

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 4 May 2021

Report Title: Covid-19 – Annual Report of our COVID-19 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 has received nine 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. This has been an unprecedented year in terms of circumstances and challenges which have affected every aspect of Cheshire East Council. It is appropriate, therefore, that as the first national anniversary of this pandemic has recently been marked, this final Cabinet report looks back over some of the key moments and achievements in the Council's response (Appendix 1) as well as providing a summary of developments since the April report.
- 1.3. The report also summarises the latest information on infection rates which have fallen considerably since last reported.
- 1.4. 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 been or is to be passported directly to other organisations. This may create an incorrect 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.

- 1.5. It is important to note that there may 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 note the main achievements in responding to Covid-19, outlined in Appendix 1 of the report.
- 2.2 That Cabinet note the developments since April 2021.

3. **Other Options Considered**

- 3.1. Not applicable.

4. **Background**

- 4.1 The WHO Weekly Epidemiological Update issued on 12 April 2021 showed an increase in infections with a further 488,141 new cases of Covid-19 reported in the previous week.
- 4.2 As of 12 April, there have been 135.4 million Covid-19 confirmed cases worldwide and 2.92 million deaths. As of the 8 April a total of 669,248,795 Covid vaccine doses have been administered.
- 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

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-r-number-in-the-uk>

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/covid-19-vaccinations/>

- 4.4 Three vaccines to protect against Coronavirus are being rolled out nationally to priority groups. As of the morning of 12 April 2021, 201,990 (62.29%) of the eligible population of Cheshire East residents who are registered with Cheshire GP Practices have received their first dose. Over 96% of people aged over 70 years had received their first vaccination and second doses are now being

administered. Almost 95% of people who are Clinically Extremely Vulnerable have received their first vaccination.

- 4.5 The UK Government National Restrictions continue at the time of writing. The Prime Minister announced changes that came into force on 12 April. Details of this change are found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do>
- 4.6 Case rates continue to show a fall. In the last full week of data until 7 April 2021, 66 people in Cheshire East tested positive. The local infection rate was recorded as 17 cases per 100,000 population. This represents a 15% reduction in cases from the previous week.
- 4.7 Case rates for Cheshire East remain slightly under the England average. Hospital capacity continues to improve with small numbers of patients requiring hospital care. As of 12 April 2021, East Cheshire NHS Trust had 4 occupied Covid beds (2% of capacity) and Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust had 13 occupied Covid beds (2% of capacity).
- 4.8 Using data up to 9 March 2021 shows the rate for those aged 60+ has plateaued between 4 and 7 per 100,000. As the number of infections continue to fall, we will see a small number of cases in each age group causing large swings in percentage change. Cases have dropped in the under 19s as a whole. We have seen a significant fall in rates for the working age population. Rates in the 20-29 year group and the 50-59 year group have fallen by 78% and 63% respectively in the last week. As infections fall, continued careful monitoring and surveillance of cases is vital to ensure that the Covid-19 response can adapt to any observed changes.
- 4.9 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. Numbers of care homes in outbreak have reduced over the last month and as of 12 April, there were no homes with a Covid-19 outbreak.
- 4.10 With the return of all pupils to school on 8 March, enhanced Lateral Flow Testing measures were put in place to assist all secondary schools implement the national programme. After the initial two week school based testing programme, pupils were expected to carry out twice weekly home testing. A report of the school based programme is being prepared for members.
- 4.11 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. As of 8 March, care homes have

begun to offer the Government's new LFT programme to enable a designated family member to visit a loved one.

4.12 Financial support for Local Authorities at Local COVID Alert Level Medium and High is to fund the following activities:

- a. Targeted testing for hard-to-reach groups out of scope of other testing programmes.
- b. Additional contact tracing.
- c. Enhanced communication and marketing e.g. towards hard-to-reach groups and other localised messaging.
- d. Delivery of essentials for those in self-isolation.
- e. Targeted interventions for specific sections of the local community and workplaces.
- f. Harnessing capacity within local sectors (voluntary, academic, commercial).
- g. Extension/introduction of specialist support (behavioural science, bespoke comms).
- h. Additional resource for compliance with, and enforcement of, restrictions and guidance.

5. Progress update

5.1 Since March 2020, Cheshire East Council has continued 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 achievements and any changes since the April update that have continued to be delivered by the Council in Appendix 1.

5.3 *Test and Trace and Outbreak Management*

5.3.1 *Testing:*

On 6 April 2021, England's first dual use testing site was launched in Cheshire East for a national pilot project at the Crewe local testing site. This is a pilot offering both symptomatic and asymptomatic testing in one location for residents. The pilot was operational from 6 April 2021; an evaluation will take place to consider the ongoing function of the site.

5.3.2 There are now 6 asymptomatic testing sites available in Cheshire East in Alderley Edge, Middlewich, Sandbach, Congleton, Prestbury and Macclesfield offering lateral flow testing for local residents. From Monday 12 April, these sites also became collection sites for home testing kits, along with the Salvation Army site in Crewe. These sites are undertaking approximately 600 lateral flow tests weekly and in the first week alone the Salvation Army site handed out 777 home test kits.

5.3.3 There are now 11 pharmacies in Cheshire East being supported to undertake lateral flow testing for local residents. The national government are also in the process of launching a community collect model in pharmacies, allowing people to collect home testing kits from a community pharmacy. All sites can be viewed and booked here: <https://cheshireeast.zipporah.co.uk/LFT.Bookings>

5.3.4 The Cheshire East Swab Squad are currently supporting over 100 local businesses in Cheshire East with advice, training and testing support. This includes six local businesses who have received rapid response urgent testing to prevent Covid-19 outbreaks. This has required the team to undertake 248 lateral flow tests within those organisations. The successful contact tracing rate in Cheshire East is currently approximately 94% and is changing regularly.

5.4 *Contact Tracing and Self Isolation Support:*

5.4.1 Cheshire East Council is now undertaking all contact tracing in Cheshire East as part of a national pilot called Local-0. This means that positive cases are referred to the Cheshire East Local Contact Tracing Team after 1 hour. To support the rollout and management of this locally, a bespoke case management system has been created using Microsoft Dynamics 365. This allowed for cases to be escalated to the various programme workstreams immediately, to help prevent and rapidly control local outbreaks when they arise.

