

## THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

<b>Head of Service:</b>	Leadership Team
<b>Wards affected:</b>	All
<b>Urgent Decision?</b>	No
<b>If yes, reason urgent decision required:</b>	
<b>Appendices (attached):</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Thank you messages to Council and staff</li><li>2. Headline response numbers</li><li>3. Staffing the emergency response</li><li>4. Council Emergency response structure</li><li>5. Council Recovery structure</li><li>6. Terms of Reference Members Communications Cell</li><li>7. Terms of Reference Member Recovery Cell</li><li>8. Terms of Reference – High Streets Task Force</li></ol>

### Summary

This report sets out the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic following a major incident being formally declared across Surrey on 19 March 2020.

### Recommendation (s)

#### Council are asked to:

- (1) **Note the significant action taken by the Council and its staff in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, including providing essential support to the most vulnerable in the local community and to local businesses and action to keep essential services running.**

## **1 Reason for Recommendation**

- 1.1 The Council and the local community faced (and continue to face) a significant and unprecedented challenge created by the global Covid-19 Pandemic. In this context, the Council as a provider of essential services responded immediately and vigorously to the unfolding situation which impacted on all parts of the Council's operation. This report sets out the key role and actions undertaken by the Council during the emergency period.

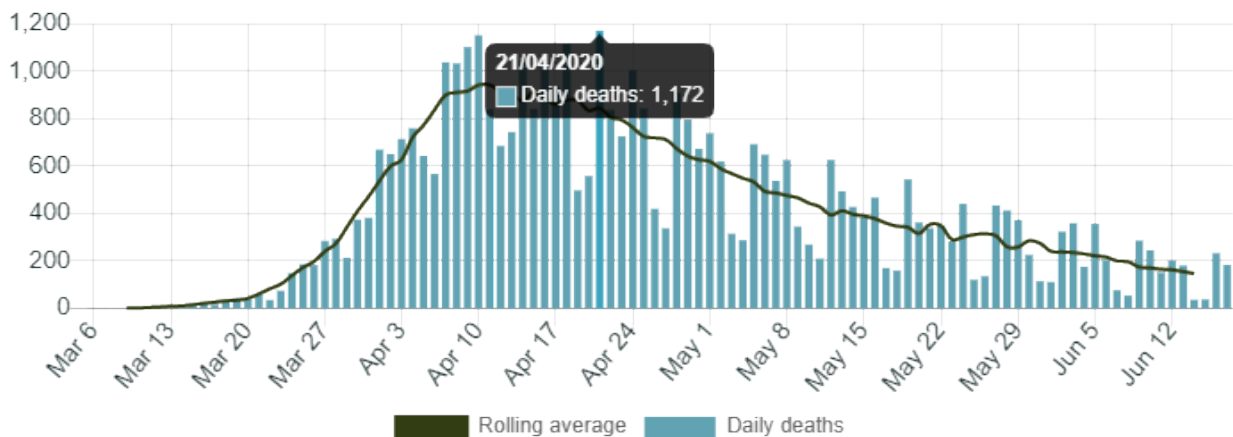
## **2 Background**

- 2.1 Local government has a crucial role in responding to emergencies and helping communities impacted by them. The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 sets out the legislative framework for responding to civil emergencies, which includes an event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare or the environment of a place. The Civil Contingencies Act sets out the structure and governance for coordinating the emergency response
- 2.2 On the 31 December the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission, China, reported a cluster of cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, Hubei Province. This led to a novel coronavirus being identified and named Covid-19. On the 28 January the death of a UK National due to Covid-19 was confirmed on the Diamond Princess Ship anchored at the Yokohama port in Japan. By 5 March the first death in the UK was confirmed due to Covid-19.
- 2.3 On the 11 March 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a pandemic, confirming that it had spread world-wide.
- 2.4 On 19 March a Civil Emergency was declared across Surrey, and the following day the Government announced the closure of all schools, restaurants, pubs and social venues. On 24 March the Government confirmed in a nation-wide text alert that everyone should stay at home (other than NHS and other essential workers), marking the start of the lock-down.
- 2.5 In responding to the unfolding emergency, the Council had to establish emergency governance arrangements and be mindful of and stay aligned to the unfolding national and Surrey-wide requirements which have continued throughout the emergency period.
- 2.6 As a category 1 provider under the Civil Contingencies legislation the Council are part of the Surrey Local Resilience Forum (SLRF). These local resilience forums are a mechanism set out to co-ordinate local emergency, responses and recovery and interfaces with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

