

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 2 February 2021

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 six detailed reports since June 2020 on how the Council, working with its partners, continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and plan for the recovery from it.
- 1.2. In view of the enduring nature of the national and international public health emergency, this report provides a summary of key developments and by exception reporting since December 2020.
- 1.3. This has been a particularly challenging period because Cheshire East has been in 5 sets of restrictions over a period of 2 weeks, culminating in a third national lockdown from 5 January 2021. Sub-regional leaders have written to the Secretaries of State for Health and Social Care and Communities and Local Government setting out the views of partners on the current Covid lockdown arrangements, concerns about the impact on schools and the NHS, and progress in the deployment of testing and vaccines. This is shown at Appendix 1.
- 1.4. The report also summarises the latest information on infection rates and the local measures instigated as a result and the latest government restrictions.
- 1.5. The financial impact of the pandemic on the council continues to be significant. A further update is provided in section 6.2. It is important to note that over

£200m has been provided in ringfenced grants for specific purposes, the majority of which has or is to be passported directly to other organisations. This may create an impression that all the council's COVID pressures are funded. Furthermore, the administration costs of passporting money directly to other organisations fall directly on the Council. This is significant in the case of business grants and infection control in care homes grants, for example.

- 1.6. The report will also be of interest to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny and the Audit and Governance Committees.
- 1.7. It is important to note that there will be other new developments following the publication of this report. Verbal updates will be given at the meeting, as appropriate.

2. Recommendations

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

3. Other Options Considered

- 3.1. Not applicable.

4. Background

- 4.1. At the time of writing the most recent WHO Weekly Epidemiological Update issued on 29 December showed a continued steep rise with over 4 million new cases of Covid-19 reported in the previous week (9-27 December).
- 4.2. From 30 December 2019 through 27 December 2020, over 79 million COVID-19 cases and 1.7 million deaths have been reported globally.
- 4.3. The latest international, national and local statistics are available from the following data dashboards:

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

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

https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/council_information/coronavirus/latest-covid-19-figures-for-cheshire-east.aspx
- 4.4. In England, the Department of Health and Social Care report that there has been an daily average of 46,002 new cases over the last seven-day period (as at 29 December) with a high number of cases in London and South East. The latest R number is quoted as 1.1 to 1.3 nationally and 0.9-1.1 in the North West indicating the epidemic is growing.

- 4.5. New variants of the Covid-19 virus have been identified in the UK and internationally in South Africa. The UK variant, VUI-202012/0, is causing concern as it is 50-70% more transmissible and is contributing to rising UK rates. Originating in the South East of England, it has spread throughout the country. Research is showing that those under 20 years of age are more likely to be affected by the new variant when compared to the main strain of Covid.
- 4.6. Three vaccines to protect against Coronavirus have received regulatory approval since early December from Pfizer/Biotech, Oxford University/Astra Zeneca and Moderna. The first two are being rolled out nationally to priority groups including care home residents and care home staff, older adults over 70 according to age range and frontline health and social care staff. The Moderna vaccine is expected to arrive in the spring.
- 4.7. The vaccination programme is being led by colleagues in the NHS. More information is given in paragraphs 5.6 and 5.7 below.
- 4.8. To counter rising rates of infection and increasing hospital admissions, the UK Government introduced a new set of National Restrictions on 5 January to apply to the whole of England. The significant difference to Tier 4 is the closure of schools, colleges and universities to all but children of key workers and vulnerable children. Currently, these measures are set to continue until at least 21 February. Details of this change are found here:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home>
- 4.9. The respective administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have introduced measures that have been tailored to their country's circumstances.
- 4.10. In the last full week of data from 16 January 2021, 1,573 people in Cheshire East tested positive (up to 9 January 2021). The local infection rate was recorded as 317 cases per 100,000 population. The corresponding rate for England was 465 cases per 100,000.
- 4.11. Within Cheshire East there had been a steep incline in cases from a rate of 120 per 100,000 seen around 11 December to the locally calculated rate of 459 per 100,000 as of 2 January; an 85% increase on the previous 7 day period. Hospital capacity is being severely affected by this wave of infections. As of 5 January East Cheshire NHS Trust had 116 occupied COVID beds (36% of capacity) and Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust had 143 occupied COVID beds (26% of capacity). This indicates that the Tier 3 and Tier 4 restrictions introduced in December were unsuccessful in reducing the epidemic. Fortunately, the death rate is considerable lower than in the initial wave. The maximum number of weekly deaths has been 22 compared with 45 in the first wave. Only 9 deaths occurred in the week ending 25 December 2020.

