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Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 10 November 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, September and October on how the Council, working with its partners, continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and plan for the recovery from it.
- 1.2. This report provides a further update of the work undertaken in response to this national and international public health emergency since the October report.
- 1.3. The report also summarises the latest information on infection rates and local measures instigated as a result. The recent assignment of Cheshire East as a Tier Two or high-level alert area is also described.
- 1.4. The financial impact of the pandemic on the council continues to be significant. The report provides a further update, which will also be of interest to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny and the Audit and Governance Committees.
- 1.5. The most recent additional costs associated with the surge in infection rates, Tier Two measures, local contact tracing and free school meals for October half term are not yet included in the financial implications section.
- 1.6. It is important to note that there will be other new developments following the publication of this report. Verbal updates will be given at the meeting, as appropriate.

2. Recommendations

2.1.1. That Cabinet notes the issues outlined in the report.

3. Other Options Considered

3.1. Not applicable.

4. Background

- 4.1. Since the last WHO Weekly Epidemiological Update issued on 5 October, over 2.2 million new cases and 39,000 deaths of COVID-19 have been reported across all six WHO regions. This is the highest number of reported cases so far in a single week.
- 4.2. From 30 December 2019 through 11 October 2020, over 37 million COVID-19 cases and 1 million deaths have been reported globally. Nearly half of these cases (48%) and deaths (55%) continue to be reported in the Region of the Americas with the United States of America, Brazil and Argentina accounting for the greatest numbers of new cases and deaths in the region. (Source WHO)
- 4.3. The latest international, national and local statistics are available from the following data dashboards:
- 4.4. <https://covid19.who.int/>
- 4.5. <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/>
- 4.6. In England, the Department of Health and Social Care report that there has been an average of 12,545 new cases over the last seven-day period (as at 15 October) with a high number of cases in the North of England, particularly in Merseyside, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and the North East.
- 4.7. The UK Government has introduced a new scheme of measures to address the different rates of infection in different local authority areas. The three-tier rating escalates restrictions from medium to very high. Cheshire East has been initially assigned to Tier Two (High) whereas the Mersey City Region, Greater Manchester and now Warrington have been assigned to Tier Three (Very High). It is also influenced by the admission rate to local hospitals of patients with serious illness due to COVID-19. Details of the Government's new Tier ratings is available at:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-covid-alert-levels-what-you-need-to-know>
- 4.8. The respective administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have or are introducing measures appropriate to their country's circumstances.

- 4.9. In terms of the daily confirmed cases, in the last full week of data, 626 people in Cheshire East have tested positive (as at 15 October 2020). This figure compares to the 95 people who in the last Cabinet report were recorded as testing positive. The local infection rate was recorded as 164.7 per 100,000 population. This compares to an average of 19.7 new cases per week for the month of July.
- 4.10. Within Cheshire East the current data indicate that the highest rises in infection rates continue to be within the younger adult population. Steeper rates are being seen within the 17-18 year old and the 19-21 cohorts however we continue to see infections amongst the 20-40 year old age group. Whilst we are seeing cases of COVID infection linked to schools, initial analysis appears to indicate that most transmission of infection has occurred in social or household settings. Care homes continue to be a focus for infection prevention and control and the weekly testing of staff continues and this is helping to detect potential sources of infection transmission at an earlier stage.
- 4.11. Since the last report to Cabinet national testing capacity has improved. This change is due to additional laboratory capacity coming on stream. Whilst access to testing is still controlled nationally our local monitoring of testing demand indicates that local residents are not experiencing the problems of accessing tests locally. A significant factor has been the deployment of a Local Testing site in Crewe that is open seven days a week from 8am-8pm. A second local testing site is under consideration for Macclesfield on the site of a former vehicle depot.
- 4.12. The Government has acknowledged that the national contact tracing system that is coordinated by Serco is not achieving the level of follow up required. Following the introduction of its new Tier system the Government has written to all Tier Two Local Authorities to advise them of the additional funding being made available to them to enhance the local Test and Trace Programme. For High Risk areas such as Cheshire East the allocation is £3 per head of population. This funding is a non-recurrent allocation.
- 4.13. Financial support for Local Authorities at Local COVID Alert Level Medium and High is to fund the following activities:
- a. Targeted testing for hard-to-reach groups out of scope of other testing programmes.
 - b. Additional contact tracing.
 - c. Enhanced communication and marketing e.g. towards hard-to-reach groups and other localised messaging.
 - d. Delivery of essentials for those in self-isolation.
 - e. Targeted interventions for specific sections of the local community and workplaces.