### 3 The scale and speed of the pandemic

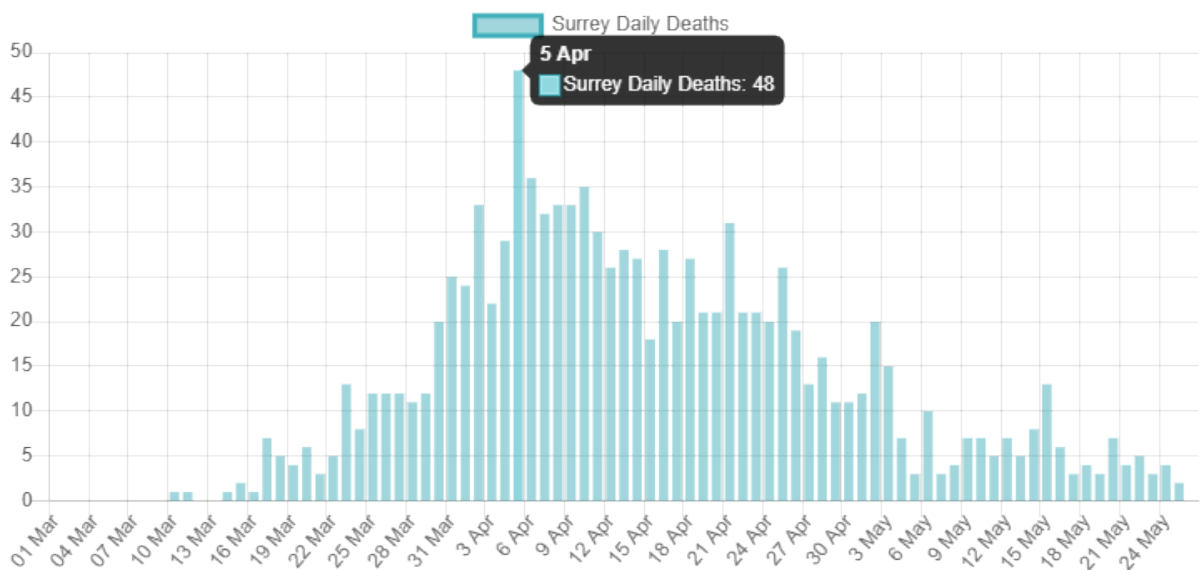
**3.1** On the 31 January 2020 the first cases of Covid-19 in the UK were confirmed and the first reported death due to the virus followed by 5 March. On 15 March 2020 the first death due to Covid-19 was confirmed in Epsom and Ewell.

**3.2** At the time of writing on 18 June 2020, the total number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 in the UK is 299,251 and the total number of deaths 42,153. The following graph shows how the number of fatalities due to Covid-19 has changed over this period.

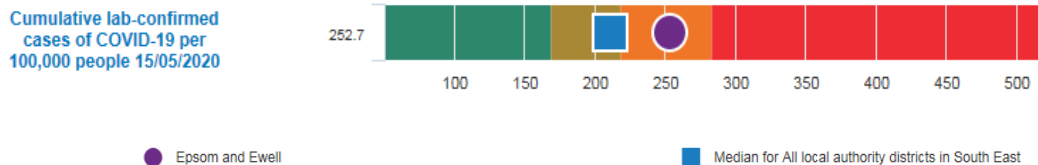


**3.1** Although daily deaths in the UK due to Covid-19 have been falling since 21 April 2020, the numbers in other countries are still on the increase. The World Health Organisation has reported that the total number infected with Covid-19 globally is global infection at 8,223,454 and total deaths due to Covid-19 at 444,813.

**3.2** Across Surrey the deaths due to Covid-19 have been falling since the peak in 5 April 2020.



- 3.3 In Epsom and Ewell number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 per 100,000 population has been higher than average for Boroughs and Districts in the South East of England. The reason for this is not known but Epsom and Ewell's close proximity to London which has the highest rates of mortality due to Covid-19 in the UK, may be a contributing factor.



- 3.4 Looking at the numbers of confirmed cases of Covid-19 infection across Boroughs and Districts in Surrey, Epsom and Ewell was broadly at the mid-point and less than half the level of the borough with the highest number.

As of 17 June 2020

**Lab confirmed cases**

**Borough**

Elmbridge	263
Epsom and Ewell	208
Guildford	386
Mole Valley	230
Reigate and Banstead	524
Runnymede	195
Spelthorne	192
Surrey Heath	285
Tandridge	204
Waverley	306
Woking	189

- 3.5 The impact of the pandemic on the lives of local people and local businesses has been unprecedented and its aftermath including the impact on the economy is likely to be felt for some time into the future. One measure of this is the impact on local employment. Even with the furloughing arrangements that have been in place, there has been a sharp increase in the number of new claimants in the borough for Universal Credit since the start of the lock down. For example the number of new claimants increased from just 34 in the week commencing 8 March, to 569 in the week commencing 22 March – probably the biggest increase on record.

- 3.6 Once a major incident was declared across Surrey on 19 March 2020, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council immediately put in place its own established arrangements for coordinating its response to the emergency. This covered the following:

- Co-ordinating the Council's emergency response
- Maintaining essential services
- Establishing the Community Hub to support the most vulnerable
- Support for businesses impacted by the pandemic
- Keeping staff safe and well
- Planning and coordinating the recovery of services

#### **4 Coordinating the Council's Emergency Response**

- 4.1 Following the declaration of major incident across Surrey on 19 March 2020, the Borough Council then immediately put in place the necessary governance arrangements at a borough level. This enabled the Council to align to the Command Centre arrangements established by the Surrey-wide Local Resilience Forum SLRF including their Strategic Coordinating Group, (Gold), Tactical Co-ordinating Group (TSG ) or Silver and a range of operational cells covering an Incident Management Team and Borough Emergency Control Centre:

Cell 1: Welfare (Volunteer & Vulnerable)

Cell 2: Excess Death Planning / Death Management Group

Cell 3: Supporting Critical/Key Workers

Cell 4: Local Infrastructure

Cell 5: Multi-Agency Information Group (MIG)

Cell 6: Workforce

Cell 7: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Cell 8: Community Care

Cell 9: Covid-19 Surge Capacity

- 4.2 A number of officers from across the Council came forward at the start of the emergency to support these cells and the other elements of the Council's emergency response. They took on new roles, worked long hours and in difficult circumstances to ensure that everything possible was being done to respond to the unfolding emergency.

