

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 6 October 2020

Report Title: Covid-19 – Update on Response and Recovery

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Sam Corcoran - Leader of the Council
Cllr Craig Browne - Deputy Leader of the Council

Senior Officer: Lorraine O'Donnell - Chief Executive

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. Cabinet have received reports in June, July and September on how the Council, working with its partners, continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.2. This report provides a further update of the work on additional/new developments that has been undertaken in response to this national and international public health emergency since the September report.
- 1.3. In terms of the financial impact the pandemic has had on the Council to date, the separate Mid-Year Review report, elsewhere on the agenda, provides a detailed update.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. That Cabinet note the issues outlined in the report.

3. Other Options Considered

- 3.1. Not applicable.

4. Background

- 4.1. As at 14 September 2020, there were 28,918,900 confirmed cases and 922,252 confirmed deaths across 216 countries, areas or territories. (Source WHO)

- 4.2. In England, as at that date, there were 320,380 positive cases. In Cheshire East there were 2,562 positive cases. (Source GOV.UK) Like other parts of the country, Cheshire East is seeing an increase in the number of people who are testing positive for COVID. Our rates of new infections remain below the significant increases being seen in neighbouring areas such as Liverpool, Warrington and Greater Manchester. As at that date our rate was 24.9 per 100,000 population compare to Liverpool 85.3 and Warrington 98.8 per 100,000 population (weekly).
- 4.3. In terms of the daily confirmed cases in the last full week of data, 95 people in Cheshire East have tested positive. This compares to an average of 19.7 new cases per week for the month of July. Testing capacity is under pressure nationally due to a finite capacity within the laboratories. The Cheshire and Merseyside Local Authorities have raised concern regarding the mismatch of testing capacity within the North West Region compared to the current rising levels of infection. As the North West has 25-30% of the new cases but access to only 12-15% of testing capacity, a request has been made for a fairer level of provision.
- 4.4. The Chief Medical Officer has reported significant increases in the infection rates across the Country with the most significant increases in the North West region. Whilst the rates in Cheshire East are much lower than most local authorities within the region, the trend is upward. As part of our measures to contain this increase the local authority has increased its targeted messages to the sections of the population at greatest risk of transmitting the virus in particular the 18 to 40 age group. In addition the local authority has increased the information and advice that it has been providing to local businesses. These actions are part of the measures agreed by the Directors of Public Health for the nine Cheshire and Merseyside local authorities to address the rise in infections. Additional staff have been recruited to support our ability to deliver our new responsibilities for contacting tracing. In line with our Outbreak plan we have stood up our emergency planning response boards including CEMART within the council and the Local Outbreak Engagement Board has been convened. Local Authority staff continue to engage with the various regional working groups that are responsible for coordinating Test and Trace programmes. This is a fast moving situation and continues to develop rapidly on a daily basis and it is likely that further control measures are likely to be agreed at the national level.
- 4.5. The latest international, national and local statistics are available from the following data dashboards:

4.5.1. <https://covid19.who.int/>

4.5.2. <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/>

4.5.3. <https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/view/lga-research/covid-19-case-tracker>

5. Response

5.1. Sub-regional

5.1.1. The sub-regional response continues to be led by the Cheshire Local Resilience Forum (LRF), which includes Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington Councils, Cheshire Constabulary, Cheshire Fire and Rescue, Public Health England and the NHS.

5.1.2. The Council is a major LRF partner and continues to play a significant role at all levels of response – participating in the strategic coordinating groups (SCG) and tactical coordinating groups (TCG) and resourcing all the multi-agency support cells established to manage the sub-regional response to the pandemic.

5.2. Council Actions

5.2.1. Cheshire East Council continues to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic. At the same time the Council has continued to strive to:

- deliver essential local services
- protect our most vulnerable people
- support our communities and local businesses.

5.2.2 The response phase is still likely to continue for some time to come. In addition, the Council is actively planning for potential second waves of the pandemic and/or localised outbreaks. A summary of the actions that have continued to be delivered by the Council is provided below.

5.2.3 *Test and Trace and Outbreak Management*– Cheshire East Council continues to support the national approach to Test, Trace, Contain and Enable programme through the creation of a Test and Trace hub within the council and by supporting the Cheshire and Merseyside hub. With the Government’s decision to replace Public Health England with a new national organisation that will focus on health protection, Local Authorities are being requested to take on a greater responsibility for contact tracing. This change has included the national Contact Tracing Centre passing on cases for follow up to Local Authorities with 24 hours instead of 48 hours. This has created increased pressures on the Cheshire and Merseyside Hub as well as Cheshire East Council’s Public Health team.