- f. Harnessing capacity within local sectors (voluntary, academic, commercial).
- g. Extension/introduction of specialist support (behavioural science, bespoke comms).
- h. Additional resource for compliance with, and enforcement of, restrictions and guidance.

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.

5.1.3. Owing to the latest position regarding the pandemic as outlined in section 4 above, the rhythm of these meetings has been adjusted with the two meetings taking place each week. This rhythm is reviewed each week in line with the nature and risks associated with 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 Council had been 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* – With the rise in infections within the region and locally, greater demand is being placed on the national contact tracing system and the joint Cheshire and Merseyside Response Hub. All local authorities are being asked to take on “Locally

Supported Contact Tracing”. Cheshire East officers are in contact with colleagues in areas where this approach has been adopted and have been advised of the significant burden that this role places on local teams. Whilst the national contact tracing service has indicated that it will transfer resources to enable local authorities to take on this new role, limited details have been provided regarding the financial and staff resources that will be allocated to each local authority. Planning is under way in preparation for the local authority being required to take on this additional role. This is likely to require the redeployment of existing resources.

- 5.2.4 Whilst an effective vaccine has yet to be manufactured for population usage local authorities are being asked to assist the NHS to develop their plans for conducting mass vaccination. Cheshire East Council staff are working closely with Clinical Commissioning Group and Cheshire West and Chester Council colleagues to identify possible locations for delivering the core programme and localised programmes for those unable to attend the core centres.
- 5.2.5 Cheshire East Staff continue to work with statutory sector partners in relation to infection prevention and control interventions and these activities are being updated in the light of the introduction of the Government’s new Three Tier measures.
- 5.2.6 *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 3,700 residents with 250 active cases still receiving support. This service has been instrumental in reducing demands and work is now underway to embed this into the Communities Team recovery planning, fully utilising volunteers to support people to keep safe and well at home. Key activities within the Communities Team include:
- New guidance for the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) was published on 13 October. The guidance is linked to the Local COVID Alert Levels and provides advice at each Alert Level (Medium, High, Very High and if ‘Shielding’ were reintroduced). Contingency planning has been updated to reflect the new guidance for any required contact and additional support which will be

provided through People Helping People if shielding is re-introduced locally.

- leading on the 'high risk places, location and communities' and 'vulnerable people' workstreams of the Test, Trace, Contain and Enable plan.
- Social Action Partnership have developed 15 Volunteer Coordination Points (VCPs) which are providing that support.

5.2.7 The Covid-19 Community Response and Recovery Fund which was launched at the end of June 2020 has since provided funding to 47 successful applicants, totalling just over £208,000. This fund was also bolstered with an additional £246,000 with DEFRA funding to support vulnerable people around food poverty and accessing essential supplies.

5.2.8 *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 service delivery and provision of care for the residents of Cheshire East. This includes Care Homes, Care at Home (Domiciliary Care), Complex Needs, Extra Care Housing and Supported Living schemes. Continued actions are set out below.

5.2.9 Infection Prevention Control training has now been delivered to all care providers in the Borough.

5.2.10 To date, care homes have received £3.8 million of funding from the Government's Infection Control Fund to support with workforce resilience and isolation measures. A further £378k has been distributed to Care at Home and complex care providers to ensure that staff are able to receive their full wages while sick or self-isolating due to Covid-19. Cheshire East received the first tranche of funding from Round 2 of the Infection Control fund on 2 October 2020. The total funding allocation (tranche 1 and 2) for the Borough is £4.71 million. In accordance with the guidance, 80% of the funding has been distributed to eligible care homes and community care providers in Cheshire East. With regard to the 20% discretionary element of the funding, the Council has decided to also pass this directly to local care homes and community care providers for infection control and workforce resilience, with a small percentage of this (5%) retained in the first instance for contingency purposes.