# Council

## 14 July 2020

- 4.3 The Strategic Co-ordinated Group (SCG) operated from Surrey Police headquarters at Mount Browne, initially met twice daily including weekends and was jointly supported by both the Council's Head of Corporate Governance, Performance & Policy and the Head of HR & OD. The Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Advisor supported the TSG with twice daily meetings and a number of staff were set up for the key contacts for the relevant operational cells. The MIG were responsible for providing the top lines brief and formed the basis of subsequent local borough level communications. .
- 4.4 In Epsom and Ewell, the Council's operational response is delivered through an Incident Management Team (IMT) and a Borough Emergency Control Centre (BECC). The governance and structure was set up under incredibly challenging circumstances at the start of the national lock-down period, and required important operational decisions to be taken in a rapidly changing environment and involved long working hours for all those involved. As well as dealing with Covid-19, the Council's emergency arrangements also had to respond to other incidents including outage at Epsom Water Treatment works potentially affecting 18,000 homes.
- 4.5 The role of the BECC is to co-ordinate the council's tactical response to an incident. It is scalable and adaptable resource and its primary objectives were to:
- Provide a focal point for the tactical emergency
  - Provide a single point of contact
  - Ensure accurate records are maintained
- 4.6 The BECC was initially operated 7 days a week and had 4 cells covering ;
- Environment
  - Information and support
  - Welfare
  - Staff
- 4.7 In total 5 borough Council staff came forward to take on key roles in the IMT, 11 staff in the BECC, 13 staff for the Community Hub and 15 staff in the front-line Response Team.
- 4.8 Operational Incident Management Team (IMT) Structure

<b>Incident Management Team (IMT)</b> <u>Membership</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• CE / COO</li><li>• Head of HR/OD</li><li>• Head of PPG</li><li>• Head of H&amp;ES</li><li>• BECC Manager</li><li>• Comms</li><li>• EE Police</li></ul>	<b>FROM THE IMT - information for actioning / communications</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• BECC Manager</li><li>• Communications Cell (public info, Members, etc)</li><li>• HR/OD – staff issues, staff messaging</li><li>• Feeding into the multi-agency Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG)</li></ul>	<b>EEBC key priorities (ranked)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staff safety</li><li>• Save life and reduce harm (working with key partners)</li><li>• Supporting residents, esp. vulnerable</li><li>• Providing services essential to the response to Covid19</li><li>• Protect the local economy</li></ul>
---	---	--

- 4.9 The Borough Emergency Control Centre Structure which included the Police ensured that there was a joined up approach across the borough:

**Staffing**

- Staff welfare
- Staff queries
- Ongoing HR activity (e.g. payroll)
- Identifying staff to support the response

**Support and Information Cell**

- Triage emails into the Covid19 a/c
- HR (workforce issues, staff messaging, managing volunteers, redeploying staff)
- Collating data for IMT
- Store incoming information
- Check minutes of multi-agency meetings and bring B/D relevant issues to the attention of the BECC Manager
- Legal issues

BECC – provides the conduit for all information relating to the tactical and operational response

**Environment Cell**

- Buildings (support staff, cleaning, maintenance)
- Cemetery Services (provision of burial space, services)
- Refuse and other collections
- Car parks / parking permits
- Street cleaning
- Environmental issues / business closures / PPE

**Welfare Cell / Community Hub**

- support vulnerable people with phone calls, referring on to other agencies, collection of prescriptions, delivery of standard food boxes)
- Community Services (meals at home, shopping, community alarm)
- Housing
- Revs and Bens
- Liaison with voluntary groups / volunteers

- 4.10 A Members Communications Cell was established early in the emergency and consisted of those Council Members who had previously been identified for this role as part of the Council's established emergency planning arrangements, and had already been trained in Crisis communication.
- 4.11 Council Members have also had a central role in planning the recovery process through the establishment of a Member Recovery Cell. This has reviewed plans for re-opening services that were suspended at the start of the pandemic and have helped prioritise the services and functions that needed to return first, ensuring that this is done in a coordinated way and reflects local need.

## 5 Maintaining Essential Services

- 5.1 Once a major incident was declared across Surrey and following the Government's lock down instructions, one of the Council's first priorities was to also take action to ensure that essential services could continue to operate despite the very significant challenges. This included core front-line services such as refuse collection and recycling, keeping parks open, the streets cleaned, continuing to provide the meals at home service, customer service and revenues and benefits to name a few.
- 5.2 Council also relied on the continued operation of key Council support services such as, Communications, Finance, ICT, and Human Resources and Payroll, Property and Estates and Legal and Democratic Services.

## Council

### 14 July 2020

- 5.3 Communications has also had to be ramped up, ensuring that residents, businesses, Members and staff were kept informed of the rapidly changing circumstances and the evolving government advice. Despite more than quadrupling the communications output through key channels and moving to daily briefings during the most fast moving periods of the emergency it has still been very challenging to keep up with the pace at which things have continued to change and the uncertainty created by national policy announcements during the pandemic that were not always accompanied at the same time by the necessary detail on which to properly determine the implications for the Council. To date 48 Staff Updates and 47 Members Updates have been produced and published by the Communications team providing key information in a timely as possible way.
- 5.4 The Council's ICT team in particular needed to rapidly increase the capacity of core Council systems to be operated remotely, and enable relevant Council staff to carry out their work from home. They also procured and deployed a video conference solution to enable home working via teleconferencing and videoconferencing, and with changes in Government legislation, enabled virtual public meetings to take place, including enabling Planning Committee meetings to re-commence.
- 5.5 The Council's Contact Centre and Business Support service was also available throughout ensuring that Council main phone number, email addresses and enquiries through the Council's website were answered, followed up and responded to and that residents always had access to the most up to date information.
- 5.6 The Council's Revenues and Benefits service not only needed to ensure that residents continued to receive the welfare benefits that they were entitled to but also had to respond to a dramatically increased workload in managing and distributing the various financial support schemes for businesses that were put in place and that are described in more detail later in this report.
- 5.7 The Council's Environmental Health staff had a key role in ensuring that businesses complied with Government guidance during the lock down, responded to a higher number of neighbour complaints as well as responding to requests for advice and guidance from numerous local businesses including restaurants that are hoping to reopen in July. The staff are also on standby to assist with the programme of Test and Trace with their skills gained from managing infectious disease outbreaks.
- 5.8 The Council's licencing team continued to help older and more vulnerable people remain safe and independent at home by working with the NHS and care workers to support hospital discharges by helping to make sure people's homes were safe and accessible.

