

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 8 September 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 and July on how the Council, working with its partners, continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.2. This report provides a further update of the work that has been undertaken in response to this national and international public health emergency.
- 1.3. In addition, this report provides a further update on the work being undertaken to support the recovery from this pandemic.
- 1.4. Furthermore, the report provides a more detailed update on the financial impact the pandemic has had on the council to date. The financial impact is significant and represents additional expenditure and losses in income compared the 2020/21 Budget, which was balanced when set in February 2020.
- 1.5. The report includes the government funding received to date in response to the financial pressures faced by local authorities. This comprises both un-ringfenced funding and funding provided for specific purposes.
- 1.6. The financial implications of COVID-19 are likely to affect the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy for several years. This report identifies financial allocations of funding to date but also identifies possible mitigating actions required to manage the future financial strategy.

2. Recommendations

2.1. That Cabinet:

- 2.1.1. Notes the issues outlined in the report;
- 2.1.2. Notes the significant financial implications relating to COVID-19 as detailed in Section 7 and Appendix 1; and
- 2.1.3. Continues to lobby to press the Government to fund the total financial impact of the pandemic on Cheshire East Council.

3. Other Options Considered

- 3.1. Not applicable.

4. Background

- 4.1. As at 11 August 2020, over 200 countries/territories have been affected; there were 20,075,600 confirmed cases globally; and 736,372 confirmed deaths. (Source WHO)
- 4.2. In the UK, as at 11th August, there were 311,641 confirmed cases and 46,526 confirmed deaths. In Cheshire East there were 2284 confirmed cases and 430 registered deaths . (Source GOV.UK)
- 4.3. In terms of the daily confirmed case rate, this has increased. The contingency plans that have been put in place across all public services including health and social care have enabled essential services to be able to continue throughout the period of this pandemic to date.
- 4.4. The latest international, national and local statistics are available from the following data dashboards:
 - 4.4.1. <https://covid19.who.int/>
 - 4.4.2. <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/>
 - 4.4.3. <https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/view/lga-research/covid-19-case-tracker>

5. Response

5.1. Sub-regional

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

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

5.2. Council Actions

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

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

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

5.2.3 *Test and Trace and Outbreak Management* – Cheshire East Council is supporting the national approach to Test, Trace, Contain and Enable through the creation of a Test and Trace hub within the council and supporting a Cheshire and Merseyside hub with staff who have been trained as call handlers. The Cheshire and Merseyside Test and Trace hub and the Cheshire East Test and Trace Hubs are both working in a shadow form as staff are recruited and trained. These hubs will be responsible for the local elements of the Test and Trace programme where cases and contacts are more complicated and local knowledge is needed.

5.2.4 Locally the programme is supported by several boards. A Local Health Protection Board provides technical advice. A Local Engagement Board focusses on the role of our elected members and

communications. This is overseen by the Cheshire East Health and Wellbeing Board.

- 5.2.5 The Director of Public Health attends regular meetings with the other Directors across the North West. This allows the lessons learned from areas with higher levels of Covid-19 to be added into our planning and response.
- 5.2.6 Rates of infection in Cheshire East Council have risen to 8.9 per 100,000 population for the last 7 days. These rates are still lower than the England average and much lower than the areas in the North West where enhanced lockdown measures have been put in place.
- 5.2.7 Recent small outbreaks are situated in care homes. These are being identified as a result of the whole home tracing programme. These cases have been symptom free and this means that we have been able to identify them early and put in infection control measures to prevent a larger outbreak. (An outbreak in a care home is where there are at least 2 cases who test positive regardless of whether or not they have symptoms).
- 5.2.8 Contact tracing for known cases is robust; The local contact tracing work being carried out by Public Health England and the Cheshire and Merseyside contact tracing hub has successfully followed up 100% of the cases that have been referred to it. For Cheshire East residents followed up by the national NHS Test and Trace system 67% are completed.
- 5.2.9 Our Public Health Intelligence team review information on cases and contacts daily including mapping the cases and looking to identify any patterns or trends that would allow us to take prompt and targeted action. At least once a week the Intelligence team review the data with specialists from Public Health England.
- 5.2.10 We continue to work with local authorities and PHE across Cheshire, Merseyside and Staffordshire to share intelligence and good practice.
- 5.2.11 *Communities - People Helping People* is a service created by Cheshire East Council which works collaboratively with new and existing Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector partners and local volunteers to channel community-based support to meet the needs of our residents. The service is delivered for the local community, by the local community. To date the service has provided

support to over 3600 residents with 1400 active cases still receiving support. This service has been instrumental in reducing immediate demands on public services so will continue during August and September.