5.4.2 In addition, the local contact tracing offer has been extended to include the new Self Isolation Framework. This means that the Local Contact Tracing Team now undertake a much more detailed conversation during the initial contact tracing to assess what self-isolation support may be required by the individual and a directory of local support available has been created. In addition, People Helping People, Care4CE and the Swab Squad are now offering self-isolation support out of hours where required. A detailed self-isolation booklet has been created (<https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/covid-19/covid-19-self->

[isolation-support-pack.pdf](#)) which will also be printed and available in libraries and community centres too.

5.5 *Covid-19 Mass Vaccination*

- 5.5.1 The Covid vaccination programme continues to be rolled out to the remainder of the nine priority groups. The uptake rates in the priority groups remains high and refusal rates low. Particular focus is being given to Hard to Reach and Vaccine Hesitant Groups. In conjunction with Cheshire CCG and local community organisations, Local Authority staff are coordinating targeted media messages and accessible vaccination sessions for such groups. The initial sessions for homeless people have been well received with good participation. Further sessions are planned. Faith leaders have been contacted to offer “Pop Up” vaccination clinics in venues such as mosques, churches and associated community halls. A joint bid has been submitted to provide mobile vaccination clinics in our communities with the highest levels of health inequalities.
- 5.5.2 At the time of writing, second doses of the vaccines are being offered to those priority groups who received their first dose in January and February. This is including care home residents and people aged over 70 years. Local Authority staff are working closely with NHS colleagues to follow up those homes and to encourage staff who may have been reluctant to be vaccinated earlier in the year.
- 5.5.3 The latest Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation has updated its guidance regarding the use of the Astra Zeneca Vaccine. As the level of infection is falling it is recommending that people under the age of 30 years do not receive an initial dose of the Astra Zeneca Vaccine. Instead they should be offered either of the two other vaccines that are licenced. Anyone in this age group who has received their first dose of the Astra Zeneca Vaccine without significant side effects can receive a second dose of this vaccine.
- 5.5.4 Cheshire East Council is working closely with NHS Cheshire CCG and Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership to address vaccine inequality. The agencies are working together to identify and engage with underserved groups, including ethnic and faith groups, people who are homeless, people with learning disabilities and people accessing alcohol and substance misuse services to support them in getting information about and access to vaccines.

- 5.6. *Communities – Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) Support: People Helping People* was a service created by Cheshire East Council in March 2020. It 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 recognised amongst all residents across the borough as an essential community service.
- 5.7. From 31 March 2021, the Council is expected to provide similar support as that provided to those were shielding to those who are told to self-isolate. The intention is to reduce the spread of Covid-19 by providing practical, emotional and social support.
- 5.8 Some of the key achievements over the last year for this service are as follows:
- 1,946 volunteers recruited and utilised including the codesign of a volunteer website: <https://cheshireeastvolunteers.co.uk/>
 - Software launched to effectively recruit volunteers and a volunteer recognition scheme created.
 - 4,108 non-shielding vulnerable people supported.
 - 1,440 shielding individuals supported, including delivery of 350 food parcels.
 - 16 community groups (volunteer coordination points) set up to recruit, coordinate and support volunteers in local neighbourhoods.
 - £450,000 of funding allocated to the VCFSE sector to change their delivery model and meet the changing needs of communities, including £10,000 of winter wellbeing goods provided to those suffering fuel poverty.
- 5.9 The People Helping People service has become a household name amongst adult social care and health professionals and our communities. It has been the Council's response to support the clinically extremely vulnerable, the non shielding vulnerable cohort, those required to isolate and the vaccination programme. The success of this service in responding to the needs of our communities resulting in reducing transmission of Covid-19 and protecting our most vulnerable is a key Council achievement.
- 5.10 *Adult Social Care* – The Commissioning Team have provided significant support for the Adult 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.

5.11 During the last year there has been a number of achievements that have been delivered across the Commissioning, Contract Management and Quality Assurance teams. Officers have worked tirelessly to support providers across the Borough, thus ensuring comprehensive market oversight of all commissioned care providers was robustly in place. Provider support mechanisms that have been adopted and implemented are as follows:

- Resident safety and effective care and support maintained
- Business continuity planning
- Covid outbreak management
- Staff wellbeing and resilience programme via project 5
- Risk management planning and implementation of the designated visitor
- Provider mutual aid calls
- Focused care home quality assurance visits
- Whole home testing programme implementation
- Vaccination programme roll out for residents and staff
- Dedicated IPC Nurse advice and support to care homes
- Implementation of an approved Designated Setting for Covid recovered patients leaving hospital
- Partnership focused provider Webinars with Cheshire CCG and colleagues in Cheshire West to support safe hospital discharge pathways
- PPE training to care providers.
- Managed the allocation of over £15 million of Covid specific Government funding to Adult Social Care providers throughout the borough.

5.12 During the year providers have formally written to the Council to express their appreciation for the level of support received by Officers locally. Some examples are given below:

“You have been amazing... from the fabulous Council staff who delivered our PPE during the height of the pandemic to you – this support has meant so much - just knowing that during the darkest of times there were people out there who cared and above all understood of the things that we were going. You listened to me rant at times and cry at others which I did unashamedly.”

“Without being too boring the support that East Cheshire has given this home is second to none and you are of course a hero to me!”

“Over the last year which has been incredibly difficult for everyone, we have been extremely lucky to have been supported by the Quality Assurance team.”

“We have been able to ask any questions and we have been met with a quick response and a very understanding attitude”

- 5.13 *Care homes* - Of all care sectors, care homes have been the most significantly impacted by the pandemic with many homes having experienced at least one Covid-19 outbreak. Care homes have been supported throughout by the Council's Quality Assurance team as set out in previous Cabinet reports.
- 5.14 As of 13 April 2021, there are no care homes across Cheshire East with a Covid Outbreak. This is an extremely positive and significant milestone for care homes given the number of outbreaks homes have encountered over the last 12 months.
- 5.15 The Care Quality Commission have undertaken several focused Infection Prevention Inspections across care homes within Cheshire East. The feedback from the regulator summarised that homes fully understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to infection prevention control and have robust outbreak management, and safe systems of work in place.
- 5.16 Care Homes have operationally embedded the Designated Visitor guidance across homes which was introduced on 8 March 2021. Visits are regularly taking place for family members and residents. The feedback to date is that visits are having a positive effect for residents and their wellbeing.
- 5.17 The introduction of a second designated care home visitor commenced from 12 April 2021 as Covid restrictions continue to be cautiously eased. Regular visits are being extended from one to two people under carefully designed conditions to prevent transmission of Covid-19. Care Homes are implementing this guidance and continue to risk manage additional visitors in line with their dynamic visiting risk assessment.
- 5.18 All care homes have now received government funding via the Infection Control Fund (Rounds 1 and 2) and the Rapid Testing Fund to support infection control, workforce resilience and Lateral Flow Testing regimes. Care homes were also invited to apply (along with other care providers) for additional funds under the Workforce Capacity Fund which, as the name suggests, is designed to increase staffing capacity to support continuity of care and hospital discharge. Unlike other funding streams there was no requirement to passport the funding directly to providers and so a decision was taken to award the limited available funding to those providers that were able to demonstrate a clear plan on how the funds would be used to increase capacity within the short timeframe of 31 March 2021. 14 care homes were successful in being awarded funding. Passporting out of this funding was completed by Commissioners in a very short timeframe, thus ensuring the grant funding was issued in a timely manner to providers.
- 5.19 A third round of Infection Control Funding and second round of Rapid Testing Funding has just been received and, subject to authorisation, will shortly be passported to providers in accordance with Government guidance.