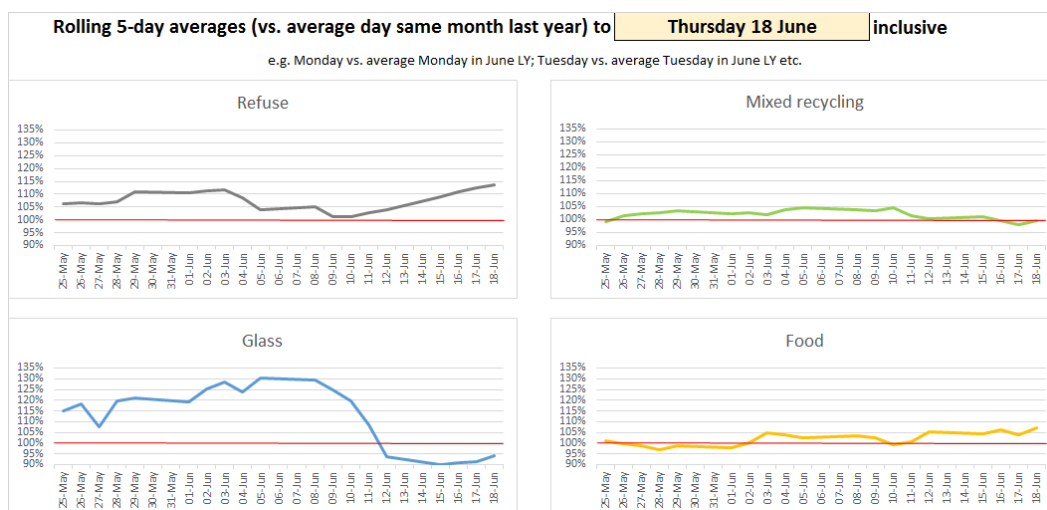


## Council

### 14 July 2020

- 5.9 The Council's finance service has managed to support the organisational response to COVID-19 by monitoring the impact of the pandemic on the Council finances and providing central government with regular detailed information including projected and actual losses incurred through this crisis. This information is being used to support the Council argument for significant additional financial support from Central Government while at the same time finance staff have still been managing to prepare the Council's year-end financial statements within the statutory deadlines.
- 5.10 The Council's front-line housing service needed to find a way to continue to operate entirely remotely while at the same time responding to new Government policy in relation to immediately accommodating people who were living on the streets at the time. The housing service also saw a significant increase in homelessness enquiries and the number of households that had to be provided with temporary accommodation also increased markedly during this period.
- 5.11 The Council's cemetery has unfortunately had to respond to the increased number of funerals and burials in the borough, including for people who had died from Covid-19. As well as relying on Council staff to conduct internments, additional grounds maintenance staff have had to be deployed and extra heavy equipment hired to create additional grave spaces, while further safety and social distancing arrangements have had to be put in place.
- 5.12 The core statutory planning service has also continued throughout this period operating remotely to continue to process planning applications within statutory timescales. In addition, with significant support and preparations by the Council's legal and democratic services team, it was possible to successfully commence with the Council's first virtual Planning Committee meetings.
- 5.13 The HR and Payroll service also had a key role in supporting managers and staff during the emergency response, ensuring that they had the advice they needed, providing up to date guidance on health matters, leave, overtime and wellbeing issues aligned to the evolving national guidance. The team have produced 8 separate sets of guidance for staff and managers since the start of the Pandemic.
- 5.14 The Council's legal and democratic services team continued to ensure that the Council's actions during the emergency period were informed by timely legal advice and had a key role in delivering the changes that were needed in relation to contracts and the establishment of virtual Committee meetings.

- 5.15 Maintaining the operation of essential services was particularly challenging given the need to reallocate Council staff into the emergency response and later into the planning of the recovery, the impact of staff sickness and the number of staff shielding or caring for vulnerable dependants (details of which are set out later in this report), and because many of the Council's front-line services relied on staff physically being present in the workplace at a time when understandably there was a lot of fear and anxiety in the general population during the official lock down.
- 5.16 Services such a Grounds Maintenance, Countryside and Parking were temporary suspended with staffing prioritised for essential services and staff redeployed to support with the delivery of Meals at Home. Operational services operated in a flexible and fluid way to ensure that priorities were managed and delivered during an extremely challenging period. This particular group of staff were out and about dealing with every day matters on the front line during the pandemic. The front line response ensuring essential services are delivered has been impressive.
- 5.17 While the Council has succeeded in continuing to operate essential large scale services like refuse and recycling collection throughout the pandemic crisis, the service has also had to respond to significant shifts in resident behaviour and the graphs below covering May and June illustrate. Interestingly the Council collected 12% more glass overall as part of the 4,324 tonnes of rubbish that the Council has recycled through the pandemic.