- 5.2.12 The government shielding service was paused on 31st July 2020. Previously, residents of the borough identified as clinically vulnerable were invited to register with the NHS central system and their support needs were assessed then met by local (PHP) and central Government (food parcel) resources. In line with Cheshire East's Outbreak Prevention, Management and Support Plan, a contingency plan has been developed to detail how the shielding response will be reinstated in the event of a local, regional or national lockdown.
- 5.2.13 The reintroduction of shielding in a local area is a decision that must be taken by ministers on advice of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO). Similarly, the decision to end shielding also rests with minister's advice of the CMO. The shielding contingency plan outlines the preparations underway for any future shielding periods, and how the response will be reinstated if required. The Cheshire East Shielding Cell remains in place and emergency food supplies are held at Macclesfield Community Centre, with commitment from all logistical partners ongoing.
- 5.2.14 The Communities Team are leading on the 'high risk places, location and communities' and 'vulnerable people' workstreams of the Test, Trace, Contain and Enable plan. Extensive mapping has taken place to identify the locations/settings where communities gather, in addition to categorising vulnerable residents into target groups, including clinically vulnerable (shielded) and non-shielded vulnerable people (NSVP). The information gathered informs the wider outbreak plan in addition to identifying channels for proactive and reactive communications.
- 5.2.15 Cheshire East Council has worked alongside the Social Action Partnership to mobilise various voluntary and statutory organisations to become Volunteer Coordination Points (VCPs). The VCPs locally co-ordinate residents who have volunteered their help and match them with vulnerable people in their community. VCPs have formed local networks to share best practice, volunteers and a range of resources. Social Action Partnership are working with VCPs to develop their infrastructure and provide support to sustain delivery of this mutual aid approach.

- 5.2.16 The Covid-19 Community Response and Recovery Fund was launched at the end of June 2020 and has since provided funding to 21 successful applicants, totalling just over £68,000. The fund supports VCFSE organisations to adapt to new ways of offering support to communities, both during and following the coronavirus pandemic. In addition, a further grant of nearly £330,000 nationally has been made available from the MHCLG to support VCFSE sector groups who are addressing Covid-related food poverty in their community. This additional funding will build on the success of our community response and recovery fund and will be available in the coming weeks.
- 5.2.17 *Adult Social Care* - The Commissioning Team have provided significant support for the Adults Social Care Market during the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure market stability and the safe provision of care for the residents of Cheshire East. This includes Care Homes, Care at Home (Domiciliary Care), Complex Needs and Supported Living. Continued actions are set out below.
- 5.2.18 Infection Prevention Control training, including the safe use and removal of PPE, continues to be delivered to our Care Providers. Commissioners have increased communications and support for our Care Providers which includes the provision of regular briefings and updates on the national guidance and developments with the national PPE Portal; the facilitation of virtual mutual aid calls; regular support calls from Contract Managers and Quality Assurance Officers; and ongoing support from our Infection Prevention Control Team.
- 5.2.19 There has been a strong focus on support for Care Homes, and our Care Home recovery planning includes the development of an Outbreak Plan for each Care Home; supported by an Outbreak Management Toolkit; Care Home visiting guidance; ongoing PPE support in emergencies or when Providers experience difficulties with their PPE supply chain; and Infection Prevention Control (IPC) recovery visits to provide advice and support. Commissioners are also undertaking scenario planning including localised outbreaks and also the possibility of second wave in conjunction with winter planning such as flu vaccinations. Commissioners have also commissioned an 'Emotional & Psychological Support' service specifically for Care Home Staff (Project 5) which is now underway. The aim of the service is to support the mental health and wellbeing of the care workforce who have worked on the frontline of Covid-19 for the past 6 months. Healthwatch are also assisting the Council to look at emotional and physical impact on residents and how we can improve outcomes.

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

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

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

5.2.22 Adults and Children’s Commissioning - Commissioners have worked closely with our ‘Early Intervention and Prevention’ ‘Community Wellbeing’ and ‘Public Health’ contracted providers which have adapted but continued to deliver effective services during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Contingency Plans were implemented straight away with our Providers during the response phase of the Pandemic, and now Commissioners are working with Providers to implement their recovery

Plans. Examples of recovery plans include: Substance Misuse Services, Healthy Child Programme, Social Action Partnership and Carers Hub:

- Substance Misuse Service: The Community Hubs delivered by our Provider CGL in Crewe and Macclesfield have remained open during Covid for the purpose of needle exchange, blood clinics and drug screening. The service runs a 24-hour help and advice line which has been well utilised during the pandemic allowing service users 24-hour access to advice and support. CGL have implemented new fingerprint drug testing technology during the pandemic. This has helped support local people and to keep them safe. Fingerprint drug testing is a new way to carry out standard drug testing in a safe way. This has worked effectively for completing drug screening during this time. The pandemic offered a clear opportunity to use this technology in line with social distancing and shielding. At the beginning of the pandemic 100% of Opioid Service users have received a risk assessment, and as a result, service users received safety deposit boxes for drug treatments and also naloxone (an overdose intervention). CGL continue to provide several ways to access the service for all service users via online, telephone, face to face and home visits for the most vulnerable, abiding by Covid-19 risk assessments.
- Healthy Child Programme: Wirral Community Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust were awarded the new contract for the Healthy Child Programme that goes live in October 2020. Mobilisation for the new service is going well despite the Covid-19 pandemic, and the service are working closely with Commissioners to implement the new service model that has been co designed with partners, children and young people.
- During the pandemic the service has worked innovatively to reach and support families, children and young people in Cheshire East, delivering a large number of virtual and telephone consultations. The service has been able to deliver aspects of the healthy child programme including antennal contacts, new birth contacts, 4-8 week, 9-12 months and 2-year reviews, and 353 packages of care have been delivered to families like behaviour management.
- The service has continued to contribute to support some of our most vulnerable children attending 1312 safeguarding meetings during the pandemic. Home visits have been available for those most in need of support. Staff members have attended multiagency meetings to support families during the pandemic. The service has continued to support families with breastfeeding

via the Cherubs offer. The Cherubs Facebook page has facilitated 2059 engagements in videos and 572 parent-to-parent support conversations. 6115 people are members of the Cherubs support group. There has also been 241 face to face breastfeeding support appointments delivered.

- Social Action Partnership: The Social Action Partnership Service launched at 1st April 2020. As this was during the Covid-19 crisis, the focus of delivery was diverted from 'business as usual' functions to supporting the Council's Communities Team Covid-19 People Helping People response. Working with People Helping People they have set up a Virtual Volunteer Network consisting of 15 Volunteer Co-ordination Points (VCPs). The VCPs cover all 8 Care Community areas using a 'hub and spoke' model with the VCP being the key hub in their local area. Whilst many were mobilised using existing community support groups some were established from the ground up by SAP (e.g. Haslington Support Group). VCPs are being supported with Recovery workshops to consider the impact of Coronavirus on their local area and identify where support is needed. Going forward the Social Action Partnership will be working with the Communities team to see how the VCPs can fit with the Neighbourhood and Town Partnerships and avoid duplication of work.
- The 974 volunteers that signed up to support People Helping People were signposted to the VCPs. VCPs supported volunteers with guidance packs developed by the Social Action Partnership. The next focus is to keep the level interest in volunteering and build on the response both for recovery phase and for future social action. The Social Action Partnership are working with our Community Development Officers on a volunteer skills audit.
- The Social Action Partnership is also starting to move to business as usual and their core service provision, including the Social Value Charter, Social Value Award, the Social Action Charter, and further raising the profile of the service through relationship building and links into other partnerships including building the connections between the public sector, business and industry and the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector.
- Carers Hub: n-Compass are the Provider of the Carers Hub and have made a number of changes to the delivery of the service during the Covid-19 Pandemic including virtual appointments reduced face-to face, they are moving forward with their recovery plan and are planning a part time return to their offices from September. They have enhanced risk assessments and PPE in

place for face to face assessments of Carers. These are only to be carried out if necessary and have to be approved by managers before going ahead. They plan to continue to offer digital assessments and support first, over face to face visits. Face to face groups are still on hold; as Carers are supporting vulnerable people, and they are aware that many may not want to risk attending a group session.

- Following the success of online activities held during Carers Week, the Carers Hub have set up a further rolling programme of online zoom activities. These include craft sessions, cooking, bingo and a choir. They are also holding weekly coffee and chat groups over zoom, including an evening session. For Young Carers the Hub are continuing to hold a weekly Facebook Live session for young carers and their families. They have also recently completed a time capsule project. They have recently sent out an email briefing and are planning to return to a postal newsletter in October.
- Wishing Well were awarded a grant through the Carers Choice Awards for a Carers café, but due to Covid-19 have been unable to run it. They have changed the project slightly and have worked with the Carers Hub to deliver afternoon teas directly to Carers identified as needing a break. Seeing the positive impact this project has had on Carers, the Hub have worked with Poynton Tea Room so Carers in the north of the borough are able to benefit as well.
- As referral numbers have dipped following lockdown the Carers Hub are delivering online briefings for local partners in order to raise the profile of the service and let referrers know how the Carers Hub has adjusted to be able to support people.

