

Corporate Policy Committee

Date of Meeting:	9 June 2022
Report Title:	Covid-19 Update
Report of:	Jane Burns, Executive Director of Corporate Services
Report Reference No.	CP/3/22-23
Ward(s) Affected	All

1. Purpose of the Report

To provide the Committee with an update on recent Covid developments, including the Government's Living with COVID-19 approach, for the purposes of oversight and review.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1** COVID-19 is an enduring national and international public health emergency. Members have been kept informed through regular reports and briefings 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 recent developments on an exception basis.
- 2.2** The Government's plan for removing the remaining legal restrictions while protecting people most vulnerable to COVID-19 and maintaining resilience was published on 21 February 2022. The publication explained that the Government was structuring its ongoing response around four principles: "(a) Living with COVID-19: removing domestic restrictions while encouraging safer behaviours through public health advice, in common with longstanding ways of managing most other respiratory illnesses; (b) Protecting people most vulnerable to COVID-19: vaccination guided by Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advice, and deploying targeted testing; (c)

Maintaining resilience: ongoing surveillance, contingency planning and the ability to reintroduce key capabilities such as mass vaccination and testing in an emergency; and (d) Securing innovations and opportunities from the COVID-19 response, including investment in life sciences.”

- 2.3** The Council and its partners have continued to respond to the changing requirements through ongoing work on response and recovery and positive public health messaging. The response to and recovery from the pandemic contributes to the strategic aims and objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25

3. Recommendation

- 3.1** To note the ongoing implications of Covid-19 and Cheshire East Council's response.

4. Reason for Recommendation

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

5. Other Options Considered

- 5.1** Not appropriate.

6. Background

Update and by exception reporting on Council actions

- 6.1** Cheshire East Council has continued to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic for over 2 years now. At all times, the Council has continued to strive to:

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

- 6.2** A summary of the key changes since February 2022 is provided below.

- 6.3 Covid infection rates**– Since January 2022, Cheshire East has consistently been experiencing high rates of infection, followed by Cheshire West, compared to other local authorities across the Cheshire and Merseyside sub region, mostly higher than England and North West rates. After the first week of January 2022, the rates started to decline. Cheshire East has seen a reduction in infection rates from 2,175 cases per 100,000 population (as of 4 January 2022) down to 79.66 cases per 100,000 (380 cases as of 22 May 2022). This is more evident since April

2022, after the restrictions being lifted and mandatory free testing came to an end, the infection rate has been decreasing dramatically.

Hospital admissions - There are fewer Covid-related admissions in our local hospitals compared to this time last year. However, the number of patients in hospitals increased from 30 to 200 between November 2021 and January 2022. Compared to last year, the rate of increase has been slower and the number of patients occupying intensive care unit (ICU) beds is very low. Since the end of March, the Covid occupied beds have decreased from 146 (27 March 2022) to 39 (23 May 2022) beds. Nevertheless, it remains a priority to emphasise the need for the local population to follow Covid safety guidance and get fully vaccinated and boosted.

Vaccination - As of 4 May 2022, there were 383,828 eligible registered patients over the age of 5 with Cheshire East GP practices, of which 311,373 (81.1%) have received their first dose, 298,582 (77.8%) have received their second dose, and 246,723 (87.1%) of those eligible have received their third or booster vaccination dose. The rate of full vaccination and booster vaccination within electoral wards ranges from 73% to 92%, and individuals yet to be vaccinated range between 11% and 42%. One explanation for this variation is that some wards have a significantly younger age profile and therefore only became eligible for vaccination later in the schedule. Targeted efforts are in place to ensure everyone in our communities has access to vaccination, with additional support to those with greater need, where possible.