5.20 Whole home and Lateral Flow Testing continues in care homes. Revised guidance on testing for professionals visiting care homes was published on 17 March. The main changes to the guidance are:

- The default position is that without a negative test, the professional should not be allowed into the care home (unless in an emergency, unless overridden by the care home manager following a risk-based decision, or unless their entry is required by law such as CQC inspectors).
- For NHS professionals, care homes should see evidence from the professional of a negative rapid Lateral Flow Test within the last 72 hours, which shows they are following the NHS staff testing regime.
- As per the previous guidance, professionals who are not part of regular testing for NHS staff or CQC inspectors (for example professionals such as podiatrists or engineers) will need to be tested at the care home in the same way as visitors.
- If they are visiting multiple care homes in one day, they will now only need to be tested at the first care home they visit that day and can use evidence of this test at the next care home they visit that day.
- CQC inspectors will now test at home using a Lateral Flow Test on the day of a care home inspection, in addition to their weekly PCR.
- Like care home staff, visiting professionals are exempt from testing for 90 days following a positive PCR test, unless they develop new symptoms.

5.21 The roll out of the Whole Home Testing Programme was a complex logistical task that required partnership system planning. The roll out of the testing was successfully implemented in a timely, safe manner across care homes.

5.22 *Domiciliary care* - On the whole domiciliary care providers have coped well with the additional demands of the pandemic. There have been some isolated staffing issues due to sickness or the need for self-isolation but commissioners have worked closely with the care providers to help them resolve these issues and some providers have experienced an upturn in recruitment levels due to the prevailing economic circumstances.

5.23 More recently there has been an upturn in demand for domiciliary care which is impacting on the number of people awaiting a suitable package of care. Particular pinch points are double handling packages of care. An increase in carer breakdown also represents a risk factor impacting on the demand for domiciliary care. Additional capacity is currently being sought for the Care Brokerage team to facilitate more timely care sourcing and to explore creative solutions to care provision e.g. split or shared care packages. It is envisaged

that the Workforce Capacity Fund will help to increase capacity within the sector as 19 domiciliary care providers successfully applied for the funding.

- 5.24 Domiciliary care staff are eligible for the Covid-19 vaccination under Priority Cohort 2 – Frontline Health and Social Care Workers. Latest available data which is collated directly from care providers suggests that vaccination rates are 83% for frontline care workers but 73% when including back office staff (who are sometimes required to deliver care).
- 5.25 *Complex care/ Supported Living* - Like domiciliary care, there have been a relatively small number of issues related to complex care and supported living. Someday services were unfortunately forced to close at the start of the pandemic.
- 5.26 Updated guidance was issued by the Department of Health and Social care on the 30 March 2021 relating to visits in and out of extra care and supported living settings which can now be supported by rapid lateral flow testing.
- 5.27 Providers of complex care were eligible to apply for funding from the Workforce Capacity Fund. A total of nine providers were successful.
- 5.28 *Extra Care Housing* - Although sadly there have been a small number of Covid related deaths of residents at Extra Care Housing schemes since the start of the pandemic, there have been no major outbreaks. Housing and care staff now receive regular lateral flow tests.
- 5.29 The major area of concern for residents of two Extra Care Housing schemes was the temporary closure of the restaurant facilities in line with Government regulations. An alternative meal delivery service was put in place.
- 5.30 From the very beginning of the pandemic the Council identified PPE as a priority and recognised the urgency to develop our supply chains and to access a supply of PPE. The Council purchased and delivered a significant amount of PPE to a number of stakeholders including our frontline staff, Schools, Funeral Directors, and Care Providers etc. This meant that we were able to continue to deliver safe and effective care in Cheshire East. Care Providers were able to access PPE from Cheshire East Council while supply chain difficulties were being reported nationally and locally. A robust system was implemented and officers worked incredibly hard to ensure that any Care Provider requiring PPE received it within 24 hours of their request.
- 5.31 The Council now receive a regular supply of PPE via the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC). This arrangement with the LRF has been extended to the end of June 2021, with the Council receiving fortnightly deliveries of PPE directly to our offices in

Sandbach on a fortnightly basis. The Council continue to distribute PPE to eligible organisations across Cheshire East. So far, the Council has distributed just over 5 million items of PPE locally.

- 5.32 *Children's Social Care* – We are continuing to see that families' needs are more complex as a result of the pandemic, which is increasing demand and providing additional challenges to services. In response our teams, parents/cares and our partners have risen to the challenge and provided support to our most vulnerable children and young people. We have recruited and retained frontline staff and developed an even more robust response to domestic abuse. We have also enhanced short break care opportunities and have seen a growth in the recruitment of foster carers and people interested in adoption. We have also developed a new support service for foster carers (Mockingbird) and recommissioned our 16+ supported accommodation offer.
- 5.33 On 9 March the government laid The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 following a public consultation. The regulations will come into force on 30 March 2021 and will see an extension of the current flexibilities for medical reports (for fostering and adoption), virtual visits and Ofsted inspection cycles.
- 5.34 Rapid progress has been made in permanency planning for children, and our cohort of cared for children is reducing. We have now achieved 25 adoptions this year. We recently attended a regional leadership event where we presented on the positive impact we have achieved for children and young people through the Mockingbird project which provides a peer support network to foster carers. Fostering was included on the annual leaflet which goes to all Cheshire East residents which will hopefully result in an increase in inquiries on becoming a foster carer.
- 5.35 We celebrated social work practice with all our teams on World Social Work Day on 16 March in an online staff workshop. Some social workers shared their experience of having the Covid-19 vaccine in Team Voice to encourage colleagues to receive a vaccination. Foster carers have now been offered vaccinations which is very positive as it will support children and young people to continue to access family homes and to experience stability in where they are living.
- 5.36 *Prevention and Early Help* – Over 22,600 vouchers have been distributed to families and young adults in need through the Winter Grant Scheme since the beginning of December. The grant is continuing to be used as intended - to offer practical support in the form of food and utilities payments for vulnerable children, young people and adults, as agreed by Cabinet on 1 December. This has included provision of food vouchers for families eligible for free school meals over the Christmas period, February half term, and will also include the

Easter holidays. In January, the scheme was extended to include support for vulnerable families to replace or access white goods. A referral process is in place for professionals to refer families who need this support which is working well. One parent said, “We are incredibly grateful for your help; it feels like a weight has been lifted.”