5.2.23 *Children's Social Care*- All children open to Children's Social Care are receiving face to face visits unless it is not safe to do so, e.g. due to the risk of this to them as a result of their complex health needs or where children are living in an area with additional lockdown restrictions. A risk assessment is in place for the small number of children not receiving face to face visits. We have now been able to transition children to live with their adoptive families following the delay during lockdown. Staff are working with the courts to progress effective court hearings. Despite the revised arrangements for courts, children and young people within the court process will experience significant delays, which will also impact on demand and costs to services. The number of cared for children is likely to increase over the next few months.

- 5.2.24 We are supporting more of our care leavers to remain in their current accommodation as they turn 18 so that they are not isolated, and we have the opportunity to complete the independence work that has been delayed during the lockdown period. We continue to be worried about the impact of Covid-19 and the economic recession as it will disproportionately impact on our care leavers, particularly their ability to secure employment, apprenticeships and training. We are working to ensure their needs are prioritised in recovery groups.
- 5.2.25 We have continued to hold weekly Safeguarding Children Partnership meetings throughout this period to ensure the needs of children who are at risk of harm are prioritised. All services will be supporting children, young people and families with the return to education in September, as we recognise that this will be a real challenge for some families after being out of their routines for so long.
- 5.2.26 Services have seen an increase in the level of need from families, with needs escalating very rapidly for some families. We expect to continue to see an increase in the demand for services both in the coming months as children return to school, and also in the longer term as we start to see the economic impact of Covid-19 on families which will increase the number of children living in poverty and will exacerbate current inequalities.
- 5.2.27 *Prevention and Early Help* - The same picture of increasing need and complexity is also being found within Prevention and Early Help; cases open to the Cheshire East Family Service are increasingly becoming more complex. Lockdown has had an impact on the mental health of our children, young people and parents/carers so our intervention and existing plans and priorities within them are changing as a result. Face to face visits are now being carried out with families within their homes which is supporting effective safeguarding and support. We are providing a targeted face to face Summer Activity Programme for families and young people who need additional support, and this is working well.
- 5.2.28 The number of open early years settings has reduced following school closure from over 200 in July to 127 at 7 August. Settings that have closed are predominantly on school sites, or where the demand for childcare is low due to the summer holiday period. We expect to see the number of open settings increase again in September. There have been some instances of confirmed Covid-19 cases within settings, and these have been managed well.

- 5.2.29 *Education and Home to School Transport* - Over 11,200 pupils attended schools following the phased opening in June. The Department for Education (DfE) thanked us for our high attendance. Schools believe this is a result of the phased approach we agreed in Cheshire East, which allowed them to engage with parents and reassure them on all the measures that were being taken to make schools safe, and that our high attendance reflected parental confidence in the safety of our arrangements. Over 1,500 vulnerable children were attending school before the end of term, which was very positive, with the main area of increase being children with an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP).
- 5.2.30 The majority of pupils continued to receive remote education during the summer term. We asked schools to ensure that children who were due to transition between schools in September were supported, and developed a minimum offer for our expectations on transition. We also asked schools to review their home learning arrangements and support for pupils' wellbeing, and ensure that they had regular contact with all children who were not invited back into school to encourage and support learning and wellbeing.
- 5.2.31 We have established a referral process for schools that have concerns about possible attendance in September, or for families that are anxious and need support to facilitate the return to school, so we can support these families over the summer to encourage attendance. We have developed a communications strategy around the return to school and key messages will be shared each day from mid August until September. We would appreciate support from members and services in promoting and sharing these messages widely.
- 5.2.32 We have developed a set of principles around expectations on attendance for all our schools. We are aware that some parents and children may be anxious about the return in September, and our focus will be on working with families and schools to support children back into education.
- 5.2.33 The Education Recovery Group has continued to meet over the summer to plan for the full opening of schools from September. As with the phased opening, we have discussed and agreed arrangements for September with all key stakeholders; teaching unions, the diocese, school heads and the Cheshire East Parent Carer Forum.
- 5.2.34 We are continuing to provide intensive support to schools around how to implement the DfE guidance to ensure we have a consistent and safe approach across all schools. We have provided all schools with a new

risk assessment checklist on their arrangements for pupils from September. Our 68 maintained schools were required to submit the risk assessment checklist before they finished for the summer to provide us with assurance that their risk assessment covers all the appropriate controls. We have reviewed these for all 68 schools to ensure they comply with the guidance as we did for the phased opening from June. We are establishing a process for schools to report positive cases of Covid-19 so we can manage potential outbreaks.