6.4 Test Trace Contain Enable (TTCE) – The core elements of test and trace were largely demobilised at the end of March as part of the Government's 'Living with Covid' plan. However, the TTCE Programme has been extended to October 2022 in order to mitigate the risk of Covid-19 resurgences. The Swab Squad remain proactive and continue to provide LFT home testing kits to priority cohorts, partners and staff as required, until the end June 2022 where this will be reviewed. In order to do this, Cheshire East Council purchased 10,000 home testing kits and also retained the Department of Health and Social Care stock of testing kits. To ensure the programme remains productive, both test and trace teams have taken on a range of other roles across the organisation to provide essential support where required. This includes, as some examples, vaccine tracing, supporting the mobile vaccination clinics, mobilising a mobile health and wellbeing offer in the community, undertaking in-person and telephony welfare checks for the Ukrainian Homes Programme, providing transport and telephony support to adult social care teams. The TTCE Programme is also working on a legacy project which is a Covid-19 early warning system,

which will involve working with the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) on a national wastewater pilot project.

6.5 National Changes since February 2022

From 21 February the Government:

- Removed the guidance for staff and students in most education and childcare settings to undertake twice weekly asymptomatic testing.

From 24 February the Government:

- Removed the legal requirement to self-isolate following a positive test. Adults and children who test positive continue to be advised to stay at home and avoid contact with other people for at least 5 full days and then continue to follow the guidance until they have received 2 negative test results on consecutive days.
- No longer asks fully vaccinated close contacts and those aged under 18 to test daily for 7 days, and removed the legal requirement for close contacts who are not fully vaccinated to self-isolate.
- Ended self-isolation support payments, national funding for practical support and the medicine delivery service is no longer be available.
- Ended routine contact tracing. Contacts will no longer be required to self-isolate or advised to take daily tests.
- Ended the legal obligation for individuals to tell their employers when they are required to self-isolate.
- Revoked The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 3)

From 24 March, the Government:

- Removed the COVID-19 provisions within the Statutory Sick Pay and Employment and Support Allowance regulations.

From 1 April, the Government:

- Removed the current guidance on voluntary COVID-status certification in domestic settings and no longer recommends that certain venues use the NHS COVID Pass.
- Updated guidance setting out the ongoing steps that people with COVID-19 should take to minimise contact with other people. This aligns with the changes to testing.
- No longer provides free universal symptomatic and asymptomatic testing for the general public in England.

- Consolidated guidance to the public and businesses, in line with public health advice.
- Removed the health and safety requirement for every employer to explicitly consider COVID-19 in their risk assessments.
- Replaced the existing set of 'Working Safely' guidance with new public health guidance

6.5.1 Summary of developments in council services brought about by the changes include:

6.5.2. Education - Specific Covid operational guidance for education has now been withdrawn. Schools and all other education settings should follow national guidance for Covid and other respiratory infections, contacting the local authority when there is cause for concern. Cheshire East Education and Public Health Teams have produced a short toolkit to help settings manage the transition during the summer term which clarifies when the council should be contacted and how schools should start to deal with Covid in the same way as other infectious diseases. The Covid support team has been reduced to match the fall in case numbers but remains available for any school or setting which requires advice. Staff who have a positive Covid test are advised to stay away for 5 days while pupils are advised to stay away for 3 days. Anyone with respiratory symptoms who has a high temperature or is unwell is advised to stay away until their temperature is normal and they are well enough to carry out all usual activities. Household and class contacts are not required to stay away from school although some individual risk assessments will be required for pregnant staff or anyone who is clinically vulnerable. All other measures such as keeping classes apart and wearing face coverings have ended but settings have been provided with an updated Health and Safety checklist which focuses on good infection prevention and control measures. This includes good hand and respiratory hygiene and ensuring good ventilation. Schools are being provided with regular updates and resources to ensure that these basic measures remain in place.

6.5.3. Covid support remains in place and settings have been advised of the circumstances when they should contact the local authority, such as rising absence rates due to respiratory illness or when an individual is admitted to hospital. In such cases, test kits may be provided by the council for specific individuals or groups.

6.5.4. The national programme of asymptomatic testing in schools has ended, but Cheshire East has decided to provide kits for staff working in

profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) schools until the end of May as they are often required to work in close proximity to children who are clinically vulnerable.