- 5.2.11 All care homes have an Infection Prevention Control Outbreak Plan supported by an Outbreak Management Toolkit issued by the Council. These can be quickly stepped up in the event of an outbreak and appropriate support put in place from the Infection Prevention and Control service and the Council's Quality Assurance team.
- 5.2.12 Officers are also working with care providers to ensure that their staff and care home residents are able to access flu vaccinations to ensure that there is resilience in the care workforce.
- 5.2.13 Monthly care home webinars have been set up in partnership with Cheshire CCG for care home providers with themed agendas such as Winter Planning, infection control, digital services etc. The first webinar was scheduled for Thursday 15th October and will focus on Infection Prevention Control and flu vaccination.
- 5.2.14 Weekly mutual aid calls have been reinstated for Care at Home providers. These now include guest expert speakers and offer an opportunity for providers to work together to develop collective solutions to common problems.
- 5.2.15 iPads are being made available to care homes who successfully apply to enable residents to stay in touch with their loved ones and facilitate GP consultations.
- 5.2.16 Whole home testing continues with care home residents and staff. This has proved effective in identifying asymptomatic staff members at an early stage enabling them to self-isolate to prevent onward transmission in the care home. Whole home testing is now being rolled out to local Extra Care Housing and Supported Living Schemes as part of a national pilot.
- 5.2.17 The Quality Assurance Team continue to undertake weekly contact calls to all care homes across the Borough. The purpose of this contact call is to seek assurance of the effective ongoing safe service delivery.
- 5.2.18 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 24 March 2020. The Council have distributed PPE to eligible organisations across Cheshire East.

We have been notified that this will be reviewed, and changes will be implemented in August and September period.

- 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 will continue to receive LRF PPE supplies on a fortnightly basis until March 2021 to support Local Authority, people in receipt of direct payment and all educational settings.
- A survey will be distributed to Care Providers to fully understand the impact of COVID-19 re PPE, current needs and issues.

5.2.19 *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 recovery Plans in place, commissioners are working with providers to re-instate contingency plans were needed in line with local tier restrictions. 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.

5.2.20 *Children's Services* – At the time of writing, new legislation on the tier system had just come into force, along with new DfE guidance, and we were reviewing the implications of this for all our services.

5.2.21 *Children's Social Care* – We are now seeing the rise in contacts and referrals to Children's Social Care that we predicted as a result of Covid-19. This is resulting in social workers' caseloads being higher than we would want them to be, although we do have a clear plan in place to reduce this. We have asked the safeguarding partnership to

support with this by partner agencies leading cases that are able to step down to prevention and early help, to prevent families experiencing statutory intervention for longer than they need to. We are working closely with the partnership to ensure that key services are maintained should stricter restrictions be implemented, to ensure that children, young people and their parents/ carers can still access the support they need, and to avoid the increase in need we have seen as a result of the initial lockdown. We will be continuing to conduct face to face visits to family homes to ensure we are effectively safeguarding children and young people.

5.2.22 We expect to receive an inspection of local authority Children's Services (ILACS) very soon and are preparing for this new type of inspection, which will focus on the quality and impact of decision making for children and young people during the pandemic.

5.2.23 We launched our new fostering brand on 1st October – Together for Fostering. At the time of writing, less than two weeks since the launch, we have already received 12 enquiries which is very positive. A direct maildrop will be carried out to all households in Cheshire East – residents will receive a postcard on fostering and what to do if you want to become a foster carer. 12 potential carers are currently in assessment. New foster carers will enable us to meet more children and young people's needs closer to home, so they can stay connected with the people who are important to them and their communities. We would like everyone to promote our campaign and spread the word to the people they know who would make great carers for our children and young people.

5.2.24 My CWA, a partnership formed with Cheshire East Council which tackles domestic abuse in our borough, have won a national award for their fantastic work from the Centre for Social Justice.

5.2.25 *Prevention and Early Help* – As reported previously we are continuing to see the needs of families increasing, alongside an increase in referrals. We have brought in additional capacity to support the Family Service to meet this increase in demand on a temporary basis to ensure children and young people are safe, and where possible prevent families from needing to escalate into a statutory social care service. We are continuing to monitor this closely as we move forward with increased evidence of poor mental health, neglect and pressurised households emerging in terms of needs.