- 5.18 Another important task for Council staff during this period has been managing the safe and orderly suspension of other services. For example, the temporary closure of the Council's Health and Wellbeing Centre involved careful assessment of the needs of all the service users to ensure that alternative arrangements were put in place for their wellbeing. The temporary closure of the Epsom Playhouse, involved contacting the production companies of all the shows that had bookings to explore if they could be rescheduled for another time, and contacting customers to arrange refunds.

- 5.19 Maintaining essential front-line operations during this period has also relied in part on securing an adequate supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and hand sanitisers. For example for staff preparing and delivering meals to the homes of medically vulnerable older people. The government guidance on PPE has been a challenge as it has been updated regularly, however recognising the priority given to NHS and Social Care workers, the Council has been able to source and sustain the levels of PPE needed for front-line staff. The Council's cleaning contractor Churchill were also very supportive in obtaining dispensers and adequate supplies of sanitizers.

## **5.20 Establishing a Community Hub**

- 5.21 The impact of the Covid-19 restrictions, including lockdown, caused significant inconvenience for most of the population. The impact was particularly severe on those 900 residents who were already known to be vulnerable from their existing use of council services, such as being registered for help with household bin pull outs and who all required the Community Hub to make contact. These vulnerable people might be reliant on neighbours, family or friends for other help during lockdown, such as help with shopping or medication collection.
- 5.22 In addition there was another emerging population of those who had been determined to be Extremely Clinically Vulnerable and therefore required to self-isolate (initially until the end of June 2020) and were known as shielded.
- 5.23 The Council created a Community Hub on 25 March 2020 and located in the Town Hall and was set up to ensure all residents who were known to be vulnerable and those registered, following strict clinical criteria, as shielding would be contacted and offered support during the Covid-19 emergency.
- 5.24 As the start of the Covid-19 crisis, key staff from a range of Council services actively came forward to volunteer from less-urgent service areas to help establish the Community Hub, initially operating seven days a week including bank holidays, and they were joined by additional volunteers from the community and local Councillors working remotely.
- 5.25 The Community Hub had a key role in making welfare calls to the borough's most vulnerable and socially isolated residents and ensuring that they had the information, essential supplies (eg food and medication) and support services they needed. To date, the Council made some 10,000 calls to vulnerable residents during the pandemic.

## Council

### 14 July 2020

- 5.26 The government had identified the shielded population as the priority for welfare calls. The Community Hub started making welfare calls to the shielded and the vulnerable residents simultaneously. To assist with this task and to ensure initial contact could be made urgently, a small number of Members, who had offered their help, were asked to take over the welfare calls to the vulnerable residents and the Community Hub then focussed on making contact with the medially shielded.
- 5.27 Initially there was great uncertainty about the numbers of shielding residents within the borough. However, as of June 2020 there are 2,536 identified shielded residents within the borough. This growth in the shielded population was the result of further refinement by GPs of their patient data, referrals from hospital consultants as well as changes in NHS guidance on the nature of who should be shielded.
- 5.28 The shielded data was released to Surrey County Council by central government in stages with the first cohort data being provided to the Community Hub in the last week in March 2020.
- 5.29 Between March and June 2020 there have been 3 main cohorts of shielded data released to the borough's Community Hub.

Category	Number of new shielded residents	Date of release
Cohort 1	1015	24 March 2020
Cohort 2	781	13 April 2020
Cohort 3	740	4 May 2020
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2536</b>	

- 5.30 The success of the Community Hub was heavily reliant on effective partnership working with a range of statutory partners and voluntary organisations. Not exclusively but the following organisation had regular contact with the Hub:
- Age Concern Epsom and Ewell
  - Say Well
  - Surrey police
  - Central Surrey Voluntary action (CSVA)
  - Surrey County Council Adult Social Care
  - Brigitte trust
  - Mary Frances Trust
  - British Red Cross

## Council

14 July 2020

- 5.31 Age Concern Epsom and Ewell (ACEE) provide essential support to the older residents within the borough and during the Covid19 emergency ACEE provided essential support to qualifying residents including shopping and medication collection and delivery services as well as befriending and welfare checks. The rapid mobilisation of Age Concern's support offer contributed significantly in the success in making that important initial contact with vulnerable residents and the provision of essential services throughout the emergency. Their involvement greatly reduced the demands on the Community Hub and many shielded residents who were eligible for support from ACEE were directly referred into their service.
- 5.32 The overwhelming response to welfare calls to both the vulnerable and shielded population has been very positive. Those shielded residents in the later cohorts were often unaware they were identified as shielding or of the need for them to self-isolate.
- 5.33 Community safety was the primary consideration for the Community Hub. The welfare calls to the vulnerable and shielded populations were essential and in addition to providing a friendly voice during the emergency, they were able to check that the resident had sufficient arrangements in place for the duration of the self-isolating period.
- 5.34 Amongst the welfare checks performed during the call was assurance that sufficient food and medicines were in place both at the time of the call but also for the duration of the self-isolating period. At times the callers identified urgent need for food and arrangements were made to get a food box delivered from the central distribution centre at The Spectrum in Guildford. There were numerous occasions where emergency collections of medications were needed and the Community Hub would refer urgent request to the council's Borough Emergency Control Centre (BECC) so that a driver could be dispatched to collect and deliver the medication.
- 5.35 Welfare checkers also explored whether there were any emotional, loneliness or mental health issues in which case, further support was offered or referrals into other services made as appropriate and follow up welfare calls would remain in place to ensure no one was left alone.
- 5.36 Prolonged periods of self-isolation can give rise to significant risks to an individual's welfare. In situations where, despite numerous attempts at contacting a shielding individual, no contact could be made, there was a team of welfare checkers, both staff and suitably safety checked volunteers, who were dispatched to visit the shielded resident in person
- 5.37 This welfare visit was to ensure the persons safety and that the matter did not require to be escalated further. The local Police Community Support Officers (PSCOs) also provided support for welfare checks where appropriate and worked closely and effectively with the Community Hub.