- 5.37 Holiday activities will be taking place for families over Easter using the DfE holiday activity fund. The aim is to provide healthy food and enriching activities to disadvantaged young people. The DfE have confirmed that they are happy with our proposal for the use of the fund.
- 5.38 *Education and Skills* – The return to school and college for all pupils has been a success. The attendance in schools across Cheshire East at the end of the spring term 2021 was 94.89% in primary schools and 89.59% in secondary schools. This is 3% above the national attendance rate. Schools, colleges, and the Education Service have worked extremely hard to ensure all arrangements were in place for transport to and from school and the safe return of all pupils on March 8th. We provided all schools with template letters for children and parents to reassure them about the return to school and the expectations around attendance. We produced a guide for professionals who were working with families to support the transition back to school, help to address anxieties and any barriers to attendance. Guidance was also provided to schools and colleges on updating risk assessments and reducing transmission.
- 5.39 Full attendance data from secondary schools was phased over the first week to allow for the rapid testing of pupils. Rapid testing of secondary aged pupils is going very well, and we have a robust system in place to monitor incident rates in schools and put the right support in place. The Education team have visited a number of secondary schools and have been very impressed with the calm organisation that has been seen with implementing the testing arrangements.
- 5.40 In the run up to the return to school of all pupils in March, secondary schools, special schools and colleges were asked to carry out three Lateral Flow Tests (LFT) on each student as they returned, and to prepare them for twice weekly home testing once these had been completed, to help control the spread of the virus. Participation by students is voluntary and while most schools have reported very high levels, there have been some schools where students have been more reluctant to be tested. In these cases, staff have tried to encourage students to participate, pointing out the advantages and helping to reduce any anxieties.
- 5.41 Schools were able to start testing from 1 March and this is now complete. The number of tests carried out by each school ranges from 2,000 to almost 7,000. Concerns about the accuracy of the tests have been raised but there have been

less than 20 'void/ inconclusive' results reported, all of which gave a conclusive result on re-testing.

- 5.42 A total of 23 positive cases in pupils have been found since the start of March, of which 17 have not shown any symptoms and so would have been in school were it not for the tests.
- 5.43 Home testing has now been rolled out to nursery setting. Kits have been delivered and colleagues in this sector started home testing from 22 March.
- 5.44 The council has dedicated resource to the roll out of LFT across Cheshire East. This has enabled schools to have access to advice and support when setting up the testing sites and has enabled the council to have some oversight of the process through ongoing dialogue with schools and by visiting test sites, while they are in operation.
- 5.45 Our focus is on pupil wellbeing and catching up on learning, and we are continuing to assist schools in supporting pupils' mental health and wellbeing, so they can help those who are most anxious. Plans are also being discussed for summer schools and catch up programmes. We are working with schools to develop a recovery plan, which will focus on how schools need to adapt the curriculum to address gaps in knowledge and the curriculum during the last year.
- 5.46 At the beginning of March, parents across the borough received offers of secondary school places for children starting in September 2021, with the majority getting their first choice of school. The council has worked with the local schools to offer preference places to 98% of Cheshire East residents (an increase from 97% in 2020) with 92% being offered their first preference of secondary school (compared to 91.6% in 2020). These figures are expected to increase before pupils start in September 2021, as some parents will decline places as their circumstances change and places become available. The school admissions process has continued during the coronavirus outbreak, with the council co-ordinating this for most state schools in Cheshire East. Schools have adapted well, offering virtual tours to help parents in making preferences for their child's school and they will now be working with primary schools and parents to prepare children for their move to secondary school. The number of applications for school places in Cheshire East continues to increase. In 2021, the total number of applications was 4621 with 470 applications received from families living outside the borough, an indication of the popularity of Cheshire East schools.

5.47 *Business Support* – The Council is continuing to support those businesses required to close due to lockdown or similar measures through distribution of grants. The table below provides a breakdown of the allocation of the current grants available to businesses. There have been two publications of a league table indicating performance for the Mandatory and Discretionary grants, and the latest being for the period up to 28 February 2021. On ‘total paid out’ and ‘number of payments’, Cheshire East is within the top 7% on Mandatory Grants (LRSG closed) , and 10 % on the Discretionary Grants (ARG). A link to the tables is <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-grant-funding-local-authority-payments-to-small-and-medium-businesses>.”

5.48 The Council has further supported businesses with new Restart Grant which Government launched on the 1st April, and is also continuing to engage with businesses throughout this period and is now developing longer term support plans for the local economy to support economic recovery.

| Total received @ 20 Apr 2021: | | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| | Applications Approved | Payments Made | |
| Mandatory Grants via Rates: | 20,543 | £ | 43,417,223 |
| Restart Grant | 689 | | 5,260,719 |
| LRSG (open) | 3,196 | £ | 2,258,757 |
| LRSG (closed)#1 November | 3,003 | £ | 4,845,718 |
| LRSG (sector) | 3 | £ | 2,286 |
| CSP (wet led) | 274 | £ | 274,000 |
| LRSG (closed)#2 December | 10,348 | £ | 16,086,743 |
| CBLP | 3,030 | £ | 14,689,000 |
| Discretionary Grants: | | | |
| ARG | 3,119 | £ | 6,298,692 |
| TOTAL | 23,662 | £ | 49,715,915 |

5.49 Throughout the pandemic, the council has maintained key neighbourhood services for our residents. Ansa, the environmental services company wholly owned by the council, has maintained all kerbside waste and recycling collections when other local authorities have at times suspended one or more of their collections. The Household Waste and Recycling Centres were closed during the first national lockdown, but once they were able to re-open measures were quickly implemented to cope with the initial high level of demand and ensure staff and customers were kept safe. Ansa have also helped to ensure our parks and green spaces have remained open throughout to provide vital access to green spaces for physical and mental wellbeing.

