

## **CABINET**

**9 JUNE 2020**

### **COVID-19 RESPONSE**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Alan Jarrett, Leader of Council

Report from: Richard Hicks, Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive

Report from: Ruth Du-Lieu, Assistant Director Front Line Services

#### **Summary**

This report outlines the Council's response to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) global pandemic. It also outlines the approach in the coming weeks as priorities around the Councils response alter to reflect the partial lifting of the lockdown and moves to restart the economy and reopen businesses and schools.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

- 1.1 The Cabinet has responsibility for service provision, therefore, this is a matter for Cabinet.
- 1.2 This report has been included on the Forward Plan in accordance with Section 10 (General Exception) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012. However, this report has been circulated separately to the main agenda. Therefore, the Cabinet is asked to accept this as an urgent item to ensure that the Cabinet is formally apprised of the process for managing the restarting of services post lockdown and longer term recovery at the earliest opportunity.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1 In March 2020, the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) was at the early stages of an epidemic and was identified at risk of becoming a public health emergency. On the 12 March 2020, the World Health Organisation advised that COVID-19 had become a Global Pandemic. In response the Local Resilience Forum (Kent Resilience Forum) put in place a Strategic Coordination Group (SCG) with just the Directors of Public Health for Kent and Medway. On the 19 March 2020 the SCG decided that the virus was indeed a public health emergency and the response required would need a joint multi-agency approach. In accordance with the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) 2004, this resulted in Medway activating its emergency procedures to put in place a

Command and Control structure. By the 24 March 2020, the SCG had declared COVID-19 a Major Incident.

2.2 The national and local response to the COVID-19 crisis has been unprecedented in peacetime. For the Council this has involved action across many spheres of activity both with regard to community leadership and the delivery of critical services across Medway. In delivering this response, much of the activity has been in partnership with other organisations including the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) NHS, Police, care providers, local businesses, the voluntary & community sector and Medway Norse.

2.3 Following Government guidance, the Council's response has been focused on ensuring the core objectives of reducing the spread of the virus whilst protecting the most vulnerable members of our community. In doing this the efforts of Council staff across all directorates in both front line and support staff has ensured the continuation of key services. The Council response has been in line with emergency planning best practice and guidance.

### 3. Response management

3.1 In accordance with the CCA, Strategic (GOLD) and Tactical (SILVER) command structures were implemented to establish a local response to the pandemic. A COVID-19 strategy was agreed as was a process for considering and recording all decisions made.

3.2 The Medway Gold Group initially met daily to shape the Council's emergency response as the crisis unfolded. This group continues as part of the current structure.

3.3 The Tactical Command (SILVER) established a cell structure that ensured that the Council's critical services could be maintained throughout the crisis. The cell structure identified the critical services to support vulnerable residents as well as ensuring critical council services, for example children's and adults social care, waste collection, etc., were maintained. Food and supplies were provided for those who had been advised to shield at home during the crisis or who were deemed as vulnerable.

3.4 Other cells in the structure concentrated on non-critical services, which would need to operate differently or to close all together in accordance with the Coronavirus Act 2020 e.g. Registration & Bereavement, Environmental services, Leisure & Heritage etc.

3.5 All of the service based cells were supported by Finance, HR, ICT, Governance, Procurement etc., also categorised as cells in the tactical response structure. These concentrated on the plans required to ensure that as far as possible business as usual could be maintained. In the case of Finance cell there was also the need to deal with government grants and loans that were put in place centrally to assist businesses cope with crisis.

3.6 In line with Medway's Emergency Plan, the Tactical Commander established an Emergency Control Centre within Gun Wharf. Due to the nature of the incident, much of the daily communications have been done via Microsoft

TEAMs to maintain distance between key staff. A daily Situation Report process was put in place to report a Common Operating Picture for all of the designated cell areas. This all contributed to establishing an efficient and effective emergency structure to respond to the pandemic crisis.

- 3.7 Whilst not directly involved in either Strategic or Tactical command Structure the Leader has been heavily involved at all stages of the emergency, with daily briefings from the Chief Executive and weekly detailed briefings from the wider command teams. Early in the process the Leader established a weekly cross-party briefing in order to share information, obtain feedback and offer reassurance.