## Council

### 14 July 2020

- 5.38 Shielded and vulnerable borough residents were well looked after by referrals from the Community Hub into other existing council community services including Meals at Home service, local shopping service or emergency medication deliveries. With the expansion of Meals at Home service during the pandemic the Council provided a special meal on VE Day so that resident could enjoy a celebratory meal in the comfort of their own home. A number of staff including the Leadership Team volunteered their time to deliver the meals which were well received on this special day.
- 5.39 There were occasions when serious safeguarding concerns were identified by welfare callers. The Hub managed such instances promptly and with great care and developed close and effective working relationships with local GPs, Adult Social Care and our local Beat Police Officers in addressing these concerns and ensuring appropriate referrals were made.
- 5.40 The Hub followed up every case to ensure expected action was taken and that no shielded resident was missed or not responded to by the relevant organisation.
- 5.41 The types of services required varied widely, with mental health becoming more significant as the period of self-isolation continued. Below is an illustrative list of the types of support or assistance required by both the vulnerable and shielded populations:
- Mental health/dementia concerns
  - Safeguarding (including domestic abuse and social care needs)
  - Food parcels
  - Meals
  - Medication and delivery of prescriptions
  - Supermarket delivery slots
  - Central government communications (questions over how long they need to stay shielded for)
  - Signposting on to other services
  - Befriending and loneliness became an increasing issue as weeks went on
  - Medical transport
- 5.42 By June 2020, many of those who are shielding were content to call the dedicated support number and did not need on-going proactive telephone support. However there remain a significant minority, approximately 150 – 200, who continue to receive regular calls from the Hub.
- 5.43 The nature of the Community Hub is such that should there be a resurgence in Covid19 infections and self-isolation be extended or reintroduced for the shielded population at a national or local level, the capacity exists to respond appropriately.

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

- 6.1 As well as the Borough Council taking on a core role in the supporting more vulnerable residents through the Community Hub, the Council also took on a central role in supporting local businesses including the allocation of new national funding through the Council's revenues and benefits service.

### **Small Business Grant Fund and Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund.**

- 6.2 On 11 and 17 March, the Government announced financial support for small businesses, and businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors, in the form of two grant funding schemes to be administered by Local Authorities.
- 6.3 Eligible businesses who applied would receive one-off grants of either £10,000 or £25,000. The Council received £11.576m Government funding for the schemes on 1 April 2020, and officers acted immediately to start distributing these funds to eligible local businesses. By the end of the first full week following receipt of the funds (5–12 April), a combined £3.2m in grants had been paid out by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council to 199 eligible businesses across the Borough.
- 6.4 In total, 840 businesses have been identified as eligible for funding across the Borough, and by 14 June, 710 (or 85%) of these have already been allocated £9.68m in grant funding. The Council is working hard to ensure that as much of the money as possible is taken up by local businesses but this is challenging given how many have ceased operations during the lock down.

### **Local Discretionary Grant Scheme**

- 6.5 In May 2020, the Government announced a further Discretionary Grant Scheme Fund to assist those small businesses that do not qualify for the above Small Business Grant or the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant.
- 6.6 The Council can award up to a total of £556,750 between eligible businesses in the Borough, which will be funded by the Government.
- 6.7 The criteria for EEBC's Discretionary Grant Scheme was agreed under Delegated Authority (#585). Applications were open online to businesses until 19 June. In week commencing 22 June, applications are due to be assessed, with awards of up to £10,000 available for eligible businesses.

### **Business Rates Relief**

- 6.8 In addition to the above Grant Schemes, the Government announced in March 2020 a series of business rates reliefs to further support business. The reliefs include Expanded Retail and Nursery Discounts of up to 100% for eligible businesses, which the Council has implemented and issued revised business rates bills to those eligible businesses. Over 400 businesses now have no business rates to pay for 2020/21

### **Council Tax Hardship Fund**

- 6.9 As well as support for businesses, the Government awarded the Council £344,000 in Hardship Funding for residents, which is being used as set out in the government guidance to provide relief for individual council taxpayers who receive Council Tax Support.
- 6.10 By the middle of June 1707 current Council Tax Support recipients have been awarded relief totalling £255,497. Hardship relief will be automatically awarded to anyone awarded Council Tax Support throughout 2020/21

### **Suspension of Charging in Car Parks**

- 6.11 For the period 2 April to 14 June 2020, the Council suspended charging in the majority of its car parks (all except for Town Hall, Hope Lodge and at Bourne Hall), as a means of providing further financial support to both residents and businesses in the Borough. The decisions to suspend charging in some car parks and then reintroduce charging in line with the 2020/21 rates were agreed under Delegated Authority (decisions #575, #578 & #586).

### **Support for Commercial Tenants of Council Properties**

- 6.12 The Council has supported those of its commercial tenants who have requested assistance, by offering the option of deferring one quarter's rental payment (typically the March to June quarter), to assist with the tenants' cashflow during lockdown. The rent will still be payable to the Council, by the end of the current financial year (i.e. it is just a deferral, not a write-off). This support was agreed under Delegated Authority decision #571.