5.50 Orbitas Bereavement Services, another company wholly owned by the council, played a key role in delivering the council’s excess death management plan,

responding to increased demand for cremations during the first wave as well as ensuring services can take place in a Covid-secure environment to keep staff and mourners safe.

- 5.51 Through the Regulatory Services team the council has been responsible for ensuring local businesses complied with the Covid-19 restrictions. Detailed guidance has been issued to over 3,500 businesses to help them understand and comply with the ever-changing national guidance and regulations to ensure they protect their staff and customers. This has included hospitality premises, takeaways, taxi drivers, supermarkets and close contact services. In addition, officers have directly engaged with over 4,000 businesses to answer questions and provide specific advice for their premises or, in response to a complaint made by the general public. Detailed advice and support including, where appropriate, referrals for onsite testing has been undertaken with 50 business premises where there has been an outbreak of Covid-19.
- 5.52 Libraries and Leisure Centres have been required to close during the three national lockdowns and when they have been able to open their activities have been restricted. This led to the launch of new services to support people with their physical and mental wellbeing while at home during lockdown. This included a new order and collect service for library books, a new home library service for customers unable to leave their home, online fitness classes, online Rhyme Times and Story Times, online Lego club, and online coffee and craft sessions. During periods of lockdown, colleagues from the library service and Everybody Sport and Recreation, the leisure trust who operate the council's leisure centres, have volunteered to help out in other ways including contacting clinically extremely vulnerable residents required to shield, supporting the payment of Covid-19 business grants, participating in the people helping people scheme, supporting mobile testing units for the re-opening of schools, and supporting the establishment of an emergency food distribution centre.
- 5.53 *Homelessness and Rough Sleeping* - In March 2020, the Government announced, "Everyone in" and under this programme alone, we provided emergency accommodation for 117 individuals and families. The Housing Options team have then worked to secure more sustainable accommodation options.

From March 2020 to March 2021 the team have:

- Accommodated 117 households through the Everyone In initiative
- Accommodated 172 households who presented as homeless in priority need
- Prevented 1,038 from becoming homeless

- 5.54 We have been able to maintain relatively low levels of rough sleeping, which has fluctuated between 2 and 10 during the year. Our dedicated Rough Sleeping Team have worked with those sleeping rough on our streets, providing them with a housing option should they wish to engage with our services. This has continued even when individuals have lost their initial accommodation.
- 5.55 Partnership working has been exemplary during this period, our partners have worked exceptionally hard to ensure that individuals have a safe place to reside. Furthermore, we have worked with the Ministry of Housing, Local Government and Communities to secure funding in order to set up new projects for those who need extra support.
- 5.56 There are however challenges ahead, the Government's eviction ban is due to be lifted in May, which we envisage will increase the level of homelessness as landlords look to seek possession of their properties if the tenants are in arrears.
- 5.57 The economic fallout of the pandemic is likely to impact on homelessness as the furlough scheme ends and some residents face unemployment. The need to prevent homelessness will increase. We are already seeing an increase in referrals to our Welfare Advice Officer with a 22% increase in referrals this year.

We are therefore:

- Increasing our skills within the Housing Team to deal with illegal evictions
- Establishing partnership working with the CAB to deal with the potential increase in referrals. We have developed our referral pathways between the agencies to ensure that people at crisis point are provided with the housing, debt, and welfare advice they need to prevent homelessness.
- Applying for further Government Rough Sleeping Initiative funding to ensure the continuation of existing schemes and services
- Have the resources to increase staffing rates on a temporary basis to deal with a significant increase in homelessness
- We are utilising our Homelessness Prevention funding to try and prevent evictions or assist those at threat of homelessness to access alternative accommodation
- We are working with the Benefits Team to explore options for more flexible use of/broader eligibility for Discretionary Housing Payments and Emergency Assistance budgets
- We are working proactively with both our commissioned Supported Accommodation Providers and Registered Housing Providers to move those who are ready from supported accommodation into alternative longer-term accommodation to ensure a flow through within provision

- We have conducted a training session with 40+ advisors from the DWP to ensure timely and appropriate referrals for households that are identified as at risk of homelessness or whom have had significant changes in their income that may impact their ability to sustain their accommodation.
- Providing more general welfare training across the Homechoice and Prevention Team to enhance skills and reduce this impact of the increased referrals to our welfare officer.
- We are contacting Private landlords who serve a 6-month notice to identify possible arrears and to intervene in advance of our 56-day duty

5.58 *Remote Meetings* - Since May 2020, councils have been allowed to conduct any formal meetings 'virtually' or remotely, in line with Covid-19 restrictions. This was facilitated by the rapid introduction of legislation.

5.59 The Council moved quickly to establish the necessary arrangements to make sure that virtual meetings would be successful. The first formal virtual Teams meeting was Cabinet on the 9 June 2020. By April 2021, all formal meetings were being conducted in this way, including 5 full Council meetings. At the time of writing this report, a further virtual Full Council meeting was due to take on the 19 April 2021. These arrangements have worked well and have brought many benefits.

5.60 Whilst there was never any intention to permanently replace all formal "face to face" meetings with virtual meetings, it had been hoped that councils would have local flexibility to hold some meetings virtually into the future. However, the legislation which allows formal decision making to take place virtually was time-limited and expires on 6 May 2021. Whilst Government is being lobbied to extend relevant provisions, and whilst it is understood that there is a legal challenge, which seeks to secure authority to continue with virtual meetings after 6 May, local authorities have been informed that this will not happen. We therefore must make new arrangements for our meetings after 7 May.

5.61 Proposals are currently being developed which will ensure that all necessary Council business after 6 May can be properly discharged, and this has been communicated to Members. A close watch is being kept for any further announcements from Government as to whether or not the virtual meeting legislation might be extended. The outcome of the legal challenge, which is due to come before the courts towards the end of April, will also be closely watched. Members will be kept informed of developments and any relevant updates will be provided at the Cabinet meeting.

5.62 *IT Migration* - A critical success factor in the council's response was the rapid deployment of mobile technology through laptops which continues to support remote working for Members and officers. Our IT Shared Service has migrated

over 7,300 users since the lockdown and introduced Teams across the entire estate. There are 4,500 connections daily. This is a significant achievement, widely praised across both councils.