- 6.5.5.** Education and Public Health have worked with HR to provide guidance on managing staff absence due to confirmed cases of Covid or symptomatic respiratory illnesses where no test has been taken. This guidance has been shared with unions and advises on how staff absence should be recorded and when sick pay and attendance management trigger thresholds will be reached. This is being kept under review and will be updated should there be any new regional or national guidance.
- 6.5.6.** The School Immunisation Team offered two sessions to all schools with pupils aged 12-15 years by the end of March 2022. Additional sessions across the borough were offered to those who had requested the vaccination in school but were unable to receive this on the day of the session. As of 20 April 2022, 69% of 12-15 year olds and 81% of 16-17 year olds have had at least one vaccine. From 1 April, vaccination has been available for everyone aged 5 to 11 years. All age groups, including those aged 5 to 11 years, are able to access vaccinations in the community and schools have been kept aware of these sessions so that they can inform parents.
- 6.5.7.** The Education Recovery Group continues to meet regularly to focus on issues that will help schools and settings get back to normal as quickly as possible. The remit has now been expanded to include health and wellbeing, attendance and behaviour. Schools and settings are kept updated about developments in these areas and any other relevant information via the Covid Briefing and Learning Bulletin.
- 6.5.8 Children's Social Care –** There continue to be significant pressures nationally on the number of placements available for cared for children and young people as a result of the pandemic. As a result we are continuing to experience significant challenges in finding the right homes for a small number of our cared for children and young people, and this is also impacting on the cost of placements.
- 6.5.9. Early Help and Prevention – Household Support Fund -** Cheshire East Council, with the help of a wide range of local partners, has distributed vouchers worth £2.2 million on behalf of the Department of Work and Pensions to support the most vulnerable households across the borough with food, utilities, housing costs, and other essentials. The money was our share of the government's £500 million Household

Support Fund which ran from 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. The fund is available to support both adults (without dependent children) and families with children and is available to vulnerable households who need additional financial support. The fund has since been extended from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022, with an additional £2.2 million being supplied to Cheshire East.

- 6.5.10 Holiday Activities and Food Programme** - The government's Holiday Activities and Food Programme has run since April 2021, and has been extended to March 2023. The scheme provides enjoyable activities and nutritious meals for primary and secondary school aged children who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals during the school holidays. It is also an important source of support for children and families during the holiday period. As at 31 March 2022, over 50,000 hours of support had been provided to over 3,000 free school meal eligible young people, and over 20,000 healthy meals.
- 6.5.11 Adult social care** – Final payments have been made from the temporary government funding streams to support the care market including the Infection Control Fund, Testing and Vaccination, and Workforce Recruitment and Retention Funding (WRRF). In total £19.14 million of government funding was provided to support Adult Social Care in Cheshire East over the two years of the pandemic. Though welcomed by providers, the short term and prescriptive nature of the funding meant it could not address longer-term recruitment and retention issues in the sector.
- 6.5.12** Recruitment and retention pressures on the care market continue due to competition from the retail and hospitality industries and this is impacting on the ability to discharge medically fit patients from hospital. This has settled to a small extent in care homes but continues in care at home services where increases in fuel costs are exacerbating the issue. A proportion of the final tranche of the WRRF was paid to care at home providers to support their careworkers with fuel costs, and a task and finish group has been established with provider representatives to support the market. An increased fee uplift of 14% (from 6%) has been agreed with the additional costs funded from Better Care Fund so that providers are able to offer staff enhanced rates of pay. The beneficial effect of this is starting to be felt with improved retention of staff and a small increase in new staff joining as rates of pay begin to match those in the hospitality and retail sectors.