#### 4. Outbreak Control Plan

- 4.1 The Department of Health & Social Care has asked upper tier local authorities in England, to develop a COVID-19 Local Outbreak Control Plan. The primary purpose of these plans is to reduce the spread of the virus. These plans will enable local authorities to work with partners and effectively manage any outbreaks of COVID-19 at a local level. The Directors of Public Health in each upper tier local authority are required to develop these outbreak control plans, to be submitted to Government before the end of June 2020.

- 4.2 The process of developing outbreak control plans will require collaboration and engagement with a number of partners. These include Public Health England, the Local Resilience Forum and various council committees including Cabinet, the Medway Health and Wellbeing Board, the Kent and Medway Joint and Health Wellbeing Board, as well as the Kent and Medway CCG.

- 4.3 It is likely that there will be need for officers, specifically the Director of Public Health and Chief Executive, to respond to local outbreaks at short notice. The Leader may also be required to use powers of urgency to protect the population of Medway.

- 4.4 Cabinet will have an opportunity to consider the Medway Outbreak Control Plan in due course once drafted but in the meantime the plan must be submitted to Government by the end of June, and therefore approval is sought for the Director of Public Health to submit this plan in consultation with the Leader.

#### 5. Voluntary and Community Sector

- 5.1 As part of the COVID-19 emergency response, Medway Council established a Voluntary and Community Sector Cell principally led by the Public Health team. The cell had the following priorities:

- Establish a community support hub that assisted residents with accessing food, prescriptions and social contact, working in partnership with third sector groups who had the same ambition
- Co-ordinate voluntary sector efforts to support residents negatively affected by COVID-19

- Co-ordinate volunteers to support residents negatively affected by COVID-19
- Support voluntary sector organisations who have experienced a large increase in demand due to COVID-19
- Pool collective insights so that potential scams are identified and reported to correct authorities.

5.2 This Cell continues but at the time of writing the report achieved the following outputs:

- Delivered 3,191 seven day food parcels, equating to over 100,000 meals for vulnerable residents
- Supported more than 200 residents with prescription collections, largely linking them with NHS volunteers
- Linked 46 people with befriending services
- 226 onward referrals for services such as mental health support, debt advice, social care and housing advice
- The sport and leisure service added a home shopping support service in April and within 6 weeks were supporting over 300 residents with their weekly food shop
- This service will continue to be in place until recovery is sufficiently embedded to deem this unnecessary by the Council leadership team.

5.3 The Council also worked with local charities, faith groups and community groups to provide invaluable support to residents throughout the emergency period. The combined support that these groups provided to over 8,000 residents included:

- More than 1,000 food parcels, resulting in over 20,000 meals
- 4,000 befriending calls to residents
- 500 shopping trips conducted
- 150 prescriptions collected
- Other tasks that were supported include linking up pen pals, Zoom parties, gas and electric card top ups, daily activity packs and community challenges

5.4 To address some of the immediate concerns from the third sector, Medway Council worked with Kent Community Foundation (KCF) to establish a Coronavirus Emergency Fund. The focus of the fund was to offer community organisations funding to deal with emerging issues in the community affecting vulnerable people as a result of the continuing threat of COVID-19.

5.5 As of mid-May, the fund had supported a number of Medway organisations:

- 33 applications have been approved to Medway based organisations
- Medway based organisations have received circa £98,000 of grant support
- A further 23 grants totalling approx. £74,000 have been awarded to organisations who have described their area of work as either countywide but with activities in Medway.

## 6. Critical Services

### **Vulnerable adults**

- 6.1 Medway Council provides support to over 2,700 adult residents with care and support needs, and the Council has ensured that those needs continue to be met during the COVID-19 pandemic despite Government passing the Care Act Easement legislation which allowed local government to prioritise the delivery of services to ensure that the most urgent and acute needs continued to be met.
- 6.2 We have responded positively to all Government guidance relating to COVID-19, including the Adult Social Care Action Plan, and have worked closely in partnership with health to implement new arrangements, particularly to support the prompt discharge of residents from hospital. This work ensured that Medway Hospital was well placed to manage any additional pressures resulting from COVID-19.
- 6.3 We have recently submitted our Care Home Support plan to the Department of Health and Social Care, which outlines the steps Medway Council has taken, in partnership with health, to support our care homes.