- 5.63 *Customer services/contacts* and changed model of support - the Contact Centre adapted quickly to support customers whilst remote working. Staff previously working in a face to face environment were reskilled to support telephony and on-line support. A Chatbot was introduced to offer further contact options for customers. The Contact Centre supported the Communities Team by providing the People Helping People Helpline and the Track and Trace Team through providing Contact Tracing and more recently the Local Zero pilot.
- 5.64 *The Web Team* have ensured the external website and internal Centranet provide the definitive source of advice and information on Coronavirus. Digital services in support of Coronavirus have been developed by the Web Team including access to the PHP service, Business Grant applications, Self-isolation payment requests and Council Tax referrals.
- 5.65 *The Benefits Team* have continued to support our most vulnerable customers through the provision of the Council Tax Hardship Scheme for working age customers, development and delivery of the Self Isolation Payment Scheme and the ongoing delivery of the Emergency Assistance Scheme. They have provided expert advice and support to colleagues delivering additional hardship schemes including Shielding support and Winter Grant Scheme/HAF's.
- 5.66 *The Revenues Team* have been responsible for the delivery of Business Grants of which there have been 13 separate schemes and continuing. To date over 31,000 grant payments have been made in excess of £142M. The team have been placed under considerable pressures as guidance has frequently been delayed whilst businesses have obviously sought to receive payment as quickly as possible.
- 5.67 The Revenues Team have also supported customers struggling to pay Council Tax and Business Rates. Business Rates Relief Schemes were introduced and implemented by the Team for both 2020/21 and 2021/22 financial years and options to defer and reprofile repayments have been introduced.
- 5.68 *The Registration Service* has coped with significant challenges as a result of Covid-19 restrictions. In terms of birth registration, the Registrar General's Office postponed the registration of births for a period of months at the start of the first lockdown, meaning that in the summer of 2020 the Service had to respond to a significant backlog of registrations.
- 5.69 Changes were made to the Register Office to ensure that staff had a safe environment in which to work and those registering births had the confidence

that they were doing so safely. The rules in relation to death registrations were changed, with all registrations being undertaken over the phone, this is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. This change necessitated the introduction (at very short notice) of a new “back office” system to ensure that registrars had the necessary information to accurately and sensitively register deaths. Feedback from families has been very positive.

- 5.70 In terms of marriages the restrictions relating to venues and numbers of guests changed multiple times. As well as the financial impact of lost income (circa £800k) staff have been dealing with couples who had to rearrange their plans, sometimes several times over. There has been some fantastic feedback about the flexibility of staff hurriedly rearranging ceremonies for couples in line with changing restrictions.
- 5.71 *Communications and engagement* - the Council provided a wide range of COVID-related information in various formats to keep residents, members of staff and other stakeholders informed throughout the first 12 months of the pandemic. For example, the council’s communications and media team produced more than 330 general media releases and information bulletins in 2020/21 – an increase of 188% over the previous year. The first quarter of 2020/21 saw a 250% increase in proactive communication over the equivalent period in 2019/20.
- 5.72 This contributed to the council securing more media coverage than ever before, (a jump of 140% of previous year) as local and national media shared key information about the council’s and partners’ response to the COVID emergency.

This included:

- Prevention, infection control measures and symptoms
- Changes to council services, schools, social care and safeguarding
- Support for local businesses and community groups
- Support for people who needed additional support when shielding and self-isolating
- Vaccine programme
- Test and trace
- Mental health and general welfare

- 5.73 During the pandemic, the council provided more than 150 COVID briefings to members and MPs, and a similar number to all staff to give them the information they need to continue to deliver services. In January 2021, the council also introduced an e-newsletter for residents to receive COVID information by direct mail.

- 5.74 *Staff* - We are so proud of our fantastic teams of dedicated, flexible, and resilient staff who have gone above and beyond what we could reasonably expect. This applies to all services and teams across the Council. Special thanks go to our Public Health and Joint Emergency Planning teams who have worked tirelessly around the clock for more than 12 months.
- 5.75 We have all worked hard to maintain engagement and to support our staff providing them with regular guidance and advice throughout the pandemic. This has enabled our workforce to adapt to different ways of working, manage risk and look after their health and wellbeing. We have been in regular dialogue with our staff and Trade Union colleagues to ensure that everyone has been well informed and listened to as the pandemic has evolved. There has been lots of positive feedback from staff about the support provided to them during the past 12 months. The current pulse survey will inform future ways of working arrangements balanced against service requirements and the needs of our customers.

6. **Implications of the Recommendations**

6.1 **Legal Implications**

- 6.1.1 The UK has made hundreds of laws in response to the Coronavirus pandemic, with four national lockdown laws covering each of the nations. For England, the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Steps) (England) Regulations ('the Roadmap Regulations') recently came into force – 29th March 2021. These Regulations expire on 31 June 2021 unless revoked or replaced before, and the Government is obliged to have reviewed the Regulations on 12th April 2021 and, thereafter, every 35 days.
- 6.1.2 The Roadmap Regulations legislate for the Government's roadmap out of lockdown (the plans for which were initially published on 12 February 2021) as part of the Spring 2021 response to Covid-19. The Spring 2021 strategy also includes information on the Government's vaccine roll out programme, their coronavirus testing strategy and how they will respond to new coronavirus variants of concern.
- 6.1.3 The Roadmap Regulations are divided into 6 parts:

Part 1 - sets out the circumstances where a linked household (or support bubble) or linked childcare household (or childcare bubble) may be formed between two households. It also provides for permitted outdoor gathering under certain circumstances;

Part 2 - introduces Schedules 1, 2 and 3 which set out three "steps" of lockdown restrictions. The Government will be able to

move England (or areas within England) between the steps by amending the Roadmap Regulations.

Part 3 - introduces a restriction on leaving the UK. Recent regulations implementing coronavirus restrictions required individuals to stay at home unless it was reasonably necessary to leave home for purposes such as work and education. This requirement is no longer in place but there are now restrictions on international travel. Part 3 also introduces Schedule 5 and 6 which lists reasonable excuses to travel outside of the UK and set out which individuals are exempt from the restrictions on leaving the UK.

Part 4 - provides powers for the Secretary of State to disapply the coronavirus restrictions to a specific premises or event for the purpose of research on the potential transmission of Covid19 in controlled environments. The Secretary of State must seek advice from the Chief Medical Officer before making such a direction.

Part 5 - provides the police and others designated with powers to enforce the restrictions

Part 6 - contains final provisions including those regarding review and expiry of the regulations. It also introduces Schedule 8 which makes amendments to other coronavirus related regulations such as the self-isolation regulations, contact detail regulations and the international travel regulations.