6.5.13 Care homes continue to be impacted by the virus and at the time of writing, 21 care homes and one supported living setting are in outbreak. The risk based assessment tool for unlocking admissions into care homes agreed by Public Health and the Infection Prevention Control team to be safe to admit with the appropriate controls in place continues to be used and is having a positive impact on hospital discharges. This has been developed in accordance with the latest government guidance. Providers have complimented and thanked officers for their timely response and support, offered in the face of frequently changing guidance and new understanding of the virus. This support has included (but is not limited to) ready provision of large quantities of PPE purchased by the council on behalf of care providers, regular mutual aid calls, weekly calls offering support, passporting government grants and council funding, IPC visits and training provided by the Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).

6.5.14 The Government has now revoked the mandatory requirement for care staff to have been fully vaccinated. However, the council continues to monitor the percentage of care home staff and residents who have had the vaccination. At the last count 99% of staff had received both vaccinations and 60% had received the booster vaccination. The roll out of a second booster jab is underway for eligible staff and residents.

6.5.15 A joint project has been running with the council's Quality Assurance and Contracts team and the CCG encouraging care homes to complete the Better Care Data Security and Protection Toolkit (DSPT) to obtain their NHS email address to allow the homes to securely communicate and undertake remote video consultation and the reordering of prescriptions for residents. Our care homes have positively engaged with this offer and a good uptake was recorded for April. Joint local authority and CCG quality assurance visits have continued to take place within our care homes across the borough and a planned schedule of visits has been set for May.

6.5.16 **Tatton Park** – All facilities are open. Visit the website for information: www.tattonpark.org.uk/home.aspx

6.5.17 Waste and recycling collections

The increase in the tonnage of waste collected since the first lockdown when more people started to work from home has not yet reduced to pre-lockdown levels, although recycling levels remain encouragingly high. Disruption to individual rounds on a daily basis as a result of staff absences has now stabilised with the need to suspend rounds now

occurring infrequently. Suspended rounds are generally being collected within 1-5 working days of their scheduled collection day. The increased tonnages of waste could result in cost pressures into 2022-23 if the tonnages do not reduce to pre-pandemic levels.

6.5.18 Planning

The caseload within the Planning service remains exceptionally high and most applications are taking 4-6 months to determine, although the backlog of applications has reduced, albeit slowly, from the peak of 2,882 at the end of October 2021 to 2,654 at the end of March 2022. Valid applications continue to be registered and the appropriate publicity and consultations are taking place but allocation to a case officer is being delayed to manage workloads. An external provider has been procured to provide additional resources to help address the backlog of applications over the next 6 months. We continue to recruit to fill staff vacancies on a permanent basis and explore options to increase resource capacity on a temporary basis. To help develop greater resilience and improve service standards in the longer term, a deep dive review of the service is being undertaken with a Members Advisory Panel established to support and advise the review. This will be reported to the Environment and Communities Committee.

6.6 Business Grants Update

At the end of December 2021, Government announced a further round of grants with the introduction of support for hospitality and leisure businesses in England as a response to the Omicron variant. This included the **Omicron Leisure and Hospitality Grant**, which was a one off payment based on a business's rateable value and subject to appropriate eligibility criteria.

At the same time, the Government announced a further Top Up to the Additional Restrictions Grant to enable Councils to award discretionary grants to businesses through locally designed schemes. Cheshire East distributed its ARG allocation under the following grant policy and schemes;

The **Business Interruption Fund** was available to support all businesses, based in the Borough that are able to demonstrate they have been impacted by the pandemic, including the latest Omicron variant. To be eligible, a business must demonstrate that they are either: operating at reduced capacity due to staff shortages as a result of Covid-19 or; have had to close for operational reasons due to Covid-19 or; that

cashflow has been disrupted due to reduced customer demand or supply-side issues as a result of Covid-19.

The **Recovery and Growth Grant Programme** aimed to support economic recovery and assist businesses that are seeking to grow, adapt, diversify, and expand their current operation to support long-term sustainability. The grant was made available for businesses seeking to invest in their premises, facilities or equipment that will enable them to re-open quickly, bring staff and customers safely back to work or to capitalise on new opportunities. access improvements / amendments (i.e. motion sensor doors, queueing adaptations, one-way set-ups, improvised waiting areas etc)

The closing date identified by the Council for applications was 11th February with final payments to be made by 31 March 2022.