- 5.2.26 We have now achieved 99% of our early years settings opening after the initial lockdown period and 96% of Childminders open for business. However, there have been positive Covid cases within our early years settings (mainly relating to staff), and for some this has meant they have needed to close for the two week isolation period. A dedicated email support line and follow up calls are in place providing specific Public Health advice to effected settings which is working well.
- 5.2.27 We continue to be concerned about the opportunities for our young people as they move into adulthood. We ran a Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) summit at the end of September where training providers, colleges and young people who are NEET informed the development of our NEET offer going forward. Alongside a range of other actions, we agreed that services and providers will meet regularly to problem solve issues for complex cases and individual young people, which will support effective sharing of options available to move into training and employment – including kick start opportunities. We will also be working together with the Job Centre to hold a virtual job fair for NEET young people in January.
- 5.2.28 *Education and Skills* – Over 53,319 pupils (88%) are now attending our schools (as at 15 October). Our attendance has remained high and is above national, statistical neighbours, and the North West average, which demonstrates that the preparations we have made have been effective in gaining parental confidence. This is despite an increasing number of pupils isolating due to positive Covid test results in schools. We currently have 3,392 pupils not attending schools as they are isolating either due to Covid symptoms, testing positive for Covid or having been in close contact with a person who has tested positive. Attendance of pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan and pupils with a social worker also remains good at 87% and 88% respectively.
- 5.2.29 We have seen an increase in parents expressing an interest in electively home educating their child which we expected and is being seen nationally. We have received 111 applications, which is high compared with previous years, but currently only 16 parents have deregistered following meetings with the school and local authority to understand what is expected if they home educate. This is compared with 18 applications last year when all 18 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.

- 5.2.30 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, including around the new changes as a result of the tier system.
- 5.2.31 We have worked with Public Health to produce guidance to support schools when children or staff develop Covid-19 symptoms, including additional guidance on school bubbles to keep the number of pupils required to isolate to a minimum. We have created a dedicated Education Covid Response Team which came into effect at the end of September. This Team runs a helpline from 8am to 8pm weekdays and weekend and responds to reports from schools on positive cases, and offers advice and guidance on the appropriate measures and pupil isolation. This is ensuring we are both supporting schools and have a consistent approach across Cheshire East. The helpline has received very positive feedback from schools. Workers within other services, such as Children's Social Care, the Family Service, and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, are being notified when pupils are isolating so they are aware and can support families.
- 5.2.32 Since the beginning of September the Education Covid Response team has supported 111 settings with positive cases in 72 settings.
- 5.2.33 We are providing daily reports on cases to the DfE. As at 13 October, there were 44 settings with positive cases, affecting 3,392 pupils and 142 staff. We are tracking the Covid cases in schools. To date, transmissions have not been linked to schools and are linked to home or social mixing outside of school.
- 5.2.34 To increase safety for pupils, drivers and staff, we have now made wearing a face covering compulsory for all pupils aged 11 and over, and drivers, on school transport. We are also encouraging schools to ask parents and carers to wear face coverings when dropping off or collecting pupils from school to help to reduce transmission where there are larger numbers of people gathering. As we have moved into a High Local Covid Alert Level, DfE guidance has been updated for high schools that adults and pupils should wear face coverings when moving around the premises, outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained.

- 5.2.35 The Department of Health and Social Care will be providing free PPE for education settings up to March 2021. We are currently organising packs to go out to schools.
- 5.2.36 From 22 October, schools must provide immediate access to remote learning to any pupils who can't attend school due to Covid-19. This includes where a class, group or a small number of pupils need to self-isolate, or local restrictions require pupils to remain at home. The DfE has put funding in place to support schools to access and set up a digital online platform through Microsoft or Google. These platforms can help to connect teachers and pupils when access to face-to-face education is disrupted. We have circulated a summary of all learning and training opportunities on remote learning to schools.
- 5.2.37 Ed Tech have been commissioned by the DfE to support schools in use of technology. We have arranged briefings for our schools delivered by Ed Tech week commencing 19 October.
- 5.2.38 We have 22 schools who are eligible to access academic mentors to support vulnerable children. We organised training for these schools week commencing 12 October. The schools have now registered and will be allocated mentors through Teach First. Teach First deliver this programme on behalf of the DfE. In addition, we are about to launch a programme to support 40 schools focused of supporting disadvantaged pupils.
- 5.2.39 On 12 October, the Secretary of State for Education announced that the summer exam series will be delayed by three weeks, giving students more time to prepare for their exams. Exams will begin on 7 June and end on 2 July for almost all A and AS Levels and GCSEs. Further details are expected to be published later in autumn.
- 5.2.40 Ofsted commenced visits to schools (not inspections) from 28 September. The visits will usually last for one day. Ofsted are planning to visit 5% of schools this term. We organised two sessions for schools ran by Ofsted in September to explain the arrangements and scope for these visits, which over 90 schools attended. Two schools in Cheshire East that have received a visit have shared their experience with our other settings.
- 5.2.41 We are launching our Wellbeing in Education Programme which will start in November. Each school will receive two training sessions which aim to empower key staff with knowledge, understanding and clear