- 5.2.4 The Local Health Protection Board meets on a fortnightly basis at present to coordinate multi-agency response and to review current protocols against the changing patterns of infection. This Board is also utilised as a basis for undertaking emergency response exercises to test the current system.
- 5.2.5 Our Public Health Intelligence team is working closely with Public Health England and their counterparts in the other Cheshire and Merseyside local authorities to review the improved data flow from the Joint Biosecurity Centre. These data include cases and contacts as well as mapping to identify any patterns or trends that would enable us to take prompt and targeted action.
- 5.2.6 Rates of infection in Cheshire East Council have risen to 24.9 per 100,000 population for the last 7 days (as at 15 September). These rates are still lower than the England average and much lower than the areas in the North West. Liverpool and Warrington have rates of 85.3 and 98.8, whilst Bolton has a rate of 199.4 per 100,000. Whilst cases are occurring across the borough we are seeing a higher number of infections in the north east of the borough close to the border with Greater Manchester.
- 5.2.7 A whole home testing programme is under way in care homes. This involves a weekly testing programme for all staff and a monthly testing programme for residents. This initiative has assisted care providers and the Local Authority's Social Care and Public Health teams to assist care home staff to monitor and manage infection control measures.
- 5.2.8 Contact tracing for known cases continues to be good, though the increasing numbers of cases is placing pressure on the service. The local service's performance continues to exceed the follow up rate of the national contact tracing service.
- 5.2.9 Whilst mobile testing units continue to be deployed across the borough, the service is now provided by commercial organisations such as Serco and Sudexo rather than the Army. Whilst these units have the capacity to test up to 400 people, the current limitations in laboratory capacity mean that there is difficulty in accessing appointments with them. This is an increasing problem locally and nationally. Directors of Public Health for Cheshire and Merseyside have escalated their concerns regarding testing capacity nationally for though the North West region has around 25-30% of the current cases nationally it has only been allocated 12-15% of the testing capacity.

- 5.2.10 We continue to work with local authorities and PHE across Cheshire, Merseyside, Staffordshire and the North West Region to share intelligence and good practice.
- 5.2.11 *Communities* - People Helping People is a service created by Cheshire East Council which works collaboratively with new and existing Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector partners and local volunteers to channel community-based support to meet the needs of our residents. The service is delivered for the local community, by the local community. To date the service has provided support to over 3600 residents with 1400 active cases still receiving support. This service has been instrumental in reducing immediate demands on public services so will continue during August and September. Key activities within the Communities Team include:
- the government shielding service which was paused on 31st July 2020.
 - leading on the 'high risk places, location and communities' and 'vulnerable people' workstreams of the Test, Trace, Contain and Enable plan.
 - Social Action Partnership to mobilise various voluntary and statutory organisations to become Volunteer Coordination Points (VCPs).
 - The Covid-19 Community Response and Recovery Fund which was launched at the end of June 2020 and has since provided funding to 21 successful applicants, totalling just over £68,000.
- 5.2.12 *Adult Social Care* - The Commissioning Team have provided significant support for the Adults Social Care Market during the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure market stability and the safe provision of care for the residents of Cheshire East. This includes Care Homes, Care at Home (Domiciliary Care), Complex Needs and Supported Living. Continued actions are set out below.
- 5.2.13 Infection Prevention Control training has been delivered to all care homes and is being rolled out to Care at Home and Complex providers.
- 5.2.14 There has been a strong focus on support for Care Homes, and our Care Home recovery planning includes the development of an Outbreak Plan for each Care Home; supported by an Outbreak Management Toolkit; Care Home visiting guidance; and Infection Prevention Control (IPC) recovery visits to provide advice and support. Commissioners are also undertaking scenario planning including

localised outbreaks and the possibility of second wave in conjunction with winter planning such as flu vaccinations.

5.2.15 “Care Homes” is one of the seven mandated workstream areas for the Test and Trace Programme within our Local Outbreak Plan. This includes the Whole Home Testing Programme, which ensures the testing of Care Home staff weekly and residents monthly, underpinned by a Test and Trace standard operating procedure linked to Test and Trace alerts within Care Homes.

5.2.16 PPE support has been key to our Covid-19 response and recovery. The position changes rapidly but the current position at the time of writing is as follows:

- The Local Authority have been supplied with PPE via the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) since the 24th March 2020. The Council have distributed PPE to eligible organisations across Cheshire East. We have been notified that this will now close at the end of August.
- All registered adult social care providers, opticians, pharmacists and urgent dental care have now been requested to register on to the government PPE Portal to continue to access free supplies. Orders are subject to limits according to capacity. Providers are asked to continue to develop their own supply chain. However, it is widely recognised that PPE market has not recovered from the impact of Covid-19.
- To ensure all agencies are supported and services are able to deliver safe care to local residents, as well as protecting the care workforce, we are currently reviewing various options and opportunities to support external Care Providers to access PPE in emergencies or when they have issues with their PPE supply chain.
- A stock has been locally purchased as part of the Council’s recovery and outbreak planning, and we continue to replenish stock to meet the needs internally to resume services for example the re-opening of Day Services.
- A survey will be distributed to Care Providers to fully understand the impact of COVID-19 re PPE, current needs and issues.