- 5.2.35 We are working with maintained schools to identify where curriculum support may be needed in September. A continual professional development programme will be put in place with a focus on remote learning, emotional wellbeing support for pupils, and catch up strategies.
- 5.2.36 The government has announced a £1 billion 'catch up' fund. This recognises that all young people have lost time in education as a result of the pandemic, regardless of their income or background. £650 million will be shared across all state primary and secondary schools over the academic year 2020-21. Schools' allocations will be calculated on a per pupil basis, providing each mainstream school with a total of £80 for each pupil in years reception through to 11. Special, Alternative Provision and hospital schools will be provided with £240 for each place for the 2020 to 2021 academic year.
- 5.2.37 £350 million will fund a National Tutoring Programme which will increase access to high-quality tuition for the most disadvantaged young people. This will help accelerate their academic progress and prevent the gap between them and their more affluent peers widening. The programme will comprise of at least 2 parts in the 2020 to 2021 academic year, including a 5 to 16 programme that will make high-quality tuition available to 5 to 16 year olds in state-funded primary and secondary schools from the second half of autumn term 2020 and a 16 to 19 fund for school sixth forms, colleges and all other 16 to 19 providers to provide small group tutoring activity for disadvantaged 16 to 19 students whose studies have been disrupted as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19).
- 5.2.38 We recognise the impact that Covid-19 has had on mental health and wellbeing. We will be developing an emotional wellbeing package for use in schools from September. This will include a suite of resources for schools to use with pupils and will provide clarity on the support that is available for schools and families. The pack will include resources for

carrying out debriefings with pupils and parents on the impact of lockdown. Training will be available to support teachers.

- 5.2.39 We have worked with schools to develop a set of principles for travel to school from September. These principles set out what the local authority and schools will do, along with expectations from parents and pupils. Based on these principles, we have been working to establish the travel to school arrangements required from September 2020. Two surveys have been conducted with families; one for those who are eligible to receive home to school transport from the local authority; the other is aimed at secondary school pupils, in particular to identify those who use public transport.
- 5.2.40 On 8 August, the government announced funding for transport to enable local authorities to provide additional transport capacity for journeys to schools and college for the first term. The government guidance on transport to school and other places of education was published on 11 August. This guidance sets out a number of requirements for local authorities and schools to ensure that arrangements for children's travel to school in September are as safe as possible. Whilst this is broadly in line with what we expected, there are some additional considerations, including the need to work with colleges, and the recommendation that the LA advises people aged 11 and over to wear a face covering when travelling on dedicated school transport to secondary school or college from the start of the autumn term.
- 5.2.41 Capacity on public transport could be limited to take into account social distancing; this will be particularly challenging for children and young people who travel to school or college by bus. We have been working with Transport colleagues and Transport Service Solutions on a number of solutions, including additional dedicated school transport for children who currently travel to school by public transport, supported by government funding that was allocated this week.
- 5.2.42 Promoting active travel to schools remains a key priority. We have launched a campaign #backtoschool and #activetravel in Cheshire East leading up to the full opening of schools.
- 5.2.43 Transport for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is being prioritised to ensure 'meet and greets' can take place between families and drivers to help children and young people feel settled and supported and arrive at school prepared to learn.

- 5.2.44 Once all pupils return to school, this will increase the visibility of children and the impact of Covid-19 on all our children and young people will become clearer. There is growing evidence of a gap in knowledge between pupils who have completed home learning and those who haven't, and a need for an intensive review of the curriculum. We are yet to understand the impact of the lack of examinations for young people who would have taken their GCSEs and A Levels this year. As a result, we expect to see an increased demand on services within Education, and wider Children's Services.
- 5.2.45 *Environmental Services* – all kerbside household waste and recycling collections are operating as normal. All household waste and recycling centres are open. Access is restricted at Crewe only, based on vehicle licence plates due to nearby roadworks causing queues.
- 5.2.46 *Neighbourhood Services* – All Cheshire East libraries have now re-opened, including the Mobile Library Service, although there are restrictions to opening hours, services and activities to ensure the safety of staff and customers. The Council's leisure centres, operated by Everybody Sport & Recreation, re-opened on a phased basis during July, August and September, again with new protocols in place to ensure a safe environment for staff and customers. Play areas and outdoor gyms were also able to re-open from 6 July. Daily cleaning is being undertaken at the 15 largest play areas, with social distancing and hand hygiene promoted at all 150 sites.
- 5.2.47 *Homelessness and Rough Sleepers* - Cheshire East's Housing Options Team continue to work to prevent residents from becoming homeless and provide assistance to those who present as homeless. During June and July 96 households presented as homeless of which 74 were provided with accommodation. The number of rough sleepers varies between 3 – 10 some of which are transient and do not wish to stay in Cheshire East. The Rough Sleepers Team continue to work proactively with them where they wish to engage with services.
- 5.2.48 The service have worked with MHCLG to repurpose the funding allocated through the Rough Sleepers Initiative to enable us to commission emergency accommodation and support to those who present with complex issues. We are also working with MHCLG and Housing Providers to co-produce a bid to the Next Steps fund, which was recently announced by Government. If successful this will enable us to provide additional accommodation and support for those leaving