- 4.12. Over the last few weeks, case rates for all 10 year age groups have increased. This increase remains the highest in the working age population groups, particularly the 20-29 age group, which has the highest rate at 805 per 100,000 as of 1 January. A more detailed breakdown of school age children and young people shows that the highest rate and week on week increases are in the 17-19 year age group, 575 per 100,000 and 97% increase on previous week. The rate in primary school children is the lowest at 135.6 per 100,000, only a 26% increase on the previous week.
- 4.13. Covid-19 infections linked to schools in both staff and pupils have been fluctuating. At 21 December, there were 58 pupils and 26 staff with current positive tests making 35 schools with positive cases. While evidence suggests that transmission amongst school age children increases during term-time it is difficult to quantify the level of transmission within schools compared to other settings. The risk of infection from behaviours and contacts within schools cannot be separated from that taking place outside of schools. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/948617/s0998-tfc-update-to-4-november-2020-paper-on-children-schools-transmission.pdf
- 4.14. Infection prevention and control within Care Homes and the weekly testing of care home staff has helped detect people who may not have symptoms and as a result reduces the risk of a serious outbreak. Data from 2 January showed an improving situation with outbreaks in 10 care homes.
- 4.15. Additional laboratory capacity coming on stream has resulted in overall national testing capacity improving. Whilst access to testing is still controlled nationally our local monitoring of testing demand indicates that local residents are not experiencing the problems of accessing tests locally. A significant factor has been the deployment of Local Testing sites in Crewe and Macclesfield.

5. Update and by exception reporting on Council actions

- 5.1 Cheshire East Council continues to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic. At the same time the Council has continued to strive to:
- deliver essential local services
 - protect our most vulnerable people
 - support our communities and local businesses.
- 5.2 A summary of the key changes since the December update that have continued to be delivered by the Council is provided below.

- 5.3 *Test and Trace and Outbreak Management* – In general 83% of cases in Cheshire East are completed by the national contact tracing system (compared to 81% for the subregion). 96% of Cheshire East cases that the national system referred to Public Health England due to greater complexity were completed (compared to 90%) for the subregion). Cases that cannot be contacted or have further need for local input are referred to our Locally Supported Contact Tracing Team.
- 5.4 The newly established Cheshire East Locally Supported Contact Tracing team has been operational since 25 November 2020. The service was initially launched on a limited basis for certain postcodes of concern within the borough. However, the whole of Cheshire East was turned on from Monday 4 January 2021. The mandate for this team is contacting those ‘lost to follow up’ cases that the national contact tracing team have been unable to contact. Currently, Cheshire East Council is reaching approximately 60-70% of these cases. To increase this number, Cheshire East Council are looking to launch an enhanced Locally Supported Contact Tracing model by utilising ‘door knockers’, who can attempt to contact individuals who have not been contacted by telephone or who are of particular concern for some reason. This will be implemented by February 2021.
- 5.5 Cheshire East Council took part in a national Mass Asymptomatic Testing (MAST) pilot project throughout December 2020. This was to pilot the use and function of Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) within some priority cohort settings. Over 50 individuals were trained to use LFTs, including 5 staff members from Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, who supported the pilots by operating as a mobile ‘swab squad’ and by providing logistics support to deliver kits to settings. Over 1,500 tests were done during the pilot projects and no positive results were found. It was an extremely useful exercise to test the process and approach to be taken forward. Cheshire East Council are now in the process of recruiting a team to operate as a mobile ‘swab squad’ to roll out LFT more widely. This team will be able to go into settings throughout Cheshire East to undertake lateral flow testing, provide a quality assurance role for any settings (including those being rolled out nationally i.e. schools and care homes) and act as a logistics team to deliver kits to settings who have been trained to do their own testing. In addition, Cheshire East Council are working with Cheshire West and Chester Council to look at fixed Asymptomatic Testing Sites (ATS) for enabling testing of the general public.
- 5.6 *Covid-19 Mass Vaccination* – Since the last Cabinet report three vaccines have been approved for use produced by Pfizer, Astra-Zeneca and Moderna. The Pfizer vaccine was introduced first but required strict “Cold Chain” management to ensure its effectiveness. These limitations restricted its use and led to a phased distribution to local hospitals and primary care, particularly in Cheshire

East as the Countess of Chester Hospital was identified by the NHS as the initial hub for the County. The Astra-Zeneca Vaccine is very similar to the Influenza vaccine in terms of its use and is therefore more suited for use in primary care settings. The Moderna vaccine was approved for use on 8 January 2021. It works in a similar way to the Pfizer one.