5.2.17 Adults and Children’s Commissioning - Commissioners have worked closely with our ‘Early Intervention and Prevention’ ‘Community Wellbeing’ and ‘Public Health’ contracted providers which have adapted but continued to deliver effective services during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Contingency Plans were implemented straight away with

our Providers during the response phase of the Pandemic, and now Commissioners are working with Providers to implement their recovery Plans. Examples of recovery plans include: Substance Misuse Services, Healthy Child Programme, Social Action Partnership and the Carers Hub. The Social Action Partnership is a new service that went live on the 1st April 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.2.18 Due to the Covid-19 crisis, the focus of delivery for the Social Action Partnership was diverted from 'business as usual' functions to supporting the Council's Communities Team Covid-19 People Helping People response. Working with People Helping People they have set up a Virtual Volunteer Network consisting of 15 Volunteer Co-ordination Points (VCPs). The VCPs cover all 8 Care Community areas using a 'hub and spoke' model with the VCP being the key hub in their local area. Whilst many were mobilised using existing community support groups some were established from the ground up by SAP (e.g. Haslington Support Group). VCPs are being supported with Recovery workshops to consider the impact of Coronavirus on their local area and identify where support is needed. Going forward the Social Action Partnership will be working with the Communities team to see how the VCPs can fit with the Neighbourhood and Town Partnerships and avoid duplication of work. The 974 volunteers that signed up to support People Helping People were signposted to the VCPs. VCPs supported volunteers with guidance packs developed by the Social Action Partnership. The next focus is to keep the level interest in volunteering and build on the response both for recovery phase and for future social action. The Social Action Partnership are working with our Community Development Officers on a volunteer skills audit.

5.2.19 *Children's Social Care* - Following lockdown we experienced a rise in the number of cared for children due to children not being able to transition to their adoptive homes, Courts being unable to progress adoption and other complex hearings, and care leavers being unable to move to more permanent accommodation. The number of cared for children reached a high of 550 in August. We also saw a small number of children come into care in an unplanned way due to rapid escalation of families needs due to the additional pressures and reduced family support as a result of lockdown. However the number of cared for children is now reducing due to court hearings resuming which is enabling children and young to achieve legal permanency. 537 children were cared for on 13 September. We are expecting this to continue to reduce as further hearings take place. Some lengthy court hearings are being carried out over September which is impacting on frontline capacity within social work teams. Positively, children and young

people are now moving on to their adoptive families. We currently have 27 children and young people placed with adoptive families. However Covid-19 has caused considerable delays of at least 4-6 months for some children and young people in achieving permanency.

- 5.2.20 Moving forward, we will be asking staff from the front door to return to working from the office on a rota basis to enable regular communication with the police and other agencies who are co-located there to support effective informed decision making for children and young people. We anticipate that we will see an increase in referrals to the front door as following the return of schools and have provided additional support to the front door to enable them to manage an increase in contacts. We have developed a clear strategy to ensure children and young people's needs are met at the right time by the right service, building resilience and preventing future demand to services. This aims to help to mitigate the anticipated increased demand to services as a result of Covid-19. We will continue to closely monitor the impact of Covid-19 on service demand and the needs of children, young people and families.
- 5.2.21 Covid-19 has had an impact on our care leavers and we have seen some lose employment opportunities and apprenticeships. The service are already targeting our most vulnerable young adults with an autumn and winter not in education, employment or training (NEET) programme, and through the Journey First Programme we will be able to target further care leavers who have struggled during this period and support them back into employment, however there remains a lot of work to do in this area to ensure our young people are supported to go on to successful careers.
- 5.2.22 We have developed an offer for parents and carers for Child Protection Conferences to take place as blended meetings, rather than purely virtual, to support good communication. For blended meetings the Conference Chair, social worker, and family members attend in person with all other professionals attending virtually.
- 5.2.23 On 6 July, Ofsted announced their plans to recommence inspections of local authority Children's Services (ILACS). The way inspections will be carried out has changed as an interim arrangement following the pause in inspections and taking into account the additional pressures services are under as a result of Covid-19. ILACS inspections will be recommencing from late September. This interim arrangement will remain in place until December 2020 and could be extended depending on the circumstances. Interim inspections will be carried out over three weeks and will evaluate how we have responded to, prioritised and met

children and young people's changing needs throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. There will be a particular focus on the quality and impact of decision making for children and young people. Work is underway to ensure we are prepared should we receive an interim inspection.

5.2.24 *Prevention and Early Help* – As reported previously we are continuing to see the needs of families increasing. We are continuing to monitor this closely as we move forward. Our targeted face to face Summer Activity Programme for families and young people who need additional support has been a real success and has provided families with some much needed respite over the summer. Our online resources provided as part of the parenting journey and our new '50 things to do together before you're 5' initiative, which supports young children to develop their self-confidence, physical skills and speech and language, are working well and have received very positive feedback from parents and carers.