### **Re-Opening Highstreets**

- 6.13 Following government guidance that non-essential shops can re-open from 15 June and that restaurants and pubs may open in July, a Task Force chaired by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has been established to support local retailers and high street businesses to safely open and welcome shoppers back to their stores.
- 6.14 The Task Force includes economic development specialists alongside key business representatives such as the Business Improvement District, the Ashley Centre and Epsom Square, and other partners such as Surrey County Council and Surrey Police and is supported by key Council staff including staff from the Council's venues service. By harnessing the combined experience of each partner, the group will ensure that the borough's high streets and shopping parades are safe and welcoming places to shop and spend time. The Task Force's work is supported by a Government grant of £71,000.

## **7 The response regarding Council staff**

- 7.1 Since a major incident was declared across Surrey on 19 March 2020 the Council has been fully reliant on its workforce in order to provide an effective and coordinated approach. In turn our staff have needed to respond and adapt in a variety of different ways to the rapidly changing circumstances including taking on new roles, working with different colleagues and working in new ways. This has had a number of implications which have had to be carefully managed from the start of the pandemic which have been particularly complex.
- 7.2 Our staff have worked incredibly hard during the pandemic and have adapted quickly and positively to the challenge at hand. Our operating model for managing and supporting our staff has completely changed during this emergency period as the delivery, suspension, and/or operating conditions for services has had to be aligned with rapidly evolving guidance from central government and Public Health England on the wide range of issues and risks resulting from this virus.
- 7.3 Our areas of focus for managing Council staff have been as follows:
- Operate in a way that keeps Council staff safe and minimises the risk to them and service users
  - Provide staff with timely information and advice
  - Support multi agency arrangements, including communications
  - Take an active role in multi-agency co-ordination, both strategic and tactical.
  - Ensure the Council's arrangements dovetail with the evolving requirements of the Surrey-wide Local Reliance Forum and provide data as required

## Council

14 July 2020

- Enable Epsom & Ewell Borough Council to continue to provide essential services to the community
- Inform the public about reduced service levels
- Prepare and plan for recovery
- Consider short, medium and long term implications

7.4 It has also been necessary to redeploy a significant number of existing Council staff into new teams working on priority activities on the emergency response, delivering essential services, supporting vulnerable people through the new community hub, or coordinating the recovery stages. Our staff have stepped up and taken on these new roles with commitment and dedication.

7.5 We have been so impressed by our staff who have rolled their sleeves up and got on with this work, sometimes under extremely difficult circumstances and while coping with their own concerns and anxieties.

### 7.6 Sickness / Self Isolation / Shielding

7.6.1 Of course all of this work is against a backdrop of staff who themselves have fallen to COVID19 with a number of staff who have been off sick, self-isolating or shielding themselves. Our workforce has been significantly affected and in the early weeks of the pandemic in March and April the Council was having to operate with a significantly reduced level of staff.

7.6.2 Statistical reporting on COVID-19 staffing absence and at risk groups has been collated by HR and updated on a regular and often daily basis as the reporting requirements have changed as the situation has evolved.

7.6.3 The table below shows the number of employees who are in different categories dependent upon personal circumstances:

Category	Number of Staff	Percentage of Workforce
Care for a dependant - working from home	12	3.8%
Care for a dependant - unable to work from home	0	0%
Building or office closure - working from home	86	27.6%
Building or office closure - unable to work from home	0	0%

Category A - clinically extremely vulnerable Shielding – (NHS advised) working from home	1	0.3%
Category A - clinically extremely vulnerable Shielding – (NHS advised) unable to work from home	1	0.3%
Category B - clinically vulnerable - working from home	48	15.4%
Category B - clinically vulnerable - unable to work from home	27	8.7%
Redeployed (BECC, Community Hub, Meals at Home, IMT, COVID Secure, Recovery Team, Cemeteries Support, High Street Task Force) *this does not include those employees redeployed within operational services	48	15.2%

- 7.7 During the emergency response key services needed support to ensure we were meeting the needs of essential services and supporting the new services that were asked of us by central government. A number of staff offered their help to support services with an increasing work load due to COVID-19 and this has been greatly appreciated.
- 7.8 During March, 187 days were lost to those who were self-isolating and unable to work from home and 99 days were lost to those who were absent from work with COVID19 symptoms.
- 7.9 During March, 78 employees were absent from work due to sickness this represents 25% of the workforce. 45 employees were absent due to Coronavirus symptoms of self-isolation which represents 14% of the workforce.
- 7.10 During April, 10 days were lost to those who were self-isolating and unable to work from home and 149 days were lost to those who were absent from work with COVID19 symptoms.
- 7.11 During April 20 employees were absent due to Coronavirus symptoms and self-isolation which represents 6% of the workforce.
- 7.12 During May, 32 days were lost to those who were self-isolating and unable to work from home and 48 days were lost to those who were absent from work with COVID19 symptoms.