- 5.7 Cheshire CCG has coordinated the mass vaccination plan for the County. Mid Cheshire Hospitals Trust began its programme on 28 December followed by East Cheshire Trust on 4 January. Large scale primary care roll out also commenced on the week of 4 January with groupings of GP surgeries cooperating to provide vaccination for their patients in line with the national prioritisation protocol. As the production of the vaccines is increased a wider range of sessions will be offered across the borough. Council staff are working closely with Cheshire CCG to ensure that vulnerable people and care home and other care staff are prioritised for vaccination in line with the national guidance.
- 5.8 *Communities – Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) Support: People Helping People* was 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. This service is quickly becoming recognised amongst all residents across the borough as an essential community service. Some key recent updates associated with this service are as follows:
- 5.8.1 Support for the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable during the 4 week November lockdown: 16,000 people are known to be CEV in Cheshire East (with Downs Syndrome and Stage 5 Chronic Kidney Disease now added to these criteria), from whom 900 people requested support from Cheshire East Council. In response the team undertook welfare checks, assessing both physical and mental health needs and meeting those needs with either food provision or by linking the individual to an appropriate local community-based service that support food, fuel or digital poverty including supporting low level mental health needs such as social isolation.
- 5.8.2 Support for the CEV cohort (shielding) re-commenced in Tier 4 on 31 December, then into the national lockdown on 5 January 2021. This support is expected to be in place until at least 21 February 2021.
- 5.9 *Adult Social Care* - The Commissioning Team have provided significant support for the Adults Social Care Market during the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure market stability and the safe service delivery and provision of care for the residents of Cheshire East. This includes Care Homes, Care at Home

(Domiciliary Care), Complex Needs, Extra Care Housing and Supported Living schemes.

- 5.10 Given the latest national lockdown, in addition to winter pressures to support the domiciliary care market we will re-commence payment for commissioned care and not claw back hours that are undelivered due to COVID-19 pandemic.
- 5.11 Commissioners are working closely with colleagues in Health to ensure that the vaccine is rolled out to care home staff and residents who are a priority cohort.
- 5.12 Administering the Pfizer vaccine to care home residents is more problematic due to the storage conditions required. However, it is understood that some Primary Care Networks have contacted care home providers and offered to vaccinate their residents and staff in the New Year.
- 5.13 Cheshire East is expecting to receive the second tranche of funding from Round 2 of the Infection Control fund in the New Year. This will support care providers to limit staff movement, support safe visiting among other workforce resilience and infection control measures.
- 5.14 Commissioners are working with Health colleagues across Cheshire to develop a hospital discharge pathway for patients who are being discharged to a care home. The pathway, which reflects latest national guidance, is designed to provide guidance and assurance for care home providers. It will be promoted to Regional Managers and policy makers in the care market via a clinically led webinar in January.
- 5.15 A multi-agency Communications Task and Finish group has been established to co-ordinate and enhance joint communications between Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester Councils, Cheshire CCG and other Health colleagues. This will support and supplement local ongoing communication methods such as monthly webinars, Mutual Aid calls and Provider briefings.
- 5.16 Whole home testing continues with care home residents and staff. This has proved effective in identifying asymptomatic staff members at an early stage enabling them to self-isolate to prevent onward transmission in the care home. The home testing pilot continues to be working well across the Extra Care Housing and Supported Living Schemes. Testing has now been introduced for all Care at Home providers across the Borough.
- 5.17 Officers are continuing to work closely with Care Homes to support the roll out of the national rapid testing programme, better known as Lateral Flow Testing (LFT). LFT kits in Care Homes are subject to national deployment and to date there have been a large proportion of homes across Cheshire East who have received their test kits. In preparation for and upon receipt of delivery, officers will continue to engage with Care Homes to understand the local position

relating to test kits and the appropriate technology being issued. A webinar has been delivered for Care Homes focusing on the implementation and logistical planning that homes will have to undertake to ensure that LFT is completed in a safe way. Care Homes have shared that the request to undertake testing will present financial implications, staffing challenges and additional cost pressure to homes due to the time and planning required to safely facilitate testing prior to any visit taking place. Officers will continue to monitor the implementation of the test kits and work as pragmatically as possible with Care Homes going forward.

- 5.18 Local visiting guidance has been produced to support care homes to facilitate safe visiting of relatives. A number of Care Homes across the Borough are continuing to put in place bespoke arrangements to facilitate visits for family member, such as External Visiting Pods, internal allocated visiting rooms with the appropriate PPE and risk management plans. Public Health and the Quality Assurance team are working closely with Care Homes to ensure they are doing all they can to support safe visiting arrangements in care homes for family members and relatives.
- 5.19 The Quality Assurance team will be working closely with Skills for Care to support the roll out of the newly launched Deputy Managers network across Cheshire East which is a virtual network specifically for deputy Care Home managers. The focus of the network is to build supportive connections and share best practice and aims to enhance support and development along with delivering themed sessions on Wellbeing & Resilience, Self Confidence, Personal Effectiveness and Delegation with Confidence.
- 5.20 The newly appointed Cheshire East Council Infection Control Nurse will be working with Care Homes in the coming months to undertake an analysis of Infection Prevention Control Practices across Care Homes. The focus will be to audit and analyse current Infection Prevention Control systems and process place and offer technical advice and support.
- 5.21 The Quality Assurance Team continue to undertake weekly contact calls to all care homes across the Borough. The purpose of this contact call is to seek assurance of the effective ongoing safe service delivery.
- 5.22 PPE support has been key to our Covid-19 response and recovery. The position changes rapidly but the current position is as follows:
- The Local Authority have been supplied with some PPE via the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) since the 24 March 2020. The Council have distributed PPE to eligible organisations across Cheshire East.

