

Corporate Policy Committee

Date of Meeting:	8 June 2021
Report Title:	Covid-19 Update
Report of:	Jane Burns, Executive Director of Corporate Services
Report Reference No.	CP/01/21
Ward(s) Affected	All

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1** COVID-19 is an enduring national and international public health emergency. Under the previous arrangements, the Cabinet received regular reports on how the Council, working with its partners, continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and plan for the recovery from it. This report summarises developments since May on an exception basis.
- 1.2** The Government published a document called “COVID-19 Response Spring 2021” which includes a “roadmap” for easing restrictions in England,
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/963491/COVID-19_Response_-_Spring_2021.pdf
- 1.3** At the time of writing Step 3 has been instigated. The implications for council activities are summarised in section 5.
- 1.4** The response to and recovery from the pandemic contributes to the strategic aims and objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1** To note the report.

3.0 Reason for Recommendation

3.1 This report is part of the Council's commitment to being open and transparent.

4. Other Options Considered

4.1 Not appropriate.

5. Background

Update and by exception reporting on Council actions

5.1 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 A summary of the key changes since the May is provided below.

5.3 COVID infection rates - COVID Infection Rates vary across the UK with some areas experiencing increasing numbers of new cases that appear to be related to a variant that was first identified in India. Several areas in the Northwest region such as Blackburn and Bolton have seen significant increases in their rates. In such areas surge testing and targeted vaccination programmes have been introduced.

At present Cheshire East is not experiencing a significant rise in its new case rate although we are seeing clusters of cases along our north eastern border, particularly in Handforth and neighbouring communities. Our largest outbreak recently is linked to a primary school in that area. Contact tracing and additional testing measures have been established to reduce risk of wider transmission. Areas to the North of Cheshire East have high rates, including Manchester, Trafford, Stockport, High Peak.

As at 18 May our new case rate for the borough was 19.5 per 100,000 over the last seven days. There are currently 5 people in Hospital with COVID, 4 in Mid Cheshire, 1 in East Cheshire.

5.4 As at 24/05/21 a total of 237,815 people, 73.04% of the eligible population of Cheshire East residents who are registered with Cheshire GP Practices have received their 1st Dose and 157,307, 48.31% have received their 2nd Dose. Our rates are higher than the England average. The national programme has been extended to people in their 30s. Invitations are being sent out to individuals in the appropriate age cohorts. In addition, the local

authority continues to support the NHS programme to target harder to reach groups and vulnerable communities.

5.5 Test Trace Contain Enable/Swab squad

Our updated Test Trace Contain and Enable strategy has an aspirational 'Zero Covid' approach, with increasing proactive testing deployment in response to any clusters so that they can be rapidly contained and prevent further spread. We continue to operate our local zero and dual use test site. Our swab squad continues to deploy to key target areas and businesses in order to increase the rates of testing.

5.6 Roadmap out of lockdown Step 3 from 17 May

5.6.1 A number of council services are directly affected by the changes to restrictions – in addition to the general changes in behaviours and attitudes we can anticipate. We are working to ensure that people can still feel safe, despite the easing of restrictions and greater freedoms that many will welcome. Council services directly affected by changes from 17 May include:

5.6.2 Education – we learned that secondary school pupils will no longer have to wear face coverings in classrooms or communal areas and higher education students can access in-person teaching.

5.6.3 Adult social care - Care home residents will be allowed up to five named visitors (two at any one time) meaning that they will be able to see more of their relatives and friends. This is subject to visitors testing negative for COVID-19.

5.6.4 Registration services and bereavement services (Orbitas) - There are changes to the number of people allowed to attend a funeral. It will be determined by how many people the COVID-secure venue can safely accommodate with social distancing. Limits at other life events, such as weddings and wakes, are increasing to 30 people.