emergency accommodation and enabling better access to the private rented sector.

- 5.2.49 *Town Centres* - Traffic Management measures have been introduced to facilitate social distancing thereby supporting businesses to open and operate safely. A new streamlined, low cost process for obtaining Pavement Licences has been developed to facilitate bars, cafes and restaurants looking to expand onto pedestrian areas to improve viability. Working collaboratively with Town Councils a '*Welcome back - We've missed you campaign*' was launched with posters, banners and bunting to encourage people to support local town centre businesses, supplemented by media releases asking residents to support their local centre and utilise the Government's '*Eat out to Help out*' scheme. A grant application has been submitted seeking ERDF Reopening High Street Safely Funding proposing further town centre focused communications and public realm measures subject to funding being available.
- 5.2.50 *Highways, Transport & Parking* - All highway maintenance operations and improvement projects continue to be delivered and are following Government COVID guidelines. Other activity has also increased on the network, with traffic flows at around 80% of pre COVID levels and utility companies dealing with a backlog of works. Parking Service operations have been fully remobilised as of the 17 August. Usage has recovered to approximately 60% of 2019 levels, whilst income sits at around 55% reflecting shorter stays in our car parks. A two phase programme of active travel measures are progressing across the borough following considerable engagement from community groups, local ward councillors and town and parish councils. The local bus network continues to grow with service levels back to around 85% pre COVID and the Council's FlexiLink back into operation, with overall patronage levels at around 30%.
- 5.2.51 *Workforce and Workplace* - Those staff who can work from home were encouraged to do so when the lockdown was introduced. That has continued to be the case. We have made a significant investment in mobile IT to allow staff to operate as effectively remotely.
- 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. There are currently 23 staff self-isolating, 94 off sick, 1995 staff working from home and 795 on leave. We have recently carried out a Pulse Survey of staff to get their feedback on how we have responded

to COVID-19. Appendix 2 presents the headline results. It is pleasing to note that 4 out of 5 staff agree that communications from the organisation has been effective and the 3 out of 4 staff agree that the council has provided effective wellbeing support during COVID-19.

5.2.53 As part of our recovery planning, a cell has been established which is developing arrangements for COVID-secure workplaces, designed to keep staff safe. An important element of the cell's work is risk assessment. We have adopted a 3-level model: Level 1 in the Workplace; Level 2 as a Workforce, Level 3 as an individual. This has been done in consultation with and good co-operation from the Trade Unions. Another important element is culture, building on the work the Council has done to embed a positive culture. We are also looking at what our estate could be in the light of the changing demands and to maximise the return on the IT investment we have made.

5.2.54 *Governance and Decision Making* - The Council moved quickly to facilitate remote meetings. All Members were provided with laptops and support to operate effectively. Since May, 32 formal remote meetings have been held. All categories of meeting have taken place – Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Audit and Governance Committee, Staffing Committee and Planning Committees. The July meeting of Council was cancelled as there was no urgent business. In addition, 13 Working Groups meetings/forum have been held and 29 school appeals. The Council has participated in an LGA Webinar to share our learning with other councils.

6 Recovery

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

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

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

- Anticipating and managing future demands on public services such as additional safeguarding referrals, increases in domestic abuse, increases demand on health services and social care
- Planning for winter in relation to the management of Covid-19 related pressures on top of the winter pressures such as seasonal flu, and adverse weather events.
- Reviewing and managing any issues that arise in relation to community safety, crime and community cohesion.
- Developing a sub-regional strategy for economic recovery.
- Providing future support packages relating to mental health, skills development and employment support
- Developing appropriate plans to support the effective day to day running of the sub-region e.g. support for transport and traffic management.
- Reviewing the sub-regional risk assessments and management of risks associated with EU Exit.