### **Children and Young People**

- 6.4 Children's Services moved swiftly and robustly to respond to the Covid-19 crisis, continuing to safeguard the most vulnerable children when face to face contacts are restricted, and availability of staff to undertake work with children is potentially limited. Priority Risk Assessments have been completed for every child and young person who is in receipt of a service identifying the historic risk, present danger, and any strengths and support mechanisms available to the family to help them to reduce the level of risk. These are reviewed regularly. This system has ensured that there is consistent decision making and effective oversight of all cases and particularly where children are most at risk.
- 6.5 Detailed and comprehensive operating procedures have provided staff with clarity on dealing with the crisis, including issues such as how to maintain contact with families, working from home and managing all aspects of child protection planning and processes. Challenges posed by PPE and the provision of IT equipment were minimised by a supportive corporate/tactical response.
- 6.6 Staff health and welfare has also been paramount. Risk assessments have been undertaken prior to every visit to ascertain whether families are symptomatic. PPE has been made available (masks, sanitiser and gloves) for staff undertaking essential home visits. Regular communications have been going out to staff. Staff have adapted to new and innovative ways of keeping in contact with children virtually.
- 6.7 Some of the young people in our care have welcomed the virtual form of contact with their social worker, appropriate to their circumstances. Youth workers have developed online activities which can be accessed by young

people but also used by foster carers. Contact for children in care with their families has been maintained either virtually or using our contact centre, with appropriate social distancing measures and hygiene in place.

- 6.8 Early Help hubs in the community have remained open to offer practical support to families and a base for partners to work from.
- 6.9 Statutory meetings requiring multi-agency involvement across the child protection processes have taken place in virtual form throughout the response phase and attendance has been very strong, as a result essential meetings such as Child Protection Conferences and the Children's Improvement Board have not been cancelled. Regular meetings are held with senior police and with health, ensuring Covid-19 does not impact the partnerships ability to respond to the most vulnerable children and/or emerging issues around domestic violence, drugs related county lines and other contextual safeguarding. There has been good cooperation between schools and Children's Social Care, both proactive in contacting vulnerable children not attending and liaison to maximise the drawn down of the digital support offered by the government to close the gap for these children. Daily consultation sessions have been made available to schools as children are returning, in order to identify and respond quickly to any emerging concerns.
- 6.10 Recruitment to key posts has continued. For example, Lee-Anne Farach, the new Assistant Director, Children's Social Care, started work at Medway on 11 May 2020.

## **Education**

- 6.11 We started joint planning work with schools very early in the crisis, working effectively through our Head Teacher's reference group (initially daily and then stepping down to bi-weekly). This joint approach has been in place from March, when Government ordered schools to close for all but vulnerable and disadvantaged children, and those of key workers. All meetings are followed by a briefing note, which is sent to all head teachers, trust chief executives and college principals. The group has given invaluable advice to enable prompt and clear decisions. We have been able to proactively engage regarding issues and problems within school environments and multi-academy trusts. Schools, including special Schools, have remained open for key workers' children.
- 6.12 As of April 2020, we have begun to plan for our recovery with our education partners, in line with the position that the council supports the phased re-opening of schools to as many pupils as possible in the nursery, year R, year one and year six as soon as practicable, on or after 1 June 2020.
- 6.13 In order to support schools, while ensuring we have the capacity to respond to heads who most need help, we have provided support with risk assessment evaluation, convened weekly meetings with trade unions, giving head teachers comprehensive advice about key issues such as the use of PPE.
- 6.14 The feedback from head teachers is that they feel they have been appropriately supported through both passes – the initial closure with only small numbers of pupils able to attend, and the phased re-opening.

- 6.15 In Medway, 51 schools (68 per cent) have confirmed they have reopened. We continue to offer our support to head teachers and anticipate 87% of schools will have reopened by next week and 93% by mid-June.
- 6.16 As we move out of lock down we will be creating teams of integrated staff (incl. early help workers, assessment social workers, mental health workers, YOT etc.) regularly accessible to schools via Microsoft Teams to help identify priority needs of young people and parents in Medway and respond effectively to any surge that may occur.