5.2.25 *"It really has made a massive positive difference to us and we continue to thoroughly enjoy it!! I'd love to see it continue - lockdown etc aside I'm sometimes not able to get out for a day or two because of my health issues and having something I know is reliable, age appropriate, educational, and super fun that we can join in with is a real boost. I think it would be a great thing for other parents or indeed children with health issues, or those that are just stuck in feeling under the weather as happens not too infrequently with bugs and little ones (!), and I think it could be especially beneficial to parents struggling with postnatal mental health issues - giving support and inspiration and potentially being the bridge between getting out to the groups in person. And obviously it's great for everyone in general too!!"*

Feedback from a parent on the parenting journey resources.

5.2.26 The number of open early years settings reduced following school closure from over 200 in July to 127 in August but has now improved again following the increase in parental demand due to the end of the holiday period and the return of schools. 333 settings were open in the week of 13 September.

5.2.27 We are working to ensure the 19 additional buildings (outside of corporate buildings) that prevention and early help services are provided from are Covid secure, and we are liaising with the other agencies that operate from our buildings, e.g. Midwifery and the 0-19 service, regarding delivery arrangements and phased reopening in line with corporate guidance.

5.2.28 Our Together in Communities workshops, which are development and networking opportunities for the whole early help and prevention workforce across the partnership, have been on hold due to Covid-19. We are planning to reinstate these in an alternative format, and we have asked the partnership for their views on how they want these to be delivered moving forwards and what topics they would like these to cover which will inform our plans.

5.2.29 We continue to be concerned about the opportunities for our young people as they move into adulthood. We will be running a Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) summit at the end of September where training providers, colleges and young people who are NEET will help to inform the development of our NEET offer going forward.

5.2.30 The government have announced a new £2bn Kickstart Scheme which nationally will create hundreds of thousands of new, fully subsidised jobs for young people. The six-month placements are open to those aged 16-24 who are claiming Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment. Guidance has been published for employers looking to create job placements for young people as part of the scheme. The job placements created with Kickstart funding must be new jobs, and the scheme will pay any employer the total amount of the National Minimum Wage (25 hours per week) for the first 6 months. The Head of External Funding, Complex Worklessness & Inclusion in the People Directorate is leading on this scheme for Cheshire East Council and a meeting of Cheshire East partners is being held to coordinate how this opportunity can be maximised.

5.2.31 The government is also introducing payments to support organisations that take on new apprentices between 1 August 2020 and 31 January 2021. The payment is in addition to the existing £1,000 employers already receive for taking on an apprentice who is aged 16 to 18 years old or is under 25 and has an education, health and care plan or has been in the care of their local authority. This will be an option we will be exploring to create opportunities for our young people.

5.2.32 *Education and Home to School Transport* – Over 48,700 pupils are now attending our schools (as at 7 September). Our attendance is high and was initially above national, statistical neighbours, and the North West average, which demonstrates that the preparations we have made have been effective in gaining parental confidence. Some schools are

undertaking a phased return. We are closely monitoring attendance and will be supporting individual schools where attendance is lower.

5.2.33 However, reported attendance has started to reduce. This is due to a number of factors including issues in the national reporting system and groups of pupils/ bubbles or teachers being sent home to isolate due to positive Covid-19 cases. We have seen a reduction in attendance of children known to social workers and with an Education, Health and Care plan – these are being followed up so we can intervene and offer support to encourage pupils to go back to school, where appropriate.

5.2.34 We have seen an increase in elective home education which we expected. We have received over 50 applications which is high compared with previous years. Currently no parents have deregistered. A clear process is in place to ensure parents and carers are supported and the decision to electively home educate is in the best interest of the child or young person.

5.2.35 We have also identified 62 children from traveller families who have not returned to school in September, this impacts on attendance at two primary schools. We are working with the schools impacted and have visits planned to traveller sites to explore the issues behind this trend and offer support to enable children to return to school where appropriate.

5.2.36 We are continuing to provide intensive support to schools around how to implement the DfE guidance to ensure we have a consistent and safe approach across all schools. We produced a range of key documents to support schools with full opening in September which covered the following areas; dealing with symptoms, curriculum and learning, vulnerable children, travel to school, and human resources. This included an aid to adapting the curriculum from September to support children and young people to catch up on important content they have missed, and guidance on remote learning if it should need to be applied from September. This was based upon national research on the impact of remote learning during lockdown and the strategies which have been most effective.

5.2.37 We also developed an emotional wellbeing package for use in schools from September to enable schools to effectively support pupils with any mental health needs as a result of lockdown. The DfE wrote to LAs about the Wellbeing for Education Return: funding and resources to train and support education settings to respond to the wellbeing and mental health

needs of pupils and students and we have completed a briefing for schools on this support.

5.2.38 The DfE have called for recently retired educational psychologists or those still working but with capacity, to make themselves known to councils to assist with pupil wellbeing as schooling resumes. We will need to work with HR to be able to draw on this capacity as it will currently sit outside our current recruitment arrangements.