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

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

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

- 6.4.3 In response to these issues the council and its partners have started to put measures in place to support people as they face unemployment. This includes a job matching service which sign post available jobs that are available, the running of jobs fairs and the provision of skills training, work experience and apprenticeships.
- 6.4.4 The Council has also delivered three phases of funding through its Discretionary Business Grant Scheme. 327 Businesses have been provided with support through this scheme and total of £2.7m has been awarded to date. Phase Three of the scheme was launched on Friday 7 August and closed on Monday 17 August. It is anticipated that the full grant amount will be allocated to businesses by end of September.
- 6.4.5 Furthermore, the Council and its partners have developed plans for the longer term economic recovery of the Borough. This approach includes:
- Understanding how the pandemic has impacted on the economy and development in the Borough including the opportunities this presents for the Borough for future inward investment.
 - Understanding the implication of these impacts on income for the council and on key strategic services such as Planning, Economic Development and Strategic Transport.
 - Support to businesses in the Borough including a focus on the sectors most likely to be impacted by the pandemic such as the hospitality sector. In addition support will continue to be provided to the key businesses and key sectors in the local economy.
 - Continuing to support our town centres and businesses that operate from them.
 - Developing a future pipeline of development and regeneration projects that can stimulate the local economy
 - Ensuring that the Borough has an effective place marketing approach so that it is able to promote itself for inward investment in the future.

7 Implications of the Recommendations

7.1 Legal Implications

- 7.1.1 The Coronavirus Act 2020 received Royal Assent on 25 March 2020. The Act has extensive schedules setting out a wide framework to life under lockdown. The Act has been followed with copious and frequent guidance notes, frequently with implementation dates ahead of what is

practically possible, e.g. Household Waste and Recycling Centres, administration of School Admission Appeals, restrictions on and subsequent opening of certain business premises, Test and Trace.

- 7.1.2 The Coronavirus Act also set out a framework by which Local Authorities could reduce their statutory duties in relation to the Care Act 2014, for Adult Social Care. These Care Act Easements could be implemented should the capacity of Adult Social Care staff become so reduced that it could not continue to meet its duties. To date Cheshire East Council has not initiated any Care Act Easements.
- 7.1.3 Any necessary urgent decisions have followed the process set out in the Constitution. To date 12 urgent decisions have been made. This are reported elsewhere on the agenda.
- 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.

7.2 Finance Implications

- 7.2.1 An update on the COVID-19 response was reported to Cabinet on 7 July 2020 and the Audit & Governance Committee on 30 July 2020. This report presents the latest financial position and identifies Government funding supplied to date. The extraordinary impact of the pandemic creates significant uncertainty for the Council that must continue to be managed throughout the 2020/21 financial year. All councils are currently analysing the impacts of the latest financial allocations and their projections.
- 7.2.2 The financial issues facing Cheshire East Council are just part of a significant national issue for public services, and the UK economy as a whole. Public Sector deficits and reductions in GDP are at levels not seen before, and Central Government continues to react with funding support packages both for general and specific purposes. The Council has continued to support MHCLG in gathering evidence, on a monthly basis, of the potential costs and income losses for 2020/21 based on information and guidance available at the date of the government return. The information from the Council contributes to the ongoing negotiations between the LGA, MHCLG, HM Treasury and other government departments and sector led organisations such as the County Councils Network.

- 7.2.3 The nature of financial issues, and the approach to funding costs and income losses associated with the pandemic, has inevitably changed over time as lockdown measures have eased. 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. This is not just a Cheshire East issue. Recent estimates from the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggests that councils, for example, only have access to useable reserves equal to half of the required costs of the COVID-19 Pandemic response and recovery. This observation is further complicated by the mix of Revenue, Capital and Collection Fund budgeting required by a Local Authority. The IFS report is available here:
<https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14977>
- 7.2.4 Cheshire East Council's MTFS is under unprecedented pressure due to the response required to protect both the health and economic wellbeing of local people and businesses during the COVID-19 Pandemic. When responding to the MHCLG data requests in June, of gross the cost financial impact of COVID-19 in 2020/21, the local costs were estimated at £70m. The high-level detail behind this estimate was considered by the Audit & Governance Committee on 30th July. The Committee was advised that estimates were due to significant change due to ongoing relaxation of the lockdown (allowing some facilities to re-open), changing guidelines (particularly in relation to home to school transport) and the emerging approach by Central Government to fund some elements via direct funding (such as the PPE requirements of local care providers).
- 7.2.5 This report considers the latest estimates of the financial impact of COVID-19 on the Council. A further MHCLG return is due on 4th September, which will be submitted by the S.151 Officer based on the forecasts available on that day. Due to the emerging nature of the financial position and the overlapping timing of reporting to Scrutiny and Cabinet, the MHCLG figures may at any point in time be out of date and subject to change. Every effort is made to ensure members are suitably informed, and where changes to the Council's budget are required this will be reported in accordance with the Council's constitution.
- 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 latest forecasts of the financial pressures from COVID-19 on the Council's 2020/21 budget. This level of detail provides further information, at Director level, as requested by the Audit & Governance Committee and supported by members of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The information in the appendix also reiterates the most significant areas of financial pressure, both revenue and capital.