### **Household Waste**

- 6.17 All of the weekly household waste and recycling kerbside collections have continued throughout the crisis.
- 6.18 Medway Norse were able to maintain services by ensuring there was adequate PPE supplied and adherence to Public Health guidance. The service has recorded a huge 20% increase in waste since the start of the lockdown.
- 6.19 The three household waste and recycling centres were closed down, although we kept our sites open for longer than the rest of Kent, following the suspension of service from the white goods collectors and Police advice that the services were not deemed to be an 'essential reason' to travel. Once the advice from Government changed, two of the three sites opened immediately with an in house booking system developed that has enabled us to successfully manage waste flows and enabled staff and residents to maintain safe distances on site.

### **Rough Sleepers**

- 6.20 Government issued an "everyone in" directive to all local housing authorities to provide accommodation for rough sleepers. The service was commended by MHCLG for its response in rapidly mobilising 30 spaces of accommodation in a local hotel and other forms of temporary accommodation. To respond to the complex nature of supporting the cohort, additional services were brought in to have a presence in this new provision including the Medway Taskforce, volunteer groups and health services. This contributed to not only removing some of the most vulnerable from the streets but keeping them there over the 10 weeks after receiving the directive from MHCLG.

### **Registrations & Bereavement**

- 6.21 When lockdown was first enforced instruction was received by the Registrar General that Deaths could be registered over the telephone and necessary documents could be transmitted electronically. This required a complete re-design of the Registration Service, which was implemented seamlessly in Medway.

- 6.22 The same instruction also ceased marriages, notices of marriage and the registration of all births. On average 100 babies are born in Medway each week and to date there are over 1000 unregistered children, each legally requiring a face to face interview with parents.
- 6.23 To enable these interviews the Register Office has converted its main marriage room to a safe socially distanced space complete with Perspex walls and intercoms that can facilitate over 160 birth registrations per week.

## 7. Non-critical services

- 7.1 Government advice was followed around the closure of non-critical services and facilities such as sports centres and libraries.
- 7.2 As part of the COVID-19 emergency response Trading Standards were tasked on the 22 March 2020 with the enforcement of the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020. The regulations created the regime that caused the closure of many commercial and retail premises. The legislation is a key mechanism in the Government's control strategy.
- 7.3 Since this date the Trading Standards team have:
- Maintained an overt presence in our High Streets and shopping Centres
  - Implemented the regulations with the overwhelming support of Medway businesses
  - Engaged with and visited 6,102 commercial premises
  - Voluntarily closed 73 non-compliant premises
  - Issued 11 Formal prohibition notices
  - Issued 9 Internet take down notices for prohibited businesses
  - Managed additional workload that manifested around scams, counterfeit PPE, product safety, animal health and travel law
  - The team will also be engaging with the Sports Grounds Safety Authority (SGSA) and Gillingham Football Club to ensure that the relevant changes to the Safety Certificate and Operations Manual are implemented to allow for the resumption of competitive football when that it permitted.
- 7.4 Trading Standards will continue to rigorously enforce revised closure provision as shops and functions are permitted to re-open.
- 7.5 Local bus services operated at 50-75% of pre-COVID levels to provide key workers with journeys to work and meet basic shopping needs; public transport usage reduced to around 10% of pre-COVID levels.
- 7.6 Public car parking remained available throughout, with enforcement activity particularly in CPZs focussed on ensuring the safe operation of the public highway.
- 7.7 Free parking was made available to all NHS and Care Workers.
- 7.8 Green Spaces have been maintained by Medway Norse throughout the crisis ensuring open spaces have remained available as an essential part of combating social isolation and for exercise and dog walking.