## Council

### 14 July 2020

- 7.13 During May, 18 employees were absent from work due to sickness which represents 5.6% of the workforce. 7 employees were absent due to Coronavirus symptoms of self-isolation which represents 2% of the workforce.
- 7.14 There have been a number of sensitives to deal with in managing those with health conditions, stress and anxiety bereavement, domestic abuse and isolation. The HR team have been available to provide confidential advice and support with these more complex employment matters.
- 7.15 Support has been provided via a number of routes namely online and telephone counselling through the Council Employee Assistance program and the Council's Mental Health First Aiders. The team have also sought to provide support and additional information by signposting to other platforms such as Surrey Health and NHS support. There was also on-going engagement with the Staff Consultative Group as part of the Council's ongoing commitment to effective employee relations and to help with the changing requirements placed on staff in this on-going emergency situation.
- 7.16 There has also been an outpouring of gratitude and support for all our staff during the pandemic which has helped to lift spirits and boost morale at this time. Some of this support has included:
- A personal letters of thanks and support to all staff from the Chief Executive
  - Two personal letters of thanks from the Chair and Vice Chairman of Strategy & Resources
  - Letters and emails from members of the public
  - Special signs and notes left for our refuse crews
- 7.17 One of the most important roles that HR undertakes is to ensure that all staff are paid. This includes collating payroll data, ensuring that adequate checks are completed and the BACS is signed off for payment. The service had continued to ensure that all pay and allowances have been paid on time and in line with regulations.
- 7.18 It is very clear that the current situation has presented challenges and new ways of working for many staff but the Council's One Team approach has certainly helped to ensure that the response has been prompt, compassionate and robust.
- 7.19 Managing through the recovery**

## Council

### 14 July 2020

- 7.20 As part of the recovery phase managers have been working on how they will recover their services going forward to meet both the challenges created by COVID-19, but also how arrangements will return to some form of normality in due course. As part of this recovery process feedback has been obtained on how staff have adapted to more agile working practices such as homeworking and worked differently, in order to identify both the successes and the areas that need further work.
- 7.21 Regular engagement has taken place with staff to get their feedback and just check in with how they are feeling. This has helped maintain morale and productivity and is helping build much needed emotional resilience.
- 7.22 The ICT service is continuing to respond to and plan for the need for greater staff agility, building greater service resilience and flexibility, including enabling more services to be accessed on-line and modernising remaining manual paper based systems.
- 7.23 COVID-19 is, and has been for a number of months a difficult and anxious time for all of our workforce as we have navigated through the unique circumstances. The lockdown, the lack of face to face social contact with many staff working from home can have impacts on their health and well-being. The workforce has been working hard and fatigue is setting in. Staff have been encouraged to take annual leave in the coming months to ensure they will be able to have an adequate break and much needed rest.
- 7.24 The Council is very proud of how its staff have responded to COVID-19 as it is an anxious and challenging situation. Many of our officers are working to continue delivering critical services to ensure our residents receive the services they need.
- 7.25 The workforce have been amazing and have demonstrated real commitment in continuing their work, adapting to change and ensuring that the Council has responded compassionately and robustly to the pandemic.

#### **Next steps and capturing lessons learnt**

- 7.26 While the Council should feel rightly proud of its response to date to the Covid-19 emergency, it has been very challenging and there are bound to be lessons to learn that would be helpful in informing the Council's response to future emergencies. A report on lessons learnt will be considered by the Audit, Crime and Disorder and Scrutiny Committee later this year.

- 7.27 While the Council is simultaneously managing the local operational response to the continued emergency situation, and managing the progressive recovery of services, it also needs to be alert and ready for the risk of further surges in Covid-19 virus infection and potential future lockdowns that may occur at a national or local level, including actions that may arise from the new Test and Trace arrangements. The challenge continues to be significant. At the same time the Council must start to consider how services and resources need to adapt around a post-Covid environment, recognising that customer behaviour and local needs have been impacted in profound ways, and that new urgent priorities have emerged such as the recovery of our high streets and local economy and helping people back into work.
- 7.28 There are also significant financial uncertainties for the Council arising from Covid-19 which are set out in a separate report on this agenda. This will be an additional challenge for the Council to consider and navigate through as part of the on-going recovery process.

## **8 Legal or other duties**

### **8.1 Impact Assessment**

#### **8.1.1 None**

### **8.2 Crime & Disorder**

- 8.2.1 The Council has continued to work with the Police to try and respond to concerns about anti social behaviour during the lockdown and during the recovery period as more facilities have opened.

### **8.3 Safeguarding**

- 8.3.1 A key role of the Community Hub described in this report has been to identify and respond to any safeguarding concerns that arise through contact with local residents.

### **8.4 Dependencies**

- 8.4.1 As part of the on-going emergency, the Council's emergency response is still aligned to the Surrey-wide Local Resilience Forum. The Council's ability to respond to the pandemic emergency and its aftermath will continue to depend on the availability of Council staff and there being sufficient financial resources.

## 9 Financial Implications

- 9.1 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** The far-reaching financial implications associated with the Covid-19 Pandemic are addressed in full in a separate report on this same agenda.

## 10 Legal Implications

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

## 11 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

- 11.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** This will impact of the delivery of the Council's new four year plan and 6 new themes: Green& Vibrant; Safe & Well, Cultural & Creative; Opportunity & Prosperity, Smart & Connected; Effective Council
- 11.2 **Service Plans:** The Covid-19 Pandemic was not included within the Council's Plan for 2020/21, however these are being updated to reflect the impact of Covid 19 on all services and the financial and staffing resources available to deliver priorities in 2020/21.
- 11.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** The impact of coronavirus on the environment is likely to see reduced pollution in the Borough with less traffic and air travel and great numbers of local people walking and cycling. Staff have been encouraged to work from home and will continue to do so. Moving into the Recovery phase a key principal will be for a green recovery which can build upon working remotely and greater use of technology
- 11.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:** The Council has continued to work closely with the police regarding issues or concerns that have arisen during the pandemic and extended lock-down period.
- 11.5 **Partnerships:** the Council have been part of a multi agency partnership approach to dealing with the emergency, working with health, Surrey County Council, Surrey Fire and Rescue Service, Surrey Police, local voluntary sector organisations and other partners.

## 12 Background papers

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

**Previous reports:**

- None

Council  
14 July 2020

**Other papers:**

- None