strategies, so that they can use these to influence school/college policy, procedures and responses in regard to supporting and enhancing wellbeing and resilience for all. This is a national training programme which we have tailored to meet our local needs.

5.2.42 *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. 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.

5.2.43 *Town Centres* - The Council is now receiving monthly data on visits to town centres in the Borough and indicates that the number of visits to the town centres has been impacted less severely than the UK benchmark.

5.2.44 Visits to centres in September range from -23% to +17% when compared to September last year. This is against a national benchmark of -35%. This indicates that the footfall levels overall are better than the national average and for some towns the number of visits have actually increased. The data company has confirmed that the upturn in footfall in some towns is by no means unique to the Borough. Changes in centres being visited may be a result of people travelling less and visiting centres more local to their homes.

5.2.45 Notwithstanding this comparable position with the national average we recognise the importance of continuing to support the hospitality, retail and leisure sectors in each of towns over the coming months. We will therefore continue to provide support and put out communications to remind people that the town centres are still open for business albeit with restrictions in place. Section 6.3 provides further information about the support we are providing to all local businesses during this time.

5.2.46 *Enforcement* – The Council is undertaking a range of compliance and enforcement activities to ensure local businesses are Covid-secure and complying with the relevant restrictions to control the spread of COVID-19, in particular within the hospitality industry. We have adopted an agreed and consistent approach with local authority partners and the Police across the Cheshire Resilience Forum, engaging, explaining and encouraging first, with enforcement the last resort for significant or regular breaches. The approach involves responding to complaints

from the public, intelligence from partners, or businesses seeking advice. A COVID-secure checklist is also completed when any business is contacted or visited as part of a regular inspection programme, such as Food Safety.

- 5.2.47 Council Officers have undertaken visits on Friday and Saturday evenings across a number of towns in partnership with the Police. There has been a good level of compliance and businesses have been reassured that they are doing the right things. Further visits are planned.
- 5.2.48 The Council has been allocated £158,572 of the £60m surge enforcement funding provided to local authorities and the Police to support additional compliance and enforcement activity to support communities to understand and comply with the local and national restrictions and regulations.
- 5.2.49 *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 season's winter operation covering the same network as last year. There is a higher level of works activity than normal being managed on the highway network covering both the Council's maintenance programme and schemes of the utility companies. Most recently traffic flows have fallen back to around 80% of pre COVID levels. Usage levels have stabilised at mid September levels and data is awaited to see whether the recent news on the pandemic will start to affect use and duration of stays at council car parks.
- 5.2.50 The two phase programme of active travel measures continues to progress across the borough following considerable engagement from community groups, local ward councillors and town and parish councils. Phase one measures are due to complete by the mid November. 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.
- 5.2.51 The local bus network has sustained services at around 85% pre COVID and the Council's FlexiLink is still in operation. Both are running at patronage levels at around 30% of pre COVID levels, which means the services are still heavily dependent on the continued central and local funding support.

- 5.2.50 *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 as the situation has evolved. 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 and have had positive feedback on this.
- 5.2.51 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.
- 5.2.52 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 16 October 2020, there are currently 38 staff self-isolating, 99 off sick, 2210 staff working from home and 268 on leave. The enduring nature of the pandemic is leading to increased feedback from staff about fatigue. We are encouraging staff to take leave and making available a range of well-being support.
- 5.2.53 *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, including our first remote Council meeting which was held on 21 October. A recent survey of Members, overseen by the Members Forum, has gathered helpful feedback on the use of the technology. Members have responded positively to the changes and the support they have received. Advice and guidance has been provided in terms of accessing office buildings, risk assessment and adapting to remote working on a longer term basis.