- 7.9 The country parks have remained open throughout, with only the car parks being closed for a period of time until Government advice was changed to enable residents to drive short distances for exercise.
- 7.10 On advice from Government, all children's play areas and adult outdoor exercise equipment have remained closed throughout. The two skate parks, tennis courts and pump track were closed for a number of weeks but reopened following the initial easing of lock down measures.
- 7.11 A Resource Cell was established as part of the Silver Tactical Command Structure to manage the redeployment of staff from non-critical services to critical or central support services.
- 7.12 This approach ensured that staff in non-critical services remained engaged in worthwhile work and enabled the Council to maintain critical services without the need to employ extra staff. This involved the following re-deployment activities: Over 150 staff have been successfully redeployed using this methodology.
- The 2 mayor's drivers have been redeployed as crematorium operators
  - 6 library staff were redeployed to customer support to assist with answering calls/admin
  - 23 staff from sport, leisure, tourism and heritage have undergone training to assist with adult social care
  - 3 staff from Business Change and Community Safety have been redeployed to Adult Social Care Partnership Commissioning to coordinate PPE requests from Care Homes
  - The Business Change Team have liaised with Education to support Easter Holiday provision for children of key workers and vulnerable children
  - 5 staff have been identified that can be redeployed to run the Emergency Coordination Room if it opens full time
  - The Business Change Team developed and managed a process to support the testing of Council and care home staff. Additional staff were redeployed to support with the administration of this process.
  - Internal Audit & Counter Fraud have redeployed 11 staff (2 to finance and 9 to Revenue and Benefits)
  - 89 staff from Sport, Leisure, Tourism and Heritage are supporting vulnerable people with shopping for groceries
  - 4 Road Safety staff have been re-trained to process revenue and benefits indexing to assist with the increased demand for Universal Credit claims
  - A Finance Officer from SEN has been partially redeployed to work on financial reconciliation within the theatres as a result of cancelled/exchanged shows and events
  - 4 staff have been redeployed to assist the Regeneration team with the administration of the discretionary business grants scheme.
- 7.13 The Resource Cell continues to support critical services and is currently looking to redeploy staff to support the Registration service with the backlog

of registering births and is also scoping out the requirement for staff to ensure the safe re-opening of Medway's high streets and town centres when that occurs.

## 8. Finance

8.1 Across all Finance teams, staff have largely been working from home throughout the Covid-19 response and services continue to operate business as usual, with the exception of Audit and Counter Fraud. The planned audit and fraud work was considered non-essential, in line with the Council's Business Continuity Plan, and so team members were redeployed to support more critical services within the division, supporting the organisation's Response 'command and control' structure and monitoring the impact of decisions taken through the Response phase, not least the potential for fraud.

8.2 In addition to continuing with the day to day administration of the Council Tax, Business Rates and Benefits functions, including surges in workload volumes of up to 300% across some teams, the Medway Revenues and Benefits Service successfully implemented the following new schemes following government announcements:

- Council Tax Hardship Fund, representing £2.056million of grant funding to reduce the liability for those in receipt of Local Support for Council Tax (LSCT) by a further £150. We have distributed £1.327million to current LSCT cases and the balance is available to fund discounts for new claimants and applications from Council Tax payers experiencing hardship, under our existing discretionary hardship relief scheme.
- Expanded Business Rates Retail discount to 100%, including leisure and hospitality sites and removing the Rateable Value cap, through which we have awarded £32.498million.
- Grants for small businesses and retail, hospitality and leisure businesses of grants scheme of £10,000 or £25,000 dependent on Rateable Value, representing a grant from government of £39.712million. We have distributed £31.835million to date, and the balance of our allocation of government grant will fund further applications, which continue to come in, as well as the new discretionary business grants scheme administered by colleagues in Economic Development.
- Business Rates holiday for non-local authority nursery schools through which we have awarded £286,000.
- Changes to Housing Benefit include increasing the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and additional earnings disregard.

We have therefore distributed a total of £65.946million in financial support to date.

8.3 The Finance Operations Service has continued to deliver all routine payroll, insurance and finance systems support throughout the response. All payments to Council suppliers have been set to immediate terms on the

financial system and daily payment runs implemented to ensure the Council's supply chain and local businesses are supported.

- 8.4 The Finance Strategy team successfully closed the Council's 2019/20 accounts alongside controlling all funding announced in the Council's budget and capturing all expenditure arising from the Covid-19 Response.

