was in place to monitor expenditure. The initial expenditure was on IT equipment and PPE.
- 7.2 At a very early stage, the Council suspended a number of non-priority services and scaled back on a number of other services. However the loss of income from services was huge and the initial forecasted position was reported to the Strategy & Resources Committee as £4.6m. This was later reduced by £3.8m as the government confirmed that they would part mitigate our losses. As reported to Council on 16<sup>th</sup> February we are predicting a net adverse variance for the year of £785,000, after taking into account the £3.8m government support. Of the net adverse variance, £720,000 is identified as outstanding rents and it is hoped that these will be paid as the payments were deferred to support our commercial tenants.
- 7.3 The Finance Team provided regular updates on the Council's financial position, first reporting to Strategy and Resources on 2 July and subsequently on 22 September. Covid 19 set a major challenge to achieve a balanced budget for 2021/22, With £950,000 provided in the 2021/22 budget to mitigate the ongoing impact of Covid. Following a number of service reviews, undertaken by officers, which identified £173k savings for next year, a balanced budget has been set by Full Council. The budget is supported by a £422,000 one-off use of strategic reserves.
- 7.4 The Chief Accountant has established a central register of all Covid-related funding received to date. Some funding is ring fenced with restrictions and other funding can be used more widely. This funding includes the Contain Outbreak Management Fund to support targeted testing, interventions, harnessing capacity, and focus on those disproportionately impacted.

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## 8 Covid Secure & Safety measures

- 8.1 The government published “Working Safely during Coronavirus “on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020. This supported the government road to recovery and suppressing the virus. An officer Covid Secure Group was established to review and implement the framework and ensure all our buildings, vehicles and sites are Covid Secure. These have been regularly updated as advice has changed and linked closely with our cleaning contractor and Projects Team. This created a significant amount of work with over 80 specific covid secure risk assessments requiring development and sign off.
- 8.2 To maintain essential frontline services the Council was able to supply PPE and hand sanitizers. These stocks are regularly checked and stocks maintained to ensure all staff are protected.

## 9 Recovery

- 9.1 The government have announced a new map for recovery and the Pandemic Coordinating Group will assist with the operational stand up plans to return services, venues and facilities safely.
- 9.2 The Service Delivery Plan 2021/22 will reflect the work programme to support the delivery including key work streams including the HR Road Map and the ICT Road Map.
- 9.3 The Members Recovery cell met in the July 2020 and agreed the overarching principles to our Recovery in line with the Council’s Vision and Four Year Plan. These principles are;
- 9.3.1 **Principle 1: Green and Vibrant (our places)** - Supporting the shift to more sustainable transport (including walking, cycling and public transport) and reducing the Council’s footprint through more modern working practices
- 9.3.2 **Principle 2: Opportunity and Prosperity (our businesses)**  
Taking a central role in the recovery of our local economy, supporting the recovery of our high streets, Epsom Market and attracting inward investment and jobs.
- 9.3.3 **Principle 3: Safe and well (our people)** Managing the continued emergency response, ensuring that the most vulnerable in the community are supported, while enabling services to recovery safely for staff and service users, and promoting the borough as a safe and welcoming place
- 9.3.4 **Principle 4: Cultural and Creative (our outlook)** to learn from the experience of the pandemic, taking a fresh perspective to the challenges we faced. Supporting the re-introduction of safe cultural

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activities and events in the borough (including in the Market Place, Bourne Hall, Playhouse, Cinema, Racing Industry, Film Festival)

9.3.5 **Principle 5: Smart and Connected (our approach)** Strengthen partnership working across local businesses, voluntary organisations, local statutory agencies and with neighbouring boroughs and districts. Strengthen the Council's digital infrastructure to support more on-line delivery and more modern working practices. Using lessons learned from remote meetings, new ways of working to improve internal processes and digital connectivity.

9.3.6 **Principle 6: Well led (your council)** Putting the Council in a more financially sustainable footing, with a greater focus on the top priorities, utilising technology to streamline the way we work and actively support the wellbeing and success of all our staff

9.4 The recovery programme "Building Back Better" – our focus on brighter future as we come out of lockdown, focuses around the Vision and Four Year Plan 2020- 2024) and consists of four streams;

9.4.1 Rebuilding our Community

9.4.2 Rebuilding our Economy

9.4.3 Greater collaboration with neighbouring boroughs and districts

9.4.4 Organisational Review

9.5 As business grants and furlough come to an end this will have a significant impact on our economy. Full details on the recovery will become clearer as the major incident is stood down.

9.6 Specific reports on aspects of the recovery will be brought to the relevant committees as needed.

## 10 Learning Points

10.1 As with any emergency or emergency exercise a formal debrief is a key part of the process to review and reflect on the processes and procedures used. This is normally undertaken at the end of the incident however due to the scale and longevity of the pandemic this has been undertaken in stages and captured as we go along. Further debriefs will be undertaken as we move into recovery.