5.2.39 We have worked with Public Health to produce guidance to support schools when children or staff develop Covid-19 symptoms, including engagement with the NHS test and trace process. We have established a helpline and email address for schools to report any expected or confirmed Covid cases to the Public Health team. We have asked that schools do not make individual or Trust decisions to close or partially close before seeking advice from the Public Health team so we can ensure we have a consistent approach across schools. Due to an increase in Covid enquires from schools and the number of positive cases we are looking to create an Education Covid Response Team with effect from 21 September.

5.2.40 The government guidance on transport to school and other places of education was published on 11 August. Despite the tight timescale, along with our Transport colleagues and Transport Service Solutions we effectively established transport for the start of term, ensuring pupils' journeys to and from school are as safe as possible. We have ensured the measures recommended by the Government are in place to protect all those choosing to travel on school transport if they cannot walk, cycle or arrive at school by car.

5.2.41 We have worked with schools to ensure that additional measures are in place to make drop-off and home times safer for pupils, parents and teachers. This has included staggered start and finish times and one-way systems. The decision by cabinet to support drop off and pick up in school playgrounds to avoid potentially unsafe gatherings at schools gates has been welcomed by schools. We are continuing to promote Park and Stride to school and have had a proactive social media campaign around this.

5.2.42 Extra bus services have been added which follow the regular public bus services. These 'shadow' buses are clearly marked 'School Bus'. Pupils have been asked to only travel with fellow students in their year group or 'transport bubble' on the dedicated school bus. We have arranged for all

non-essential roadworks near schools to be paused to avoid congestion from school traffic. For all pupils and parents we are promoting the recently launched [#TravelSafely campaign](#) from the Department for Transport.

- 5.2.43 We are now prioritising further areas for development in terms of safe arrangements for transport. We have risk assessed vehicles that drop off at more than one school in priority order and are exploring using either additional or larger vehicles. We are assessing the number of pupils using the additional transport on a regular basis and will adjust arrangements over the half term based on usage. Use of our additional transport is currently low but this may change as confidence increases. We have had some cases of a larger than expected number of pupils on buses, these have been responded to swiftly to put in place additional capacity.
- 5.2.44 We have been notified that the grant for additional transport support will be extended for the second half term. We need to submit a return on current usage of the grant which will then inform the allocation for the second term.
- 5.2.45 The statutory guidance, '*Keeping Children in Education Settings*' (KCSIE), for schools and colleges has been updated. This guidance came into force on 1 September 2020. For those schools which have purchased the Enhanced Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership service level agreement, a document has been produced which outlines the changes in KCSIE 2020 along with a draft exemplar policy and training package which Safeguarding Leads can use as part of their annual Safeguarding update with staff which incorporates the changes.
- 5.2.46 The routine collection of A Level and GCSE results has not occurred this year due to the fact that school level data is not being collated or being used nationally this year for school performance tables or as accountability measures by Local Authorities, Ofsted or the Regional Schools Commissioner. We have however for both sets of data spoken to the majority of our schools to seek feedback. Overall, our schools have fed back that they are positive overall with their A Level and GCSE results. The use of the algorithm for A Levels and the suppression of some school results has affected individual students, and each school spoken to has shown differing levels of impact in specific subjects which makes it difficult to report trends across the borough.

- 5.2.47 In terms of GCSE results, the late change in the decision to not apply the full algorithm but utilise the 'Centre Assessment Grades' (CAG) minimised the impact on certain schools especially those with a higher proportion of disadvantaged learners. However, it is important to state that there has been some use of the algorithm as it has resulted in the awarding of some higher grades than those submitted by schools.
- 5.2.48 The more significant impact of the results will be seen in the size of Post 16 cohorts returning to start courses. Schools are reporting that they will need to accommodate bigger groups for certain subjects which clearly adds challenges to the full return of all learners post lockdown. The Post 16 rise will also impact on our further education colleges.
- 5.2.49 We have had some very strong individual results for our cared for children which is fantastic.
- 5.2.50 *Homelessness and Rough Sleepers* - Cheshire East's Housing Options Team continue to work to prevent residents from becoming homeless and provide assistance to those who present as homeless. During June and July 96 households presented as homeless of which 74 were provided with accommodation. The number of rough sleepers varies between 3 – 10 some of which are transient and do not wish to stay in Cheshire East. The Rough Sleepers Team continue to work proactively with them where they wish to engage with services.
- 5.2.51 The service have worked with MHCLG to repurpose the funding allocated through the Rough Sleepers Initiative to enable us to commission emergency accommodation and support to those who present with complex issues. We are also working with MHCLG and Housing Providers to co-produce a bid to the Next Steps fund, which was recently announced by Government. If successful this will enable us to provide additional accommodation and support for those leaving emergency accommodation and enabling better access to the private rented sector.
- 5.2.52 *Town Centres* - Traffic Management measures that were introduced to facilitate social distancing thereby supporting businesses to open and operate safely are being reviewed on an on-going basis. A new streamlined, low cost process for obtaining Pavement Licences has been developed to facilitate bars, cafes and restaurants looking to expand onto pedestrian areas to improve viability. A grant application has been submitted seeking ERDF Reopening High Street Safely

Funding proposing further town centre focused communications and public realm measures subject to funding being available.