5.6.5 Leisure services (ESAR) - Organised indoor sport will be able to take place for all (this includes gym classes). To find out more, visit: <https://everybody.org.uk/>

5.6.6 Tatton Park – From the 17 May we re-opened the Gardener's Cottage Tea Room and the Mansion, subject to government guidelines. Visit the website for updates: <https://www.tattonpark.org.uk/home.aspx>

5.6.7 Support for businesses – The council's economic development and regulatory services teams are providing advice and guidance to hospitality, events and tourism businesses to support the many changes in those sectors:

- Indoor hospitality venues, such as restaurants, pubs, bars and cafes can reopen – though you will need to remain seated while eating and drinking.
- Indoor entertainment and attractions such as cinemas, theatres, concert halls, bowling alleys, casinos, amusement arcades, museums and children's indoor play areas will be permitted to open with COVID-secure measures in place.
- All holiday accommodation in England can open – such as hotels and B&Bs. These can be used by groups of up to six people or two households.
- You can attend indoor and outdoor events, including live performances, sporting events and business events. Attendance at these events will be capped according to venue type and will be subject to COVID-secure measures.
- The council's work to ensure compliance with regulations and to help to reduce risk of infections will continue as both businesses and customers/visitors become used to the changes.
- The [‘Say Hi to the High Street’ campaign](#) has been launched and is gaining positive and active support from local businesses and social media across all the key towns.

5.7 Business Grants Update

5.7.1 We are continuing to invite [applications](#) for the new Restart Grant, which supports eligible businesses with one-off grants of up to £18,000 to help them reopen safely.

5.7.2 More than 1,600 grants have already been paid out, totalling £13m. In line with government guidance. The application closure date for the Restart Grant is 30 June.

5.7.3 The first two phases of the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) is closed to new applications and all funding has been allocated in line with the policy.

- 5.7.4** We have so far paid out ARG grants totalling £10.9m and businesses that are still required to close will continue to receive grant funding up until 21 June, in line with the roadmap out of lockdown.
- 5.7.5** The phases of ARG will see us provide additional funding, to around 1191 businesses totalling £11.1m.
- 5.7.6** We anticipate the receipt of £3.4m in government funding to give further support to businesses up to March 2022.
- 5.7.7** A phase three ARG policy to cover this new allocation of funding is being developed.

5.8 Recovery planning

- 5.8.1** At the sub-regional level the strategic command for the response to the pandemic has been transferred to a strategic recovery co-ordinating group. This is a multi-agency group that brings together key partners including local government, health, police, the local enterprise partnership and enables feedback to central government.
- 5.8.2** This group is chaired by the Chief Executive of Cheshire East Council and oversees a sub-regional approach to the ongoing management of the pandemic, managing the easing of restrictions and planning for longer term recovery.
- 5.8.3** The council has therefore developed a recovery plan to support this sub-regional approach as well as ensuring the Borough continues to manage the pandemic effectively as well as recovery arrangements.
- 5.8.4** In particular the recovery plan anticipates and is preparing the Council to manage the longer-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Borough and on our council services. For example, it is anticipated that there will be significant long-term impacts on communities and business in Cheshire East.
- 5.8.5** The key issues, risks and plans that have been developed at this stage cover:
- The ongoing management of COVID-19 including test, trace, contain and enable
 - Supporting children and young people including ensuring an effective education recovery, managing increased demand on social care and supporting mental health

- Meeting the increased demands on adult social care, health and community services
- Putting effective arrangements in place to provide guidance and support to local businesses to ensure they operate safely and in line with the regulations
- Leading an effective economic recovery

6. Consultation and Engagement

- 6.1** Formal consultation activities were initially paused due to the lockdown restrictions. However, we are now undertaking all consultations following a review on a case by case basis to ensure that we can continue to operate effectively.

7. Implications

7.1 Legal Implications

- 7.1.1** The UK has made hundreds of laws in response to the Coronavirus pandemic, with four national lockdown laws covering each of the nations. For England, the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Steps) (England) Regulations ('the Roadmap Regulations') recently came into force – 29 March 2021. These Regulations expire on 30 June 2021 unless revoked or replaced before. The Government reviewed the Regulations on 12 April 2021 and are to review every 35 days.
- 7.1.2** The Roadmap Regulations legislate for the Government's roadmap out of lockdown (the plans for which were initially published on 12 February 2021) as part of the Spring 2021 response to Covid-19. The Spring 2021 strategy also includes information on the Government's vaccine roll-out programme, their coronavirus testing strategy and how they will respond to new coronavirus variants of concern.
- 7.1.3** The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 have expired. The High Court determined that primary legislation would be necessary to allow remote meetings to continue. There was no reference to such legislation in the Queen's Speech on 12 May. Essential meetings including planning and licensing committees, are taking place in person at Macclesfield and Crewe, with appropriate COVID-19 measures such as ensuring adequate ventilation, separation distances and the requirement for attendees to wear face masks unless sat during the meeting.