- 6.1.4 The Roadmap Regulations provide for three legal steps out of lockdown. Earlier this week, the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Steps and Local Authority Enforcement Powers) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 came into force, which allows for England to move from Step 1 to Step 2.
- 6.1.5 The current restrictions under Step 2 include: an international travel ban (excluding those with a 'reasonable excuse'); a prohibition on people meeting inside with people not in their household/support bubble (although some exemptions apply); a prohibition on outdoor gatherings involving more than six people (unless exempted) and hospitality venues only being able to offer food and drink outdoors. As of 12th April, all non-essential retail and personal care services can re-open.
- 6.1.6 Step 3 (no earlier than 17 May) will further ease restrictions so as to allow for outdoor gatherings of up to 30 people and indoor gatherings of

up to 6 people. At this stage, hospitality venues can reopen indoors with table service. Businesses such as nightclubs must remain closed.

- 6.1.7 The final step (no earlier than 21 June) will remove all legal limits on social contact, with nightclubs reopening and the easing of restrictions on large events and performances.
- 6.1.8 Movement through the remaining steps is dependant upon four tests: the continual success of the vaccination programme; evidence of a reduction in hospitalisation and deaths; infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisation and the assessment of risks is not fundamentally changed by new variants of Covid-19.
- 6.1.9 Although the steps are designed to apply to all regions, the Government has reserved the right to reimpose economic and social restrictions at a local level.
- 6.1.10 The laws surrounding the wearing of face-coverings are found in The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings in a Relevant Place) (England) Regulations 2020. There is a requirement for most people to wear a face covering in shops, on public transport and in other public spaces.
- 6.1.11 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Self-Isolation) (England) Regulations 2020 require people to self-isolate when requested to do so by certain officials and apply to those who have tested positive for coronavirus or those who have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive. It would not apply to those who had been recommended to self-isolate by the NHS contact-tracing app only. Individuals are required to self-isolate for 10 days. Breaches of the regulations can lead to criminal prosecutions or fixed penalty notices on sliding scales of up to £10,000. If not previously revoked, these Regulations expire on 28th September 2021.
- 6.1.12 The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 remain in force and make provision for the conduct of local authority meetings up until 7 May 2021. On 25 March, the Government announced that this provision will not be extended. Hertfordshire CC, Lawyers in Local Government and the Association of Democratic Service Officers launched a judicial review against this decision which is due to be heard at the end of April. However, the Council should continue with preparations for the reinstatement of face-to-face meetings in the event that such a challenge

is unsuccessful. Preparations are underway for regulatory meetings to take place at Macclesfield and Crewe.

6.1.13 On 2nd December 2020, additional powers came into force to support local authorities' efforts to maintain COVID-secure environments. Further amendments were made in the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Steps) (England) Regulations 2021. Local authorities have tools consisting of: Coronavirus Improvement Notice (CIN); Coronavirus Restrictions Notice (CRN) and a Coronavirus Immediate Restrictions Notice (CIRN). These notices are based in part on the existing health and safety regime under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. Proportionality and the principles established in the Regulators' Code should be followed and officers should attempt to engage with a business before issuing a notice wherever possible.

6.1.14 **Coronavirus Improvement Notice (CIN):** This can be issued when a business is failing to fulfil a provision set out in the relevant coronavirus regulations relating to COVID-secure measures. A CIN will be applied for a minimum of 48 hours (although its actual duration is at the discretion of the enforcement officer). Failure to comply with a CIN by the end of its operational period could lead to an FPN of £2,000 and/or a Coronavirus Immediate Restriction Notice or a Coronavirus Restriction Notice being issued.

6.1.15 **Coronavirus Restriction Notice (CRN):** This is issued where there has been a breach of the provisions of the relevant coronavirus regulations and the recipient has failed to comply with the terms of the CIN, where such non-compliance creates a risk of exposure to coronavirus. Following the 7-day period of application, the CRN can be withdrawn or allowed to expire. Failure to comply with a CRN during its operational period will result in an FPN of £4,000 or a new CRN / CIRN being issued.

6.1.16 **Coronavirus Immediate Restriction Notice (CIRN):** This can be issued where rapid action is needed to close a premises or restrict an activity to stop the spread of coronavirus (and without first having to issue a CIN). Closure will be for an initial 48-hour period. Where necessary, a CRN can be issued so that the premises is required to close for a further 7-day period, or where it is assessed that the premises is causing a serious and imminent threat to public health, a direction can be issued under separate regulations. Failure to comply with a CIRN will result in an FPN of £4,000 being issued.

6.1.17 Any notices can be appealed by the Claimant in the Magistrates' Court. Where an appeal is successful, compensation may be awarded. The period of appeal is limited to 28 days. Local Authority enforcement

officers have powers of entry and investigation as set out in the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984.

6.2 Financial Implications

6.2.1 The potential financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are regularly reported to Members via Cabinet, with additional briefings provided via Audit and Governance and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Member written briefings.

6.2.2 This report presents the latest financial position and identifies Government funding already provided or claimed to date. Significant levels of uncertainty remain over the final projected financial implications for local authorities, and the approach to funding costs and income losses associated with Covid-19 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.

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

- (i) **Un-ringfenced Service 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. 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. The Government also announced that £100m had been top sliced from national grant provision totals to provide support to keeping leisure centres open; the Council has been allocated £964,000 (as shown in Table 2). 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 £11m. 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 in 2020/21; and Table 2a is now included to show specific grants announced so far for the 2021/22 year.

Table 1: The approach to un-ringfenced funding for 2020/21 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, now referred to as the COVID Formula. |
| Total | £24.979m (of £4.6bn) | |
| 2nd July | £6m (£n/k) for Income Compensation | Estimated total – subject to claims process. £3.5m claimed so far, in 2 of 3 data collection rounds Compensation at 75p in £1 for losses above 5% of sales, fees and charges budgets |

| | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| 2nd July | £tba for Collection Fund | Compensation at 75p in £1 for losses (to be received in 2021/22); and defer residual 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 | £1.5m (£n/k) for Income Compensation | Sales, Fees & Charges compensation scheme extended for April-June 2021 |

6.2.4 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. The MTFS reflects that costs that are deferred, such as capital spending impacts (of £8.7m) and Collection Fund losses are managed through existing risks provisions within the Capital Programme or through use of the Collection Fund Earmarked Reserve. By taking this approach the Council is creating flexibility by carrying forward unspent COVID revenue Grant funding at year-end that can support the outturn position or provide financial support in the 2021/22 financial year. This position will be subject to ongoing analysis and review as part of the outturn reporting.