- 5.2.53 *Highways, Transport & Parking* - All highway maintenance operations and improvement projects continue to be delivered and are following Government COVID guidelines. Adjustments to working practices have been implemented and plans are in place for running this seasons winter operation covering the same network as last year. Other activity has also increased on the network, with traffic flows at around 87% of pre COVID levels and utility companies continuing to deal with a backlog of works. Parking Service operations have been fully remobilised as of the 17 August. By mid September usage had recovered to approximately 75% of 2019 levels, whilst income sits at around 70% reflecting shorter stays in our car parks. The first week in September saw the first drop in use through the recovery phase. The two phase programme of active travel measures are progressing across the borough following considerable engagement from community groups, local ward councillors and town and parish councils. Phase one was due for completion by the end of September. A government funding decision is awaited for the commencement of phase two, with a slight delay announced to give consideration to the guidelines to local authorities. The local bus network has sustained services at 85% pre COVID and the Council's FlexiLink is back into operation. Both are running at patronage levels at around 30% of pre COVID levels, which means the services are dependent on the continued central and local funding support to the bus operators.
- 5.2.54 *Workforce and Workplace* - Those staff who can work from home were encouraged to do so when the lockdown was introduced in March. That has continued to be the case. We have made a significant investment in mobile IT to allow staff to operate as effectively remotely. However, to support services who need more flexibility to continue to deliver services while still working under COVID-19 restrictions, we have introduced team zones which allocated spaces within our buildings that will be carefully managed by heads of service. We continue to communicate with staff on a regular basis.
- 5.2.55 Frontline staff continue to deliver services with adjustments to working practices in line with the COVID guidelines to ensure they are protected from the virus as far as practicable. In some areas this has added to the cost of running the service, with the purchase of additional PPE and vehicles for example. Staff also continue to work

flexibly and divert from their normal duties to support the Council's varied roles on COVID.

5.2.56 We are continuing to monitor COVID-19 related absences on a regular basis, including the numbers of staff self-isolating and/or off sick. As at 4 September 2020, there are currently 18 staff self-isolating, 96 off sick, 2090 staff working from home and 295 on leave.

5.2.57 *Governance and Decision Making* - The Council moved quickly to facilitate remote meetings. All Members were provided with laptops and support to operate effectively. Formal meetings are taking place remotely as standard now.

6 Recovery

6.1 Cheshire East Council continues to lead and support the Local Resilience Forum in developing its future planning for the recovery from this pandemic. The Strategic Co-ordinating Group of the LRF has established a Strategic Recovery Co-ordinating Group leading on this Recovery. This is chaired by the Chief Executive of Cheshire East Council and includes senior colleagues from local authorities, the NHS, Public Health, Police and Fire.

6.2 This group is focused on longer-term recovery with the strategic aims: to enable the sub-region to deliver its ambitions around delivering continued economic growth in a sustainable and inclusive way, to instil confidence and provide clarity to our communities and business in relation to recovery and to take advantage of the opportunities that the response to the pandemic has created.

6.3 The initial focus of the group has been to co-ordinate the easing of restrictions and supporting the reopening of high streets and town centres across the sub-region including the management of the reopening of the night-time economy. The group is now co-ordinating the sub-regional approach relating to:

- Anticipating and managing future demands on public services such as additional safeguarding referrals, increases in domestic abuse, increases demand on health services and social care
- Planning for winter in relation to the management of Covid-19 related pressures on top of the winter pressures such as seasonal flu, and adverse weather events.
- Reviewing and managing any issues that arise in relation to community safety, crime and community cohesion.
- Developing a sub-regional strategy for economic recovery.

- Providing future support packages relating to mental health, skills development and employment support
- Developing appropriate plans to support the effective day to day running of the sub-region e.g. support for transport and traffic management.
- Reviewing the sub-regional risk assessments and management of risks associated with EU Exit.

6.4 Within the Borough the Council is anticipating and preparing for the longer-term impacts of the Pandemic

6.4.1 *Community* - the Council and its partners anticipate that there will be significant long-term impacts on communities in Cheshire East. For example, there is expected to be a significant increase in unemployment and reduction in household income. It is expected that services will see an increase in demand as referrals increase in relation to safeguarding, domestic abuse and social care support. The council, working with its partners will be ensuring that it continues to support vulnerable people as well providing appropriate support in relation skills, employability, mental health and personal resilience.

6.4.2 *Economy* - Cheshire East Council continues to work with local businesses and business organisations (including Chambers of Commerce, Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership, Federation of Small Businesses and National Farmers Union) to channel business-based support to meet local need and to enable businesses to support each other.

6.4.3 In response to these issues the council and its partners have started to put measures in place to support people as they face unemployment. This includes a job matching service which sign post available jobs that are available, the running of jobs fairs and the the provision of skills training, work experience and apprenticeships.