- All registered adult social care providers, opticians, pharmacists and urgent dental care have 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. It is widely recognised that the PPE supply is available in the market however prices have been grossly inflated, and this is likely to effect budgets.
- A stock has been locally purchased as part of the Council's recovery and outbreak planning, and we will continue to supply providers PPE on a mutual aid basis as and when required.

5.23 *Children's Social Care* – We have reviewed our service offer in light of the new national lockdown which came into effect on 6 January. We will be maintaining statutory service provision in line with our usual processes where it is safe to do so, including face to face visits, in order to continue to effectively safeguard children and young people. Visits are carefully risk assessed to consider the risk of Covid to the child and wider family members. Family time is continuing to take place as we recognise the importance of this to children and young people's wellbeing and long-term relationships.

5.24 We are identifying which vulnerable children supported by our Children's Social Care and Early Help services would be safer attending their early years setting or school, and workers are supporting and encouraging families to continue attendance. Safeguarding is a multi-agency responsibility and we will be ensuring the Safeguarding Children Partnership has oversight of which children we feel are at increased risk due to not attending education, and that as a partnership we take action to support them to attend, and review our plans, assessment of risk and multi-agency response where the child continues to not attend.

5.25 To recognise the dedication and great work from the workforce, Children's Social Care carried out '24 days of thank yous' for advent and shared compliments and resources for working with families each day during December. One example of the positive feedback shared was this compliment which was received by a social worker from a parent:

'From the bottom of our hearts THANK YOU! You gave me back my trust for professionals you had never given up on me! Even when things wasn't in our favour you still stuck by us and pushed us you have made me so much better! You made me realise the mother I can be you showed me that the world isn't that dark and that there is light. THANK YOU! Thank you for saving me!'

- 5.26 Ofsted ILACS inspections were due to recommence from 5 January 2021. Ofsted have announced that they will not be conducting any fieldwork in January so that local authorities can focus on leading their local emergency response. Inspections will resume from February and we are expecting to receive any inspection shortly.
- 5.27 *Prevention and Early Help* – We have reviewed our service offer in light of the new national lockdown which came into effect on 6 January. We will be maintaining service provision in line with our usual processes where it is safe to do so, including face to face visits, in order to continue to effectively safeguard children and young people. Visits are carefully risk assessed to consider the risk of Covid to the child and wider family members. We are also continuing to provide some targeted, direct work in line with Government guidance from our Family and Children’s Centres. This includes support for families open to our service and to new parents who have given birth during the pandemic. A range of online and remote support continues to be in place to complement this offer.
- 5.28 Early years providers were advised that they could remain open during the new national lockdown, this includes nurseries and registered childminders but does not include nursery classes in primary schools – we are waiting for further guidance from the DfE on this. We will continue to offer our support to all settings and will be closely monitoring the number of vulnerable children attending to ensure families can continue to access provision and support.
- 5.29 Over 9,000 vouchers were distributed over the Christmas period to families and young adults in need through the Winter Grant Scheme. The grant is to offer practical support in the form of food and utilities payments. The scheme will continue until the end of March. A referral process is in place for professionals to refer families who need this support which is working well. Emergency vouchers were distributed to Social Care and Early Help teams to cover any enquiries during the holiday period when families may self-refer.
- 5.30 *Education and Skills* – On 6 January the DfE announced the following:
- Schools and colleges remain open but with attendance limited to vulnerable children and children of critical workers (also referred to as key workers).
 - Extra funding will be provided to support schools to provide food parcels or meals to students eligible for free school meals. The national voucher scheme will also re-open so that in the event schools cannot offer food parcels or provide an alternative local solution, every child can access free school meals while they are learning at home.