Grant funding to support un-ringfenced expenditure and income losses is detailed in Table 1 below, in a format consistent with previous Cabinet and Audit & Governance Committee reports.

(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, but to be permitted to spread the impact over the next three years. There is ongoing consideration from MHCLG and the LGA on this issue and further information will be provided when it is available.

(iii) Ringfenced Expenditure

Table 2 below 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 (England total) | Notes |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| 19 th March | £9.150m (£1.6bn) | Adult Social Care based payment |
| 18 th April | £10.539m (£1.6bn) | Payment per capita to help reflect lost income |
| Sub-Total | £19.689m (£3.2bn) | |
| 2 nd July | £2.712m (£0.5bn) for Expenditure | Adult Social Care / deprivation based payment |
| Total | £22.401m (of £3.7bn) | |
| 2 nd July | £n/k (£n/k) for Income | Paid at 75p in £1 above 5% losses. |

| | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| | | (Note: Guidance has been issued and a claims process is being established for the 2020/21 Financial Year. No recompense to date). |
| 2nd July | £nil for Collection Fund | Defer Collection Fund Deficit over 3yrs |

7.2.7 Based on the latest guidance and changes to direct funding via specific grants the value of un-ringfenced Revenue, Capital and Collection Fund financial impacts are currently estimated to be in the region of **£50m**. Taking in account the government funding received to date, as detailed in Table 1 (above) is currently £22.401m the estimated shortfall currently stands at c.£28m.

To understand the potential shortfall between un-ringfenced financial impacts and the funding provided by Government, the Council is engaged in several activities:

1. Continuing to manage and review the financial forecasts in response to emerging guidance and the local response to the emergency and how this affects the Council's revenue budget.
2. 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.£185m

| Activity (National Total) | Spending forecast | Funding | Variance |
|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Test & Trace (£300m) | £1,533,331 | £1,533,331 | £0 |
| Rough Sleeping (£32m)* | £229,530 | £6,000 | (£223,530) |
| Active Travel (£225m) | £774,000 | £774,000 | £0 |
| Opening High Streets (£500m) | £339,533 | £339,533 | £0 |
| Infection Control (£600m)** | £5,320,292 | £5,320,292 | £0 |
| Business Grants (£12.3bn) | £86,500,000 | £95,514,000 | c.£9,000,000 |

| | | | |
|---|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Disc. Business Grants (£617m) | £4,200,000 | £4,287,250 | £87,250 |
| Business Rate Holiday (£9.7bn) | £61,371,000 | £58,785,655 | (£2,585,345) |
| CT Hardship (£500m) | £2,500,000 | £2,062,635 | c.£500,000 |
| Local Bus Network (£167m) | £229,632 | £229,632 | £0 |
| Emergency Assistance (£63m) | £326,292 | £326,292 | £0 |
| Towns Fund Capital (£5bn) | £750,000 | £750,000 | £0 |
| Additional Dedicated Home to School and College Transport (£400m) | £294,536 | £294,536 | £0 |
| Wellbeing for Education Return (£8m) | £55,403 | £55,403 | £0 |
| Food and basic necessities (essential supplies) | £326,393 | £326,393 | £0 |
| Bus Service Support Grant (CBSSG) Restart scheme | £122,769 | £156,600 | £33,831 |

7.2.8 The Business Grants and Discretionary Business Grants schemes close to new applicants on 28th August. The Council has run three phases of the discretionary scheme and will ensure the full allocation of this scheme is provided to local businesses.

7.2.9 In relation to other Business Grants, linked to the Business Rates database, staff and members have been using all forms of media and even visiting premises to ensure eligible businesses received their funding allocations. BEIS have confirmed that unspent funding provided for these schemes should be returned to government. The amount of funding allocated to Cheshire East Council, which could potentially be returned to government, is estimated at £9m. The Council will continue to lobby and support the LGA, the FSB and other bodies in requesting that this funding is retained locally to provide further support to the local economy.

7.2.10 The 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 to 5.5.53 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.

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 They 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 have been paused due to the lockdown restrictions. The Council is considering how and when they can be restarted.

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