## 9. Staffing and resourcing critical services

- 9.1 HR is a support cell for the service areas, and has focussed on 3 key areas, advice on all matters relating to HR both internally and with schools, recruitment and training. A key area has been to establish daily workforce data that helps the business understand the impact of COVID-19 on the workforce and therefore our services. This allows for redeployment between critical service areas and re prioritisation. HR provide welfare support calls to individuals who are impacted and ensure the service for wellbeing are widely known and used.
- 9.2 HR have continued to provide advice and support to the organisation on a range of HR matters, including recruitment, advice to schools and virtual training for example, signs of safety (supporting the children's services improvement journey).
- 9.3 Many policies have been re written or relaxed in light of government guidance, including working from home, annual leave allowances, sickness, payments, risk assessments and contracts. A number of services have been redesigned to include, virtual hearings, virtual interviews, PDR moderations and training.
- 9.4 There has been an increase in on line learning, with many face to face class content being moved into eLearning sessions.

## 10. PPE

- 10.1 Through the introduction of Covid-19, most of the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) supply chains failed to be able to meet the increased demand being put on the sector. This resulted in Kent Resilience Forum leading a collaboration of procurement professionals with the objective to make known where certified PPE can be obtained from.
- 10.2 By being an active part of the KRF, Medway has been able to actively manage the local supply resulting in no known shortages. Furthermore, over 400,000 items of PPE have been delivered to Medway based organisations to date.

## 11. ICT

- 11.1 ICT consists of five service areas, Service Desk, Technical Operations & Administration, Infrastructure, Application Support, Networks & Cyber Security and Children & Adults Systems Support. Approximately 90% of ICT

staff have worked from home, maintaining a business as usual service which has, in turn, enabled the council to deliver critical and non-critical services.

- 11.2 Our technical infrastructure and network stability has been excellent. Regular monitoring has enabled any potential issues to be quickly resolved.
- 11.3 The pandemic 'paused' the importing of Laptops/Tablets, which led to a lack of equipment across the country. This caused a problem for Children's Services who were expecting a delivery of laptops for new Social Workers and for CABS, who require specialist kit to enable their telephony functionality to work correctly.
- 11.4 ICT identified specific computers that were available, which enabled both the CABS service and Children's Services to work from home and continue their service delivery.
- 11.5 ICT and Democratic Services have worked closely to deliver live streaming of Cabinet, Council and Planning Committee meetings using Microsoft Teams Live Events. The use of Microsoft Teams across the Council has been instrumental in continuing to provide service delivery (i.e. Child Protection Conferences), work with partners and communicate with Members and staff.

## 12. Democracy

- 12.1 The last meeting which took place before the Government issued formal guidance in response to the pandemic was the Health and Adult Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12 March 2020. Since then, and following consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Labour and Co-operative Group, only essential meetings have taken place with reduced numbers of Members in attendance. In summary, meetings of the Cabinet, Planning Committee and Full Council have taken place with the usual frequency and other meetings have or will take place as necessary. A full round of Overview and Scrutiny committee meetings will take place during June and July with essential business only.
- 12.2 In early April the law was changed, on a temporary basis until May 2021, which permits meetings to take place with remote participation by Members subject to meetings being livestreamed. The law requiring an Annual Council meeting to take place was also changed on a temporary basis and Full Council, on 23 April 2020, agreed not to hold an Annual Council meeting during the 2020/21 municipal year, the main effect of which was for the current Mayor and Deputy Mayor to continue in their roles until May 2021.
- 12.3 A number of urgent decisions have been taken during this period in response to the pandemic, either by the Leader or the Chief Executive, using urgency powers set out in the Council's Constitution. In addition, to the decisions below, the Leader had also ordered grass cutting to resume on 4 May 2020.

Date	Issue	Decision
27 March 2020	Council Tax and Business Rates Relief	Leader's urgent decision to implement a number of Government measures (and any future measures) to support local residents and businesses in relation to Council Tax and Business Rates Relief which are in place to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.
1 April 2020	Addition to the Revenue Budget	<p>Chief Executive's urgent decision to approve the addition of the COVID-19 grant funding, made available by the MHCLG, to the Council's revenue budget:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 39,712,000 to fund the provision of small business grants to eligible businesses in Medway;</li> <li>• £6,628,475 to fund expenditure incurred by the Council in responding to the COVID-19 emergency.</li> </ul>
21 April 2020	Extension of the Use of Temporary Accommodation Provision for Homeless Households and Rough Sleepers	Chief Executive's urgent decision to comply with Government guidance on the implementation of a range of measures until further guidance is received from the government confirming that the current social distancing requirements have ceased, with regards to the temporary change of policy and budgetary impact.
21 April 2020	Temporary Suspension of Treasury Management Counterparty Limits	Chief Executive's urgent decision to temporarily lift the counterparty limits within the Treasury Strategy, with effect from 27 March 2020 for a period of three months, to enable the Council to place funds in the counterparty which; is the most economically advantageous, enables fast access to funds, and in which funds can be placed and removed in a manner that can be operated with council