The Council successfully achieved full payment of allocated funds for Discretionary Grants by that deadline date.

Addressing the complete timeline of support since the first lockdown in March 2020, and the introduction of **Discretionary Grant support** from June 2020, the Council's Economic Development Service has assessed 4,114 grant applicants and awarded 2,374 grants.

In addition, the Cheshire East Recovery & Growth Programme was set up and delivered support to more than 350 businesses to help develop recovery and growth plans through an online portal and one-to-one consultancy support.

The Council Team are in the process of conducting an economic impact assessment report on the Recovery & Growth Programme to capture the benefits of the grants and business support on the recovery and growth of the beneficiary businesses.

Below is a summary table of the total amounts distributed via each discretionary grant scheme:

	Local Discretionary Grant Schemes	Period of Grant Scheme	Total Funding Allocated to Cheshire East Council	Total Amount Awarded	Total Number of Applications	Total Number of Payments Made to Businesses
2020 - 2021	Local Discretionary Grant Scheme	4 Phases: (1/6/2020 - 30/9/2020)	£ 4,356,000.00	£ 4,368,500.00	751	540
	ARG Initial payment and top up 1	14/10/2020 - 30/06/2021	£ 11,095,482.00	£ 11,095,482.00	2133	1102
2021 - 2022	ARG 2 nd & 3 rd Top Up		£ 4,232,452.00			
	Extended Restrictions Grant	13/09/21 - 14/10/2021		£ 430,500.00	249	187
	Business Interruption Fund	27/09/21 - 11/02/2022		£ 1,296,929.00	709	359
	Recovery & Growth Grant	27/09/21 - 11/02/2022		£ 2,427,474.00	272	186
	Recovery & Growth Programme (online portal and business support)			£ 77,549.00		
	TOTAL		£ 19,683,934.00	£ 19,696,434.00	4114	2374

The Discretionary Grant was supplemental to the main **National Grant Schemes for the Retail, Hospitality & Leisure** Sectors. These Main Grants were based on property and business rateable value and similar to the discretionary grants evolved over the period of the pandemic and became more focused to react to the parameters of each lockdown period.

Again, significant levels of support were applied across the Borough, as outlined in the table below:

	National Grant Schemes (Based on Rateable Values)	Period of Grant Scheme	Total Funding Allocated to Cheshire East Council	Total Amount Awarded	Total Number of Applications	Total Number of Payments Made to Businesses
2020 - 2021	Small Business Grant	One-off payment (1/4/2020 - 30/09/2020)	£ 91,158,000	£ 55,480,000	5549	5547
	Retail, Hospitality & Leisure Grant	One-off payment (1/4/2020 - 30/09/2020)		£ 31,506,939	1694	1680
	Christmas Support Payment	One-off payment (Dec 2020)	£ 274,000	£ 274,000	274	274
	Local Restriction Support Grant	4 phases based on Local Tiers: 14/10/2020 - 31/03/2021	£ 30,440,594	£ 23,467,717	5155	3185
	Closed Business Lockdown Payment	One-off payment (05/11/2020 - 01/12/2020)	£ 19,557,000	£ 14,838,000	4878	3062
2021 - 2022	Restart Grant	One-off payment (April 2021 - Aug 2021)	£ 21,294,675	£ 18,634,155	2137	2137
	Omicron Hospitality & Leisure Grant	Dec 2021 - 31/03/2022	£ 3,486,195	£ 2,641,462	745	745
	TOTAL		£ 166,210,464	£ 146,842,273	20432	16630

6.7 Future Workplace and engagement

6.7.1 Throughout the pandemic, we have provided frequent briefings to staff through a variety of methods. This includes written briefings, Conversation With/Question and Answer sessions, team meetings, TLC calls and wellbeing support. There have been three Pulse Surveys of staff which reported mainly positive feedback on how informed staff have felt. The summary of the latest results is included in the Workforce Strategy Update, elsewhere on the agenda.