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 Since the last report the Strategic Recovery Co-ordinating Group has undertaken an exercise to support planning for the winter months with a particular focus on the potential cumulative impacts of Covid-19, Winter Pressures, Adverse Weather and EU Exit. Plans have therefore been developed to provide assurance regarding:

- Winter planning for health and social care
- Planning for potential future local outbreaks
- Contingency plans for relating to adverse weather including flood events so that the responses can be managed in a Covid secure manner and to provide resilience to key services such as education and health
- Impact assessments to inform contingency planning relating to EU exit including the potential impacts on local communities, households, the local economy, key infrastructure, supply of essential items including food, council services and its providers.

6.3 The Council continues to anticipate and prepare for the longer-term impacts of the Pandemic:

6.3.1 *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.

6.3.2 *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. The Council has established the Cheshire East Business Forum, which meets monthly and provides a useful platform for the exchange of information and discussion of key topics and issues for the Borough which will, in turn, help us to better

understand the impacts of Covid-19 on our business community, mobilise and direct resource as appropriate. The Council is re-launching our 'Business Helping Business' initiative so that businesses can outline how they can help with our economic, social, health and environmental recovery objectives. Other businesses that need help, can also use it to provide details of their support requirements and officers in the Economic Development service will connect businesses in need with those that can help.

- 6.3.3 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 jobs that are available, the running of jobs fairs and the the provision of skills training, work experience and apprenticeships.
- 6.3.4 The Council is working very closely with the Cheshire & Warrington LEP to plan and deliver a series of virtual jobs fairs – Cheshire Works4U – to give employers with vacancies a platform to promote these to a wide audience of potential future employees. The first of these events focussed on Crewe and Nantwich and attracted over 16,000 views, both live and on Demand. The next Cheshire Works4U jobs fair is scheduled for 28 October is expected to exceed this figure. The sub-regional Redundancy Action Support Team (RAST) has been stood-up again, which comprises Officers from all three Local Authorities, the Department for Work & Pensions and the National Careers Service. This team co-ordinates the provision of a rapid response to redundancy situations across the Cheshire and Warrington sub region, ensuring effectiveness in operational service delivery. Officers from the Economic Development Service are part of the RAST Team and have been coordinating support for employers such as Bentley, Senior Aerospace, Dairy Gold Foods and Manchester Airport Group. The Council is also promoting the Government's Kickstart Scheme to encourage local employers to provide high quality 6-month work placements aimed at those aged 16 to 24 who are on Universal Credit and are deemed to be at risk of long term unemployment.
- 6.3.5 The Council has also delivered four phases of funding through its Discretionary Business Grant Scheme since it launched on the 1 June. Circa 540 businesses that missed out on grant funding from the Government's Small Business Grant Scheme or Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Scheme have received grants through this scheme. The Grant Scheme is now closed and all grant payments were made before 30th September.

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

- Understanding the Impacts of the pandemic and EU exit 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 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 18 September 2020, again by way of emergency Regulations. The Regulations make 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.

7.1.16 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Local COVID-19 Alert Level) (High) (England) Regulations 2020 were made on 12 October 2020 and came into force on 14 October 2020. Cheshire East Council fell within the area covered by these Regulations, known as Tier Two restricted areas. In general, these regulations make provision for local restrictions in the affected areas in terms of social interaction and operation of some businesses. People must not socialise with anybody outside of their household or support bubble in any indoor setting, whether at home or in a public place, nor must they socialise in a group of more than 6 outside, including in a garden or other space like beaches or parks. The Regulations make provision for certain lawful exceptions to these restrictions. Similarly, businesses and venues can continue to operate, in a COVID-Secure manner, other than those which remain closed in law. Certain businesses selling food or drink on their premises are required to close between 10pm and 5am. Businesses and venues selling food for consumption off the premises, can continue to do so after 10pm as long as this is through delivery service, click-and-collect or drive-thru. Schools, universities and places of worship remain open. Weddings and funerals can go ahead with restrictions on the number of attendees. People can continue to travel to venues or amenities which are open, for work or to access education, but should look to reduce the number of journeys they make where possible. There is also an expectation that any national guidance in place at the time will be

followed for example the wearing of face masks where mandated and maintaining social distancing. The Regulations make provision for a constable, a police community support officer or a person designated by a local authority, to enforce the regulations, with any offence/breach being punishable by a fixed penalty notice fine, which operates on an increasing scale should there be repeated breaches of the regulations. The fines can be levied against individual, or businesses who fail to adhere to the regulations.