6.4.4 The Council facilitated, in coordination with the Cheshire & Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership and Job Centre Plus, a Virtual Jobs Fair focused on the Crewe and Nantwich area on 26th August. This Virtual Jobs Fair was very well attended with in excess of 2500 participants registered and circa 600 jobs showcased.

6.4.5 The Council has also delivered three phases of funding through its Discretionary Business Grant Scheme. Circa 536 businesses have been provided with support through this scheme utilising all of the

£4.2M allocated funding. The Government promoted Scheme is now closed and all grant payments will be made before 30th September.

6.4.6 Furthermore, the Council and its partners have developed plans for the longer term economic recovery of the Borough. This approach includes:

- Understanding how the pandemic has impacted on the economy and development in the Borough including the opportunities this presents for the Borough for future inward investment.
- Understanding the implication of these impacts on income for the council and on key strategic services such as Planning, Economic Development and Strategic Transport.
- Support to businesses in the Borough including a focus on the sectors most likely to be impacted by the pandemic such as the hospitality sector. In addition support will continue to be provided to the key businesses and key sectors in the local economy.
- Continuing to support our town centres and businesses that operate from them.
- Developing a future pipeline of development and regeneration projects that can stimulate the local economy
- Ensuring that the Borough has an effective place marketing approach so that it is able to promote itself for inward investment in the future.

7 Implications of the Recommendations

7.1 Legal Implications

7.1.1 The Coronavirus Act 2020 received Royal Assent on 25 March 2020. The Act has extensive schedules setting out a wide framework to life under lockdown. The Act has been followed with copious and frequent guidance notes, frequently with implementation dates ahead of what is practically possible, e.g. Household Waste and Recycling Centres, administration of School Admission Appeals, restrictions on and subsequent opening of certain business premises, Test and Trace.

7.1.2 The Coronavirus Act also set out a framework by which Local Authorities could reduce their statutory duties in relation to the Care Act 2014, for Adult Social Care. These Care Act Easements could be implemented should the capacity of Adult Social Care staff become so reduced that it could not continue to meet its duties. To date Cheshire East Council has not initiated any Care Act Easements.

- 7.1.3 Any necessary urgent decisions have followed the process set out in the Constitution.
- 7.1.4 Local authority meetings - on Friday 31 July 2020, the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 came into force and will expire on 7 May 2021 unless extended. It removes the requirements to hold annual meetings; allows councils to hold all necessary meetings virtually, to alter the frequency and occurrence of meetings, without the requirement for further notice and to enable members, officers and the public to attend and access meetings and associated documents remotely. However, the amended regulations do not specifically mention 'hybrid' meetings.
- 7.1.5 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No 3) Regulations 2020 came into force on 18 July 2020 and will expire at the end of 17 January 2021. They give local authorities (LA) power to give directions which impose prohibitions, requirements or restrictions relating to premises, events and public outdoor spaces, more commonly known as local lockdowns in order to tackle local coronavirus outbreaks. The LA must ensure the conditions set out in the Regulations are met before it can give such a Direction. It must also have regard to advice from its Director of Public Health when deciding whether or not to make a Direction. If a Direction is made, the Secretary of State (SoS) must be notified as soon as reasonably practicable, and the Direction must be reviewed at least once every seven days to ensure the conditions for making it are still met. Similarly, the SoS has the power to direct a LA to make a Direction under the Regulations, if the SoS considers the conditions for making a Direction are met.
- 7.1.6 Directions relating to premises may require closure of premises, restriction of entry or restrictions relating to the location of persons in the premises. A LA may not make a Direction relating to premises which form part of essential infrastructure.
- 7.1.7 Directions may be given in relation to specified events or events of a specified description.
- 7.1.8 If the LA gives a direction which imposes a prohibition, requirement or restriction on a person specified by name, the LA must give notice in writing to that person and also publish the notice to bring to the attention of persons who may be affected by it. Persons who are given a direction

under the Regulations have a right of appeal against the direction to a magistrate's court and also to make representations to the SoS.

7.1.9 LA designated officers and constables have enforcement powers. Persons who contravene directions under the Regulations or obstruct persons carrying out functions under the Regulations commit offences.

7.1.10 Officers continue to consider both formal Regulations and Guidance issued by Government which informs the Council's approach to the relevant subject matter. By way of example, the government's advice on COVID-19: Guidance for the safe use of council buildings was updated on the 9th September 2020. See link for full details; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-council-buildings/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-council-buildings>

7.1.11 Particular reference is drawn to section 3c 'Meetings' which states; "We continue to recommend that where meetings can take place digitally, without the need for face-to-face contact, they should do so. Where council buildings need to be used for physical meetings, these meetings must be managed within the social distancing guidance and principles set out above."

7.1.12 As referenced in para. 7.1.4 above, the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 enable remote meetings. The key question to consider in all cases would be, is it necessary to holding face to face meetings in council buildings? Such risk assessment would need to consider the availability of alternative methods, i.e. virtual meetings, the risk and data pertaining to infection rates both locally and nationally, any particular local considerations and vulnerabilities of those who may be impacted by a decision, and equality considerations when considering the necessity if it should hold in person meetings.