7.2 Financial Implications

7.2.1 The financial implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Council relate to the need to incur additional expenditure to meet the needs of our community and to continue to provide services; losses in income from sales, fees and charges; and reductions in council tax and business rates income. The effect on the Council's budget and its Medium Term Financial Strategy are influenced by the Government's approach to funding. Government policies and strategies in this regard have evolved over time, since March 2020; but essentially financial support to the Council and for our Borough has been provided in the following forms:

- Unringfenced grant
- Sales, fees and charges compensation scheme
- Tax income guarantee
- Specific grants
- Deferment of financial impacts on Capital Programme and Collection Fund

7.2.2 2020/21

The final position for the year ended 31 March 2021 will be reported in the statutory accounts for the year, and may be summarised as:

Service expenditure and income losses*

	Expenditure	Income	Net
	£000	£000	£000
Service costs/ losses above Budget	22,553	10,365	32,918
Financed by:			
Unringfenced grant			(23,926)
Sales, fees & charges compensation			(6,000)
Capitalisation of expenditure			(8,000)
Total - Financing			(37,926)
Allocation to COVID Earmarked Reserve			(5,008)

*Figures are illustrative, based on last estimates; final year figures will differ

Council Tax and Business Rates*

	Losses in 2020/21 year	Met by Tax Income Guarantee Scheme	Deferred and managed over 3 years
	£000	£000	£000
Council Tax	4,400	tba	tba
Business Rates	4,900	tba	tba
Total - Collection Fund	9,300	0	0

*Figures are illustrative, based on last estimates; final year figures will differ

7.2.3 Specific Grants

The Council has received in excess of £250m in specific grants for the 2020/21 year. Analysis of spending of each grant will be provided as part of the outturn report for the financial year.

7.2.4 2021/22

The latest position for the current financial year will be formally reported in the Mid-Year Review, but the Committee may wish to note the following with regard to latest estimates:

Service expenditure and income losses*

	Expenditure	Income	Net
	£000	£000	£000
Service costs/ losses above Budget	7,400	7,600	15,000
Financed by:			
Unringfenced grant - brought forward from 20/21			(5,008)
Unringfenced grant – 2021/22			(8,500)
Sales, fees & charges compensation – 2021/22			(750)
Capitalisation of expenditure			(600)
Total – Financing			(14,858)
Potential Shortfall 2021/22			142

*Figures are illustrative, based on last estimates

7.2.5 Implications for council tax and business rates will continue to be managed within the Collection Fund, over the medium term, and is not expected to have an immediate effect on the Council's revenue budget in 2021/22. Early estimates for this

year show losses in receipts of £2.7m on council tax, and £0.9m on business rates.

- 7.2.6** The Council has also been allocated £34m for 2021/22 in specific grants, to continue to support outbreak management, infection control in care homes, and to provide businesses with support and restart grants, along with other grants to support residents. Further specific grants may become payable and require local administration in response to the emerging status of the pandemic response.

7.2.7 Reporting to Government

Reporting of the Council's position continues to be reported to MHCLG on a monthly basis, in the required format; and those returns are published on the Cheshire East website.

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** Work has continued to improve accessibility of the vaccine, particularly for those who are vaccine hesitant or less able to travel to vaccination centres.
- 7.4.2** We carried out individual risk assessments for staff with protected characteristics, particularly in relation to BAME colleagues and staff with a disability and are issuing regular reminders to keep these under review as circumstances may change.

7.5 Human Resources Implications

- 7.5.1** The latest data on staff absences on 13th May 2021 are 9 (23 *last month*) staff self-isolating and working from home, 1 (27 *last month*) staff self-isolating and not working from home (role doesn't allow), 2 (4 *last month*) Covid-related absences, and 94 (102 *last month*) non-Covid-related absences.

7.5.2 Staff vaccinations: as at 18th March 1871 staff are eligible for vaccinations due to their role. Of these, 89.5% have had a first vaccination.

7.5.3 There continues to be regular communication with staff and good co-operation with the Trade Unions. The results of the latest Pulse Survey will be brought to the July meeting.

7.6 Risk Management Implications

7.6.1 The risk environment around COVID-19 remains dynamic. 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.

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.

8. Ward Members Affected

8.1 All members.

Access to Information

HM Government website contains comprehensive information.

Roadmap https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/963491/COVID-19_Response - Spring 2021.pdf	
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Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	Government Guidance COVID-19 Response – Spring 2021(Roadmap)