- The minimum standards of remote learning have been strengthened, schools will be expected to offer pupils online lessons and a set number of hours of remote education for pupils.
- Schools are expected to have a digital platform, such as G-Suite or Microsoft Education, and should provide at least some of their remote provision via video lessons – this can be done by school-led videos or using other providers like Oak National Academy.
- There will be further distribution of laptops to schools.
- The UK’s leading mobile network operators will provide access to educational sites. Schools can already request free mobile data uplifts for disadvantaged families via the Department for Education’s website.
- The level of additional data for families will vary by provider, but for example Three customers will receive unlimited data and EE customers will receive an extra 20 gigabytes per month. Other providers supporting the offer include Tesco Mobile, Smarty, Sky Mobile, Virgin Mobile, Vodafone and O2.
- Students will not be asked to sit GCSE, AS and A level exams this summer. Ofqual will consider a teacher assessed system as a replacement for GCSEs, AS and A levels. A consultation will be launched next week and conclude swiftly to give certainty to schools, colleges and students, while also giving them the opportunity to have their say.
- Assessments in some vocational qualifications can still take place in January, where schools and colleges judge it right to do so. The department is working with Ofqual on arrangements for those who do not take their January assessments, as well as for vocational and technical assessments scheduled for February onwards.
- Statutory key stage 1 and key stage 2 tests and teacher assessments planned for summer 2021, including the key stage 2 tests in reading and mathematics, will not take place.
- As announced in December, Ofsted will carry out monitoring inspections in the Spring term of those schools most in need of challenge and support. These inspections will have a strong focus on remote education. In addition, Ofsted can inspect schools – of any grade – where it has significant concerns about safeguarding or the quality of education being provided, including remote education.
- The rapid testing programme for secondary schools and colleges will continue for those on site, with daily testing of close contacts available to students and staff and weekly testing available for staff. Primary staff will be included later in January, and more detail will be set out in due course about reaching all secondary students as they return to face-to-face education.

- 5.31 Following the announcement from the Prime Minister on 4 January on the third national lockdown, we contacted schools and colleges to advise them to open on 5 January to vulnerable children and children of key workers. Based on the learning from the first school closedown in March, we offered advice to schools on how to support vulnerable groups such as children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and children on a child in need or child protection plan. The Virtual School for cared for children has been ensuring that appropriate support is in place for cared for children and young people who are accessing education from home so they can continue to make progress.
- 5.32 We have established internal arrangements to review support for the most vulnerable children not attending school based on a risk-based approach to ensure coordinated support across partners/professionals.
- 5.33 It is required in law to deliver the provision in Education Health and Care (EHC) plans. For all children with EHC plans, we have advised schools to complete a risk assessment to assess the impact on the child of not attending education and, if it is agreed their needs can be met safely at home, to put in place a temporary provision plan which is coproduced with the parent/carer. Based on feedback from our parent carers, we have also asked schools to consider any children with SEN support plans, especially those where a needs assessment was being considered for an EHC plan or where they have complex needs.
- 5.34 We have re-established our email address for practitioners, parents and schools to contact with any queries on attendance of vulnerable children and the children of critical workers. This was previously very effective in enabling us to address any barriers to attendance quickly. The learning from the first lockdown has enabled us to put plans into place quickly and effectively.
- 5.35 Schools have moved to remote learning until at least February half term. Schools were well prepared in terms of planning for remote learning and have been able to have this in place with short notice.
- 5.36 We have encouraged schools with secondary age children to continue to set up testing arrangements. We will look at how we can enable access to testing for primary school staff. Pilots took place before Christmas and training sessions for schools are taking place in January.
- 5.37 We are awaiting the publication of new guidance for schools and will continue to provide intensive support to schools around how to implement this to ensure we have a consistent and safe approach across all schools. The

Education Recovery Group continues to be effective in planning our joint response.

- 5.38 *Homelessness and Rough Sleepers* – From the 26th March 2020 to 31st December 2020 Housing have accommodated 222 separate households who presented to us as homeless and have placed them in emergency provision. Of those 222:-
- 165 have successfully been moved on from the hotel placements into longer term provision
 - 18 Lost their accommodation due to their behaviour
 - 14 abandoned the hotel or they disengaged.
 - 23 are being encouraged to secure longer term provision
 - 2 have sadly died
- 5.39 Those accommodated were predominantly single people, but we also accommodated five families. As of 31 December 2020, we had 9 households in Bed and Breakfast and plans were in place to move those onto more appropriate accommodation.
- 5.40 In addition the Housing Options Team have also prevented 786 people from becoming homeless during this period.
- 5.41 In relation to those sleeping rough, we are currently seeing the number fluctuate between 6 and 10 within the Borough.
- 5.42 The council has secured funding through the Government’s “Next Steps” programme which will provide housing solutions for the homeless.
- 5.43 We have also undertaken a tendering exercise to develop a Fresh Start scheme, which will provide 6 units of accommodation and support for those with complex needs for example those, with a history of offending.
- 5.44 We are continuing to utilise our Homelessness Prevention funding to try to prevent evictions or assist those at threat of homelessness to access alternative accommodation.
- 5.45 *Business Support* - On Business Grants, the Government announced four new grant funds in November to support business since the introduction of the Local Covid Alert Level (LCAL) and the national lockdown. These grants have an estimated total value of £15,262,935.
- 5.46 In December 2020, the Government added support to Wet-Led Public Houses with a one off payment of £1,000.
- 5.47 Further to the latest National Lockdown, on 5 January 2021, the Government announced a supplementary one-off grant available to the Retail , Leisure and

Hospitality sectors. The payment would be up to a maximum of £9,000, and the total available would be dependent on the rateable value of the business's premises.