7.1.13 Most recently, The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (England) (Amendment) (No. 4) Regulations 2020 which came into force on 14th September 2020, amended the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2020, so that people may not participate in social gatherings, in any place, in groups of more than 6, unless they are members of the same household, two linked households, or exceptions apply. The changes apply to England, in so

far as an area isn't subject to additional or enhanced restrictions by way of are specific regulations.

7.1.14 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Obligations of Hospitality Undertakings) (England) Regulations 2020, came into force on 18th September 2020 by way of emergency Regulations. The Regulations make provision for requirements for pubs, restaurants, cafes and other businesses involved in providing food for consumption on the premises to take reasonable steps or measures to limit customers to parties of six, and to keep tables an appropriate distance apart.

7.1.15 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Collection of Contact Details etc and Related Requirements) Regulations 2020 came into force on 18th September 2020, again by way of emergency Regulations. The Regulations makes provisions requiring designated venues to collect certain contact details mainly from customers, visitors and staff (as set out in the regulations), store this information for 21 days, and share it with NHS Test and Trace or local public health officials, if requested. This is with the purpose of enabling NHS Test and Trace and local public health officials to contact people who may have been exposed to coronavirus and give them appropriate public health advice to help stop the further spread of the virus.

7.2 Finance Implications

7.2.1 A detailed financial update on the COVID-19 response was reported to Cabinet on 8 September and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 1 September. The separate Mid-Year Review report, elsewhere on the agenda, provides a further update on the following items:

- COVID-19 related additional expenditure and losses of income from sales, fees, charges and local taxation
- COVID-19 related funding for specific and non-specific activities
- the non-COVID-19 related financial performance of the Council
- areas under consideration to mitigate any forecast impact on the Council's General Reserves
- The Mid-Year Review also includes recommendations associated with sound financial control, budget management and decision making.

7.2.2 The financial issues facing Cheshire East Council are just part of a significant national issue for public services, and the UK economy as a

whole. Public Sector deficits and reductions in GDP are at levels not seen before, and Central Government continues to react with funding support packages both for general and specific purposes. The Council has continued to support MHCLG in gathering evidence, on a monthly basis, of the potential costs and income losses for 2020/21 based on information and guidance available at the date of the government return. The information from the Council contributes to the ongoing negotiations between the LGA, MHCLG, HM Treasury and other government departments and sector led organisations such as the County Councils Network.

- 7.2.3 Any ongoing financial implications of COVID-19 must be factored into the development of the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy. Financial impacts may occur in a number of ways, such as a reduction in reserves (that may need to be replaced), ongoing dependency on Council services, slow recovery in important income sources or, perhaps more fundamentally the levels of financial support from government grants. These impacts will continue to be monitored and analysed to ensure future budgets are capable of being both robust and sustainable.

7.3 Policy Implications

- 7.3.1 COVID-19 is having a wide-ranging impact on many policies. Any significant implications for the council's policies are outlined in this report.

7.4 Equality Implications

- 7.4.1 Implications of the changes will continue to be reviewed. We are carrying out individual risk assessments for staff with protected characteristics, particularly in relation to BAME colleagues and staff with a disability.

7.5 Human Resources Implications

- 7.5.1 Paragraphs 5.2.56-5.2.58 provide information in relation to the Council's workforce and workplace. Throughout the pandemic, there has been regular communication with staff and good co-operation with the Trade Unions.

7.6 Risk Management Implications

- 7.6.1 Risk registers have been maintained as part of the Council's response to date and the plans for recovery. Business Continuity Plans are

being kept under review and plans have been tested against concurrent risks of EU Exit and winter pressures.

7.7 Rural Communities Implications

7.7.1 COVID-19 is having an impact across all communities, including rural communities. The support for small businesses will support rural business.

7.8 Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children

7.8.1 There are implications for children and young people. There are implications for schools, early help and prevention and children's social care which are summarised in the report.

7.9 Public Health Implications

7.9.1 COVID-19 is a global pandemic and public health emergency. There are implications for Cheshire East which are summarised in the report.

7.10 Climate Change Implications

7.10.1 There have been positive benefits of fewer cars on the road. This includes most staff who have been working from home. There has also been lower demand for heating/lighting offices. This is outlined in paragraph 6.5.14.

8 Ward Members Affected

8.1 All Members.

9 Consultation & Engagement

9.1 Formal consultation activities were initially paused due to the lockdown restrictions. We are reviewing on a case by case basis to ensure that we can continue to operate effectively.

10 Access to Information

10.1 Comprehensive reports on COVID-19 can be found on the Council's and the Government's websites.

11 Contact Information

11.1 Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officers:

Frank Jordan, Executive Director Place and Deputy Chief Executive

Mark Palethorpe, Executive Director People

Jane Burns, Executive Director Corporate Services