7.2 Financial Implications

- 7.2.1 The potential financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been reported to Cabinet each month since July with the October update including the additional link to the Council's underlying budget performance in 2020/21. Members outside of Cabinet have received briefings via the Audit & Governance and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committees or direct member briefing. This report presents the latest financial position and identifies Government funding already provided or claimed to date.
- 7.2.2 Significant levels of uncertainty remain over the potential financial implications for local authorities. The financial issues facing Cheshire East Council are just part of an ongoing national issue for public services, and the whole UK economy. Central Government continues to react with funding support packages for both general and specific purposes. The Council continues 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 The nature of financial issues, and the approach to funding costs and income losses associated with the pandemic, has inevitably changed over time as the severity of the pandemic has changed. This creates issues with producing an accurate forecast of financial consequences compared to the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy which had been approved by Council on 20 February 2020.
- 7.2.4 In June the potential gross financial pressure for the Council was estimated at c.£70m. This represented both increased expenditure and reductions in income. At the time this figure was reported to MHCLG, conversations were already ongoing about how this could be mitigated, either through increased grant funding or by providing payments direct to businesses, suppliers or to individuals in the local area.

7.2.5 The positive response to control the virus and subsequent easing of national lockdown restrictions as well as the direction of funding to other local bodies or individuals has subsequently reduced the gross costs being accounted for by the Council. In addition, the Council has now also made a first claim for losses under the Income Compensation Scheme.

7.2.6 The returns to Central Government identify three main types of financial pressure:

(i) **Un-ringfenced Expenditure and Income Losses**

Appendix 1 provides an indication of the forecast financial pressures from COVID-19 on the Council's 2020/21 budget in early October. At that time potential financial impacts under this category equated to c.£32.8m. Although provided in the report for context and clarity, these figures are under monthly review and expenditure is expected to rise with the rising number of infection cases. Un-ringfenced grant funding to support expenditure and income losses is detailed in Table 1 below, in a format consistent with previous reports. £22.4m of Support Grant has been paid to date; £2.1m has also been claimed so far under the Income Compensation Scheme and is pending analysis before payment. On 12 October Government announced that an additional £1 billion will be provided to support councils in England to ensure they have the resources needed this winter. Cheshire East's allocation is £2.6m, announced on 22 October. Further analysis will be completed to understand how this new allocation can mitigate the issues identified within Appendix 1. Alongside this recent allocation, Government have also announced that £100m has been top sliced to provide support in keeping leisure centres open, and a claims process to access this funding will be announced shortly.

(ii) **Collection Fund**

Collection Fund potential losses relate to Council Tax and Business Rates income. At the time of writing, the Council expects to have to bear these losses. Latest guidance from government requires councils to spread the impact over the next three years. However, there is ongoing consideration from MHCLG and the LGA on this issue and further information will be provided when it is available. Cash shortfalls in-year are expected to be in the region of £9m. The Council will continue to recover late payments where practical, however some losses will be permanent; for example, where businesses have ceased trading, individuals are now entitled to Council Tax Support Payments, or where growth in the tax base has slowed down compared to forecasts.

(iii) **Ringfenced Expenditure**

Table 2 provides information about the activities the Council has been undertaking which have received specific government funding.

Table 1: The approach to un-ringfenced funding has changed over time

Announced	Funding for CEC	Notes
(England total)		
19th March	£9.150m (£1.6bn)	Adult Social Care based payment
18th April	£10.539m (£1.6bn)	Payment per capita to help reflect lost income
Sub-Total	£19.689m (£3.2bn)	
2nd July	£2.712m (£0.5bn)	Adult Social Care / deprivation based payment
12th October	£2.578m (£1bn)	To provide resources for winter. This tranche of funding has been used to equalise all payments using the same approach as the July payment.
Total	£24.979m (of £4.7bn)	
2nd July	£6.1m (£n/k) for Income Compensation	Estimated total – subject to claims process. £2.1m claimed so far, in 1 st of 3 data collection rounds Compensation at 75p in £1 for losses above 5% of sales, fees and charges budgets
2nd July	£nil for Collection Fund	Defer Collection Fund Deficit over 3yrs