5.48 The main grants are:

- **Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed)** - The grant amount £6,520,842 and is 90% of the estimated grant funding requirement, calculated using Valuation Office Agency data. This grant is to support those businesses that are required to close as a result of the national restrictions and have a business property that has a rateable value as determined by the Valuation Office Agency. It will be a payment to cover a period of closure such as required under Tier 3, Tier 4, and national lockdown, with the amount payable dependent on the rateable value of the business premises. The Council has no discretion over this grant and will make payments to eligible businesses in line with the government guidance.
- **Local Restrictions Support Grant (Open)** - The grant amount is £1,059,053, it is part of the wider set of measures to support businesses in response to Coronavirus (Covid-19) and specifically for businesses that were still open but have been severely impacted by Local Covid Alert Levels 'High' (LCAL 2) and 'Very High' (LCAL 3) restrictions since 1 August to 4 November 2020. Cheshire East entered Local Covid Alert Level 'High' (Tier 2) on 14th October.
- **Additional Restrictions Grant** - Local Authorities will receive a one-off lump sum payment amounting to £20 per head. This amounts to a total of £7,683,040 in Cheshire East. The funding can be used across financial years 2020/2021 and 2021/2022. Once a Local Authority exits national or Tier 3 restrictions, they will not receive additional funding under this grant scheme if the Local Authority then re-enters national or Tier 3 or Tier 4 restrictions. This grant will primarily take the form of discretionary grants, but Local Authorities could also use this funding for wider business support activities.

5.49 The policy for the grants is live, and application is available via the Council's website. The Local Restrictions Support Grants (LRSG) are being administered by the rates team and the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) by Economic Development.

5.50 As at the 8 January the total grants paid out is as follows:

Business Support Grants		
Total Applications Received @8th Jan 2021	c4000	
	Applications Approved	Payments Made £
Local Restrictions Support Grant (open)	908	1,634,303
Local Restrictions Support Grant (sectors)	3	2,285
Local Restrictions Support Grant (closed)	2329	3,783,150
Additional Restrictions Grant	371	788,331
Wet Led Pubs	124	124,000
Total	3735	6,332,069

- 5.51 *Leisure Centres and Libraries* have closed again in accordance with the legislation for the third national lockdown. Both Libraries and Leisure Centres provide a range of digital services to enable people to keep mentally and physically active while at home. Libraries are also providing a click and collect service for customers who prefer physical books to maintain their positive mental health and wellbeing.
- 5.52 The third lockdown will have a further significant impact on Everybody Sport & Recreation with receipts from fees and charges effectively reduced to zero during periods of closure. The National Leisure Recovery Fund was launched by Government on 14 December. Its purpose is to enable the reopening of public leisure facilities following the second national lockdown, to support recovery to a position of sustainable operation over the medium term, and to sustain the delivery of activities (such as swimming) that are not widely accessible in the private leisure market. The fund is to cover the period from 1 December 2020 to 31 March 2021. Applications were required to be submitted by 15 January. The third national lockdown was announced after the fund was launched and we await guidance on how the scheme will take account of the third national lockdown.
- 5.53 Enforcement - As a regulatory authority, the Council is required to ensure that legislation in response to the Covid-19 pandemic is followed and that complaints are investigated. Our Regulatory Services team follow the principles of Engage, Educate, Encourage and Enforce in undertaking their work, only enforcing when there is a failure to co-operate. This is particularly important given the complex and ever-changing nature of the rules and guidance. We continue to work in partnership with the police to share intelligence and joint operations within our towns to provide advice and ensure compliance. New enforcement powers for local authorities were introduced by

Government on 1 December enabling councils to issue improvement and restriction notices to businesses not meeting COVID-secure obligations. However, compliance remains generally good within Cheshire East with businesses co-operating and following advice provided by Council officers to improve safety measures for their customers and staff. No notices have been issued using the new powers up to 11 January.

6. Implications of the Recommendations

6.1 Legal Implications

6.1.1 The Coronavirus Act 2020 received Royal Assent on 25 March 2020. The Act has extensive schedules setting out a wide framework of legislative changes. The Act has been supported by a multiplicity of regulations which provide a legal basis for enforcement etc. Supported by copious and frequent guidance notes which purports to assist in the interpretation of the regulations.

6.1.2 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.

6.1.3 Any necessary urgent decisions made by the Council in response to the pandemic have followed the relevant process set out in the Constitution.

6.1.4 Since the last report in December 2020 there have been amendments to the existing regulations using Secretary of State emergency powers altering Christmas arrangements, alteration of tiers and most recently parliamentary approved third national 'lockdown' regulations. As amendments are made to adapt to changing social circumstances, infection rates, new COVID variants and the vaccination programme, the definitive legal position is time-specific and subject to frequent change.