6.7.2 Member decision-making meetings have been held face-to-face since the remote meeting regulations expired. Appropriate health and safety and risk assessments have been undertaken to protect participants. The Government conducted a consultation on future arrangements between 25 March and 17 June 2021 to inform consideration of permanent provisions. Any permanent provision would require primary legislation and would depend upon available Parliamentary time. The department has considered responses to the Call for Evidence and the Minister, Kemi Badenoch MP confirmed on 19 April 2022 that the Government will respond shortly.

6.7.3 We have continued to engage with and listen to staff about new ways of working which meet customer, service and individual needs. Our recent *Spring Back Together* campaign is focused on building one team at Cheshire East Council and actively encouraging those staff who have been predominantly working at home to come back into workplaces again to re-connect with colleagues. The feedback from the week has been positive. Other events are planned in June. Following on from team based conversations about effective ways of working, team plans will now be developed which will allow us to identify whether changes to policies are required to embed the new ways of working. Work is also progressing on options for asset rationalisation.

6.8 Recovery planning

6.8.1 At the sub-regional level, the multi-agency group that brings together key partners including local government, health, police, the local enterprise partnership enables feedback and escalation to central government was formally stood down on 31st March 2022.

6.8.2 The Cheshire East CEMART arrangements were stood down on 22 April 2022. It can be stepped back up as and when necessary.

7. Consultation and Engagement

7.1 Consultations have resumed, although they are predominantly through digital or remote means.

8. Implications

8.1 Legal Implications

8.1.1 The UK Government has now moved to a policy of living with Covid-19 and away from deploying regulations and requirements in England, to be replaced with specific interventions for Covid-19 with specific interventions and public health measures and guidance.

Remaining domestic restrictions were removed earlier this year, which included the legal requirement to self-isolate following a positive test. Although those testing positive are still advised to stay at home and to avoid contact with other people. People are advised to take a LFT on the 5th and 6th day – if these results are negative, they can go about their normal routine. The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No.3) Regulations were also revoked. Local authorities will continue to manage local outbreaks of

COVID-19 in high risk settings as they do with other infectious diseases.

The COVID-19 provisions within Statutory Sick Pay and Employment and Support Allowance regulations ended on 24 March. People with COVID-19 may still be eligible, subject to the normal conditions of entitlement.

- 8.1.2** 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 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.

8.2 Financial Implications

- 8.2.1** 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 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

- 8.2.2** With regard to unringfenced grant received from Government for Covid-19 purposes, as at 31 March 2021 the balance held in an earmarked reserve for future use was £5.153m. For the 2021/22 financial year, the Council was allocated £8.508m in unringfenced grant; and the sales, fees and charges scheme was also extended

to provide some compensation for losses in income compared to budget, for the April to June 2021 period.

- 8.2.3** The draft final position for the 2021/22 financial year is summarised in the table below. The Committee may wish to note that with pressures on Service budgets totalling some £8.6m, and following the compensation receivable for income losses and capitalisation of some expenditure, where appropriate, not all of the unringfenced Covid grant allocation for the year was utilised. Consequently, some £6m in grant will be carried forward into 2022/23, as anticipated in the MTFS, to help cover certain 'Covid scarring' costs/ financial pressures, that will continue for some time due to the effects of the pandemic on Council services.

Service expenditure and income losses

	Expenditure	Income	Net
	£000	£000	£000
Service costs/ losses above Budget	5,191	3,434	8,625
Less:			
Sales, fees & charges compensation - 2021/22			(872)
Capitalisation of expenditure			(81)
Net pressures in year			7,672
Unringfenced Grant			
Balance of grant brought forward 1 April 2021			5,153
Unringfenced grant allocation 2021/22			8,508
Less - net pressures in year as above			(7,672)
Balance of grant carried forward 31 March 2022			5,989

- 8.2.4** Implications for council tax and business rates will continue to be managed within the Collection Fund, over the medium term, and are not expected to have an immediate effect on the Council's revenue budget in 2022/23. Draft final estimates for last year show losses in receipts of £3m on council tax, and £7m on business rates, as at 31 March 2022.