7.2.7 Un-ringfenced government funding received to date as detailed in Table 1 (above) is currently **£24.9m**, and the income compensation scheme is anticipated to bring in **£6.1m**, if settled in full. In October it was reported that current spending and income loss forecasts could see a shortfall for the Council of c. **£13.5m**. Although a fourth tranche of funding has been announced by the Government, the financial impact is increasing, due to increasing number of cases of COVID-19. At this point it is not clear

whether the previously forecast shortfall will change, but it will be subject to ongoing analysis and review.

7.2.8 Mindful of the possibility for further expenditure / net cost pressures going forward, it will be important to continue to review, understand and mitigate the potential shortfall between additional financial impacts and the funding provided by Government. The Council continues to engage in several activities:

1. Managing and reviewing the financial forecasts in response to guidance and the local response to the emergency and how this affects the Council's revenue budget.
2. Further analysing the Government proposals to compensate losses from Sales, Fees and Charges.
3. Analysing the level of Collection Fund losses across the three financial years 2021/22 to 2023/24.
4. Reviewing the consequences of funding shortfalls on the Council's capital programme and how this impacts on the Council's long-term funding of capital expenditure.

Table 2: Specific Grants are valued at c.£176m

Activity (National Total)	Spending forecast*	Funding	Variance
Test & Trace (£300m)	£1,533,331	£1,533,331	£0
Towns Fund (Capital £5bn)	£750,000	£750,000	£0
Dedicated Home to School and College Transport (£40m)	£294,536	£294,536	£0
Rough Sleeping (£3.2m + £105m)	£158,516	£6,000	£152,516
Active Travel (£225m)	£774,000	£774,000	£0
Re-Opening High Streets (£50m)	£339,533	£339,533	£0
Culture Recovery Fund (£1.57bn)	£180,000	£180,000	£0
Infection Control (£600m)	£5,320,292	£5,320,292	£0
Business Grants (£12.3bn)**	£87,445,000 (spending to	£95,514,000	Awaiting guidance

	date)		
Discretionary Business Grants (£617m)**	£4,357,000 (spending to date)	£4,372,250	
Tier Two Business Grants **	£n/k	£n/k	
Business Rate Holiday (£9.7bn)	£62,339,000	£58,785,655	£3,553,345
Council Tax Hardship (£500m)	£2,500,000	£2,062,635	£437,365
Local Bus Network (£167m)	£229,632	£229,632	£0
Emergency Assistance Food and basic necessities (£63m)	£326,293	£326,293	£0
Towns Fund Capital (£5bn)	£750,000	£750,000	£0
Additional Dedicated Home to School and College Transport (£40m)	£294,536	£294,536	£0
Wellbeing for Education Return (£8m)	£55,403	£55,403	£0
Compliance and Enforcement Grant (£60m)	£158,572	£158,572	£0
Bus Service Support Grant (CBSSG) Restart scheme (£254m)	£305,467	£299,634	(£5,833)
Self Isolation Test and Trace Support Payment (n/k)	£250,979	£250,979	£0
Infection Control in Care Homes (£546m) 2 nd Tranche	£4,712,872	£4,712,872	£0
Tier Two Payment (£3ph)	c.£1,100,000	£n/k	£n/k
Leisure Centres (£100m)	£n/k	£n/k (pending claims process)	£n/k

*Note: where 'Spending Forecast' equals 'Funding' this does not necessarily indicate the full extent of spending but does demonstrate the expectation that funding will be fully utilised.

**Business Grant scheme funding has been combined to date. Scheme totals can also vary if payments are subject to review or appeal

7.2.9 Further specific grants may become payable and require local administration in response to the emerging status of the pandemic response.

7.2.10 LGA and CCN collate returns from all member councils, though the types of financial pressure vary from council to council depending on their circumstances. For example, whether they provide social care, have a strong tourist economy or the extent of deprivation. The overall impacts are similar across councils and Cheshire East Council is not an outlier. The Council will continue to support lobbying by the LGA and CCN in their aim to ensure fair settlement of the financial pressures facing local authorities.

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 5.2.51-5.2.52 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