6.2.5 Returns to central government now include estimates for potential costs, and losses from sales, fees, and charges, in the 2021/22 financial year. The budget approved by Council in February 2021 was balanced on the understanding that COVID related financial impacts would be managed from additional COVID funding. Early estimates for the full year indicate the potential financial impact in 2021/22 could be as much as £17.6m. This is set against the potential funding identified in Table 1a above of £10m.

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 announced for 2020/21 are valued at c.£255m

| 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 (£n/k) | £883,387 | £883,387 | £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 | £95,514,000 | |

| | (spending date) to | | Awaiting guidance |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Discretionary Business Grants (£617m)*** | £4,357,000 (spending date) to | £4,372,250 | |
| Local Restrictions Business Support Grants (£n/k) *** | £61,201,875 | £61,201,875 | |
| Christmas Support Payment (Wet-led pubs) | £236,800 | £236,800 | |
| 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) (6 tranches to 31 Mar) | £9,000,133 | £9,000,133 | £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) | £671,101 | £675,474 | (£4,373) |
| Self Isolation Test and Trace Support Payment (£177m) | £740,476 | £740,476 | £0 |
| Clinically Extremely Vulnerable Individuals (£175m) | £1,054,566 | £1,054,566 | £0 |

| | | | |
|--|------------|------------|----|
| Covid Winter Grant Scheme (£170m) | £880,472 | £880,472 | £0 |
| Domestic Abuse Building Capacity Fund (£6m) | £50,000 | £50,000 | £0 |
| Leisure Centres (£100m) | £963,513 | £963,513 | £0 |
| Workforce Capacity Fund (£120m) | £725,319 | £725,319 | £0 |
| Rapid Testing Fund (£149m) | £1,361,266 | £1,361,266 | £0 |
| Vaccine Roll-out Funding (n/k) | tba | tba | £0 |
| Community Testing Funding (£11m) | £356,076 | £356,076 | £0 |
| Holiday Activities and Food Programme 2021 (grant is split £88,630 for 2020/21 and £792,710 for 2021/22) | £881,340 | £881,340 | £0 |
| LA Framework/ Practical Support for those Self-Isolating (for period March to June 2021) (£12.9m) | £70,806 | £70,806 | £0 |

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

** Spending in relation to Rough Sleeping/ Accommodation exceeds specific Covid grant funding but is being met from other appropriate Housing grants and existing linked reserves.

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

Table 2a: Specific Grants announced for 2021/22 are valued at c.£34m

| Activity (National Total) | Spending forecast* | Funding | Variance |
|--|--------------------|-------------|----------|
| Covid secure measures for Elections (£15m) | £tba | £tba | £0 |
| Additional Dedicated Home to School and College Transport (n/k) | £26,153 | £26,153 | £0 |
| Contain Outbreak Management Fund (7 th Tranche) (£400m) | £2,195,538 | £2,195,538 | £0 |
| Welcome Back Fund (£56m) | £339,534 | £339,534 | £0 |
| Council Tax Support Scheme (£670m) | £3,371,000 | £3,371,000 | £0 |
| Business Restart Grants (£5bn) | £21,294,675 | £21,294,675 | £0 |
| Additional Restrictions Grant Top-up Allocation (£n/k) | £3,405,353 | £3,405,353 | £0 |
| Business Rate Reliefs (£1.5bn) | £tba | £tba | £0 |
| Infection control measures and rapid testing (£341m) | £3,028,690 | £3,028,690 | £0 |
| Covid Local Support Grant (£40m) | £207,170 | £207,170 | £0 |

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 Vaccination programmes are prioritising people by age and those who are clinically vulnerable.

6.4.3 As mentioned in paragraph 5.30, over 21,500 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 was originally due to end March. It will now be extended in 2021/22.

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.

6.4.5 We hosted a workshop on 4 March to understand how to improve our communications about the COVID-19 vaccine in targeting local under-served communities. This forms part of the ongoing work that is taking place with the NHS Cheshire CCG in dispelling myths and rumours about the vaccine and to encourage take up of the jab. Information shows there is a lot of hesitancy amongst some local communities including some ethnic groups, asylum seekers, Travellers, homeless people, boating and multi-faith groups. The session was hosted by our communications team, our local community engagement team and a representative from the NHS Cheshire CCG. Members of the community who attended included a freelance translator, the Waterways Chaplaincy, the Arch Deacon of Nantwich (subbing for the Bishop of Chester) and the manager of a homeless shelter in Crewe. The session was very insightful, with discussions around worries and fears amongst our underserved communities about the vaccine. It was noted that there is a need to support and represent our Bulgarian, Slovakian, Czech, Portuguese, East Timor, Polish and Romania communities more than we do currently. Discussions developed around how this could be achieved.

6.4.6 It was also noted that more work needs to be done around the accessibility of the vaccine. Many communities would be willing to have their job if medical teams were able to come to them – e.g. those in the homeless shelter who aren't registered with a GP, the boating community, Travellers, older residents living in rural areas and many of the BAME community, as they can struggle to access services. The session was extremely uplifting, with an overwhelming feeling of positivity for the work the vaccination programme has done to date. All community representatives on the call were extremely keen to work with the council and the CCG to help further the scope of the work being done and to raise vaccination numbers amongst our underserved audiences. Actions have been noted and work is underway. Updates will be shared on this work in due course.

6.5 Human Resources Implications

- 6.5.1 The latest data on staff absences on 18 March 2021 are 19 (23 *last month*) staff self-isolating and working from home, 15 (27 *last month*) staff self-isolating and not working from home (role doesn't allow), 5 (4 *last month*) Covid-related absences, and 99 (102 *last month*) non-Covid-related absences.
- 6.5.2 Staff vaccinations: as at 18 March 1866 staff are eligible for vaccinations due to their role. Of these, 86.7% have had a first vaccination.
- 6.5.3 There continues to be regular communication with staff and good co-operation with the Trade Unions.

6.6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.6.1 The risk environment around COVID-19 remains dynamic. Risk registers have been maintained as part of the Council's response to date and the plans for recovery. Business Continuity Plans are being kept under review.

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. However, we are now undertaking all consultations following a review on a case by case basis to ensure that we can continue to operate effectively.

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

Jane Burns, Executive Director Corporate Services