- 8.2.5** The Council was also allocated some £88m 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.

8.2.6 Reporting to Government

Reporting of the Council's position continued to be submitted frequently to DLUHC as required, in the specified format; and those returns are published on the Cheshire East website:

[Open data and transparency \(cheshireeast.gov.uk\)](https://cheshireeast.gov.uk)

[Search for 'covid' | Insight Cheshire East \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com)

Over the last two years, the Council supported lobbying by the LGA and CCN in their aim to ensure fair settlement of the financial pressures facing local authorities.

8.3 Policy Implications

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

8.4 Equality Implications

8.4.1 Work has continued to improve accessibility of the vaccine, particularly for those who are vaccine hesitant or less able to travel to vaccination centres Targeted efforts are in place to ensure everyone in our communities has access to vaccination, with additional support to those with greater need, where possible. A recent example is the provision of multiple vaccination sites in Crewe.

8.4.2 We carried out individual risk assessments for staff with protected characteristics, particularly in relation to BAME colleagues and staff with a disability and have issued regular reminders to keep these under review as circumstances may change. Further work is being done to support staff who may be vaccine hesitant, including BAME staff.

8.5 Human Resources Implications

8.5.1 Sickness absence has continued to be reported, although the frequency has been stepped down to monthly, given the drop in infection levels. The latest data on staff absences on 19 May 2022 are 15 (31 in January) staff self-isolating and working from home, no members of staff self-isolating and not working from home (1 in January) (role does not allow), 14 (45 in January) Covid-related sickness absences, and 124 (129 in January) non-Covid-related sickness absences.

8.5.2 There has been no update on the staff vaccinations. As at 24 January 2022, 1900 staff are eligible for vaccinations due to their role. Of these, 95.3% have had a first vaccination and 94.1% have had their second vaccination. Data on boosters not been collected.

8.5.3 The pandemic has exposed capacity pressures and skills shortages, for example, public health professionals, enforcement officers, care workers and school support staff. In addition, the challenging financial context and re-prioritisation of work has meant that vacant posts in some service areas have not been automatically filled. Work continues to provide short and longer term resourcing solutions in a challenging recruitment market.

8.5.4 There continues to be regular communication with staff and good co-operation with the Trade Unions.

8.6 Risk Management Implications

8.6.1 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 have been invoked over December/January period in a number of services are being kept under review and have been invoked following the Omicron surge.

8.7 Rural Communities Implications

8.7.1 COVID-19 has had an impact across all communities, including rural communities. The support for small businesses will support rural business.

8.8 Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children

8.8.1 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.

8.9 Public Health Implications

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

8.10 Climate Change Implications

8.10.1 There have been positive benefits of fewer cars on the road during the first 12 months of the pandemic, although traffic levels are now

exceeding pre-pandemic levels. Those staff who have been able to work from home have done so and business mileage has also reduced. There has also been lower demand for heating/lighting offices. The emerging Future Workplace Strategy will carefully consider how to embed carbon reduction.

National Highways data shows that on the UK strategic road network traffic is 107% of pre-pandemic levels. There are a number of reasons for this:

- Public transport use levels are still significantly lower. CEC public transport use is 65%-70% of pre-pandemic levels.
- A sharp increase in value and purchasing second hand cars apparently due to people seeking own transport to avoid using public transport.
- A significant increase in online shopping associated increase in local delivery journeys
- A significant increase in people vacationing in the UK rather than overseas.

9 Ward Members Affected

9.1 All members.

Access to Information	
HM Government website contains comprehensive information.	
Contact Officer:	Jane Burns, Executive Director of Corporate Services Jane.burns@cheshireeast.gov.uk 01270 686013
Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	COVID-19 Response - Living with COVID-19.docx (publishing.service.gov.uk)