6.1.5 The tier restriction regulations (The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (All Tiers) (England) Regulations 2020) came into force on the 2 December 2020 and 4 substantive amendment regulations were made in rapid succession on 16, 19, 26 and 31 December 2020. At the time of drafting, the most recent of these amending regulations came in to force on 6 January 2021.

6.1.6 Essentially the regulations provide the legal framework for the implementation and enforcement of national restrictions. The key elements are the restrictions on individual freedom to associate,

restrictions on travel, closure of non-essential retail and entertainment venues. The legal framework underpinning the tier system provides for support to the employers, business and the public sector to help facilitate the immediate response to the pandemic and longer term recovery options.

6.2 Financial Implications

- 6.2.1 The potential financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been reported to Cabinet each month since July. Members outside of Cabinet have received briefings via the Audit and Governance and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committees and direct Member briefings. This report presents the latest financial position and identifies Government funding already provided or claimed to date. Further detail of the implications on specific services and the medium-term finances of the Council are contained within the Third Quarter Review 2020/21 and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2021 to 2025 elsewhere on this agenda.
- 6.2.2 Significant levels of uncertainty remain over the potential financial implications for local authorities and locally this has been evident by the movement between tiers where different funding packages apply for business grants and contain outbreak management funding.
- 6.2.3 The nature of financial issues, and the approach to funding costs and income losses associated with the pandemic, continue to change as the severity of the pandemic has changed. This creates issues with producing an accurate forecast of financial consequences compared to the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy which had been approved by Council on 20 February 2020.
- 6.2.4 The returns to Central Government identify three main types of financial pressure:
- (i) **Un-ringfenced Expenditure and Income Losses**
The most recent forecast of financial pressures from COVID-19 on the Council's 2020/21 budget for Services is £33.6m. The figures are under frequent review and expenditure is expected to rise with the rising number of infection cases. Grant funding to support expenditure and income losses is detailed in Table 1 below, in a format consistent with previous reports. £25m of un-ringfenced Support Grant has been allocated to date for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 financial years; and £3.5m has also been claimed so far under the Income Compensation Scheme and is pending analysis before payment. The Government has also

announced that £100m has been top sliced from national grant provision totals to provide support to keeping leisure centres open; and a claims process to access this funding is in progress. Table 1a identifies funding announcements provided as part of the Spending Review 2020, which will feature as part of the management of COVID related financial impacts in 2021/22 and potentially beyond.

(ii) **Collection Fund**

Potential losses on the Collection Fund relate to Council Tax and Business Rates income. The Government requires councils to spread the deficit over the next three years, although a compensation scheme has been announced, to cover up to 75% of irrecoverable losses. Cash shortfalls in-year are currently expected to be in the region of £11.1m, but this may rise as a consequence of the latest national lockdown. The Council will continue to recover late payments where practicable, however some losses will be permanent; for example, where businesses have ceased trading, individuals are now entitled to Council Tax Support Payments, or where growth in the tax base has slowed down compared to forecasts.

(iii) **Ringfenced Expenditure**

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

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

Announced	Funding for CEC	Notes
(England total)		
19th March	£9.150m (£1.6bn)	Adult Social Care based payment
18th April	£10.539m (£1.6bn)	Payment per capita to help reflect lost income
Sub-Total	£19.689m (£3.2bn)	
2nd July	£2.712m (£0.5bn)	Adult Social Care / deprivation based payment

12th October	£2.578m (£1bn)	To provide resources for winter. This tranche of funding has been used to equalise all payments using the same approach as the July payment.
Total	£24.979m (of £4.6bn)	
2nd July	£6m (£n/k) for Income Compensation	Estimated total – subject to claims process. £2.1m claimed so far, in 1 st of 3 data collection rounds Compensation at 75p in £1 for losses above 5% of sales, fees and charges budgets
2nd July	£nil for Collection Fund	Compensation at 75p in £1 for losses (to be received in 2021/22); and defer Collection Fund deficit over 3yrs

Table 1a: Un-ringfenced support announced for 2021/22

Announced	Funding for CEC	Notes
(England total)		
18th December	£8.508m (£1.55bn)	5 th Tranche of Emergency Funding Grant
18th December	(£n/k) for Income Compensation	Sales, Fees & Charges compensation scheme extended for April-June 2021

6.2.5 Un-ringfenced government funding received to date as detailed in Table 1 (above) is currently **£25m, of which £1m was utilised in 2019/20**; and the income compensation scheme is anticipated to bring in **£6m**, if settled in full. There is potential that there could be a shortfall in funding compared to the overall financial impact on the Council. This is a changing position and the MTFs and TQR reflect that costs that are deferred, such as capital spending impacts (of £8.7m) and Collection Fund losses which are managed through the Collection Fund Earmarked Reserve. This position will be subject to ongoing analysis and review as part of the outturn reporting.