10.2 Some of the key successes to the Council's emergency response include;

10.2.1 Strong team working and operational co-ordination

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- 10.2.2 Personal commitment of staff
  - 10.2.3 Large scale remote working with significant support for ICT
  - 10.2.4 Virtual meetings and committee meetings
  - 10.2.5 Enhanced communications to staff, Members and Businesses
  - 10.2.6 Flexibility of teams to deliver the new guidance, regulations, grants and requests for support
  - 10.2.7 Working with partners including the voluntary sector.
- 10.3 As part of our debrief we have captured views to ensure we learn lessons and although a unique situation there are a number of improvements that can be implemented. We have captured information from;
- 10.3.1 Internal Audit of the Emergency Response.
  - 10.3.2 Debrief held in July with staff involved in the response
  - 10.3.3 Feedback from key officers
  - 10.3.4 Surrey Local Resilience Forum report on lessons learnt
  - 10.3.5 Staff surveys
- 10.4 Some of these learning points have already been actioned and others are longer term and will be implemented once we are in the full recovery phase. Once the major incident has been stood down, Applied Resilience will assist with a debrief exercise. Updates will be reviewed Leadership Team and where relevant action built into the Service Delivery Plan and the work programme of Applied Resilience. The key learning points include;
- 10.5 **Resourcing the Emergency Response** - A report was taken to Leadership Team after the first lockdown which confirmed resourcing for the BECC would be prioritised should it be stood up. In addition, training on the BECC was provided to a range of additional staff to ensure that the BECC could be operated for an extended period with less reliance on the core staff involved.
- 10.6 **Service delivery** - The full impact of the pandemic is unlikely to be clear until out of current lockdown and there are a range of issues in relation to backlogs, access to resources that will be assessed with current polices and services available to staff .

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- 10.7 **The Organisational Development Strategy and People Framework** – This will need to be refreshed to reflect the changing environment and new ways of working. This will be built into the HR Road Map and include a Remote Working Procedure.
- 10.8 **Recording of decisions** - The decisions of the IMT were fully recorded but not shared consistently with all Leadership Team. This was rectified to during the first lockdown to ensure all minutes could be accessed by the Leadership Team. The Emergency Plan will be updated to ensure record keeping is clarified
- 10.9 **Working with voluntary organisations and volunteers** - We should continue to grow the new relationships with partners on the basis of the success and support provided to our community.
- 10.10 **The business continuity plans and a business impact analysis** – These will be updated to reflect the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and maintained centrally.
- 10.11 **Communications in an emergency** - Prior to the pandemic, the LGA had completed a Peer Review of the Council’s communications, this identified that communications needs to be strategic, planned and well resourced. The critical role and resourcing of the Communications team will be key in any emergency. The team have benefited from having additional internal support and this should be developed as part of implementing the recommendations from the Peer Review.
- 10.12 **Digital Switch** - As a result of the pandemic there has been a digital switch by residents and this should be developed as we roll out phase 2 of the CRM replacement in the ICT Road Map.
- 10.13 **Office Accommodation** - The need for large office space and future accommodation needs to be assessed in conjunction with the digital shift. This will be reviewed as part of service reviews to support the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

## 11 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

### 11.1 Impact Assessment

11.1.1 Keeping people safe and well, tackling social isolation, and getting people back into employment will be a key part of the next steps.

11.1.2 Supporting the re-opening businesses and securing investment in jobs.

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11.1.3 Building stronger services to support residents.

## 11.2 Crime & Disorder

11.2.1 None for the purpose of this report

## 11.3 Safeguarding

11.3.1 The role of the Community Hub has been to support those that are most vulnerable and have had agreed safeguarding processes in place.

## 11.4 Dependencies

11.4.1 Our emergency response is subject to further changes in government guidance and the transmission rates

## 11.5 Other

11.5.1

## 12 Financial Implications

12.1 The financial implications are addressed in the report but will be far reaching and part of the strategy for recovery in Building Back Better

12.2 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** The Council has set a budget for 2021/22. The financial impact of Covid-19 will continue to be monitored closely and reported through the Council's existing financial reporting framework.

## 13 Legal Implications

13.1 None arising from the contents of this report.

13.2 **Monitoring Officer's comments:** None arising from the contents of this report.

## 14 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

14.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The Council's Emergency response has impacted on the delivery of the Corporate Plan that was agreed in January 2020

14.2 **Service Plans:** The Service Delivery Plan for 2020/21 was updated in July and agreed through the Member Recovery cell to reflect the impact on all services. The Service Delivery Plan for 21/22 is being developed and will shortly be agreed.

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14.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** as we move into a true recovery phase, the implications on the environment will be assessed as part of our climate change

14.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:**

14.5 **Partnerships:** The Council are part of a multi-agency partnership within the Surrey Local Resilience Forum. The governance and role of the SLRF is being reviewed as part of lessons learnt arrangements.

**15 Background papers**

15.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

**Previous reports:**

Council Emergency Response to Covid – Strategy & Resources  
Committee 2 July 2020

**Other papers:**