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

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

Table 2: Specific Grants are valued at c.£200m

Activity (National Total)	Spending forecast*	Funding	Variance
Test & Trace (£300m)	£1,533,331	£1,533,331	£0
Towns Fund (Capital £5bn)	£750,000	£750,000	£0
Dedicated Home to School and College Transport (£67m)	£625,506	£625,506	£0
Rough Sleeping/ Next Steps Accommodation (£3.2m+£10m) **	£157,648	£68,400	£89,248
Active Travel (£225m)	£743,050	£743,050	£0
Re-Opening High Streets (£50m)	£339,533	£339,533	£0
Culture Recovery Fund (£1.57bn)	£180,000	£180,000	£0
Infection Control in Care Homes (£600m)	£5,320,292	£5,320,292	£0
Infection Control in Care Homes (£546m) 2 nd Tranche	£4,712,872	£4,712,872	£0
Business Grants (£12.3bn)***	£87,445,000 (spending to date)	£95,514,000	Awaiting guidance
Discretionary Business Grants	£4,357,000	£4,372,250	

(£617m)***	(spending to date)		
Local Restrictions Business Support Grants (£3.3bn) ***	£16,183,434	£16,183,434	
Christmas Support Payment (Wet-led pubs)	£236,800	£236,800	
Lockdown Grants (Businesses) (£4.6bn)	tba	tba	
Business Rate Holiday (£10.7bn)	£62,339,000	£60,561,068	£1,777,932
Council Tax Hardship (£500m)	£2,691,326	£2,062,635	£628,691
Local Bus Network (£167m)	£229,632	£229,632	£0
Emergency Assistance Food and basic necessities (£63m)	£326,293	£326,293	£0
Contain Outbreak Management Fund (£per/head, based on Tier) (3 tranches to 29 Dec)	£3,951,278	£3,951,278	£0
School Condition Grant (Capital) (£n/k)	£589,604	£589,604	£0
Wellbeing for Education Return (£8m)	£55,403	£55,403	£0
Compliance and Enforcement Grant (£60m)	£158,572	£158,572	£0
Bus Service Support Grant (CBSSG) Restart scheme (£n/k)	£488,362	£492,735	(£4,373)
Self Isolation Test and Trace Support Payment (n/k)	£250,979	£250,979	£0
Clinically Extremely Vulnerable Individuals (£32m)	£210,000	£210,000	£0
Covid Winter Grant Scheme	£880,472	£880,472	£0

(£170m)			
Domestic Abuse Building Capacity Fund (£6m)	£50,000	£50,000	£0
Leisure Centres (£100m)	£n/k	£n/k (pending claims process)	£n/k

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

** Whilst spending in relation to Rough Sleeping/ Accommodation exceeds specific Covid grant funding in this respect, the balance is being met by other Housing grants/ reserves, and as such there will not be an additional pressure on the Revenue Account.

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

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

6.2.8 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.

6.3 Policy Implications

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

6.4 Equality Implications

6.4.1 Implications of any changes and restrictions will continue to be reviewed on a regular basis.

6.4.2 Vaccinations are prioritising older people and those who are clinically extremely vulnerable.

- 6.4.3 As mentioned in paragraph 5.28 Over 9,000 vouchers were distributed over the Christmas period to families and young adults in need through the Winter Grant Scheme. The grant is to offer practical support in the form of food and utilities payments. The scheme will continue until the end of March
- 6.4.4 We carried out individual risk assessments for staff with protected characteristics, particularly in relation to BAME colleagues and staff with a disability and are issuing regular reminders to keep these under review as circumstances may change.

6.5 Human Resources Implications

- 6.5.1 The latest data on staff absences on 7 January 2021 are 34 staff self-isolating and working from home, 28 staff self-isolating and not working from home (role doesn't allow), 27 Covid-related absences, and 91 non-Covid-related absences. The numbers have increased since December in all bar non-Covid related absences. Clearly this will be kept under review in terms of impact on our capacity to deliver services. There continues to be regular communication with staff and good co-operation with the Trade Unions.

6.6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.6.1 Risk registers have been maintained as part of the Council's response to date and the plans for recovery. Business Continuity Plans are being kept under review and plans have been tested against concurrent risks of EU Exit and winter pressures which have materialised in the last month.

6.7 Rural Communities Implications

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

6.8 Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children

- 6.8.1 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.

6.9 Public Health Implications

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

6.10 Climate Change Implications

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

7 Ward Members Affected

All Members.

8 Consultation & Engagement

8.1 Formal consultation activities were initially paused due to the lockdown restrictions. We have undertaken consultation relating to the Corporate Plan and the budget and are currently consulting on Household Waste and Recycling Centres and Parking. Each proposal for consultation will be reviewed on a case by case basis to ensure that we can continue to operate effectively.

9 Access to Information

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

10 Contact Information

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