<b>Date</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Decision</b>
		and institution staff working remotely and securely.
21 April 2020	Car Mileage Rates for Electric Cars	Chief Executive's urgent decision to agree rates for the Council for reimbursing staff in the use of Electric Cars.
4 May 2020	Pentagon Centre Tenants and Other Commercial Tenants – Rent Deferral	<p>Leader's urgent decision to agree the delaying of current rent of Pentagon Centre tenants as and when requested on a case by case basis. This agreement should follow professional advice from the Centre Management Team and to to agree the delaying of current rent of other commercial properties within the Council's property portfolio, on a case by case basis, after receipt of details of reduced income and future trading viability.</p> <p>Chief Executive's urgent decision to agree the potential budgetary impact of these decisions.</p>
13 May 2020	Addition to the Revenue Budget	Chief Executive's urgent decision to add £7,648,146 to help the Council to deal with the impacts of coronavirus, funded from grant provided by Central Government, to the 2020/21 revenue budget.
22 May 2020	Local Authority Discretionary Grants Fund	Leader's urgent decision to approve the Local Authority Discretionary Grants Fund which the government has introduced in response to Covid-19.

### 13. Communications

- 13.1 Extensive and consistent communication with our residents, staff, Members and partners has been a critical part of our response in order to inform and offer reassurance. We have used a wide variety of communications channels to reach people. This has included social media, email bulletins,

our website, messages from the Leader, press releases, media and digital media advertising and promoting messages via our partners too.

13.2 Since lockdown, the council has:

- Issued 410 Facebook posts from its main corporate Facebook account, reaching 2.2 million people
- issued 472 tweets from its main corporate Twitter account, reaching 12.2 million by 1 June
- Enjoy Medway has reached over 210,000 people with a strong engagement rate
- In total approximately 1,900 messages have been posted across all social media accounts, reaching 17.5 million people in total
- Responded to many enquiries we've received via social media and we have been responding to hundreds of these each day
- issued 71 press releases
- Answered 190 coronavirus related media enquiries, to assist local, regional and national media in their role to keep the public informed of critical pandemic advice and updates
- The Leader and the Director of Public Health have appeared regularly on local media including BBC South East, Meridian, Radio Kent, Medway Messenger and KMFM and the Assistant Director for Adult Social Care appeared in an interview on Radio 5 Live
- The total number of interviews have been 28 since the start of lockdown.
- We have issued 48 electronic newsletters with information reaching 30,000 subscribers
- Our open rate is 10% higher than the UK average.

### **Internal Communications**

13.3 From a corporate perspective the Internal Communications function has sought to ensure all staff have access to:

- Up to date national news and priorities
- Medway and service updates
- HR updates and wellbeing support
- Actions they need to take.

13.4 This has been achieved through the following communication channels (to 1 June 2020):

- Production of a regular weekday daily bulletin during the peak of lockdown. The e-newsletters were sent to all council staff, councillors, MPs and key partners. Daily updates were issued from 19 March to 26 May (45 no.) From 27 May this has now reduced to three updates a week
- Six videos from the Leader and Chief Executive, Silver Command and Director of Public Health
- Weekly MEDSPACE news roundups
- Direct messages to all staff
- Weekly employee wellbeing support advice.

- 13.5 As well as keeping the workforce informed, internal communications has sought to inspire and motivate employees through the sharing of service successes, colleagues going the extra mile for the vulnerable together with heart-warming “thank yous” received from customers.

### **Digital update on Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

- 13.6 The Digital team has continued to operate largely as normal throughout the pandemic, working successfully from home using Teams to collaborate.
- 13.7 On Medway.gov.uk, the Digital Team created a dedicated section relating to [Coronavirus](#), to keep our customers up to date. New pages include [changes to our services](#), information for [businesses](#), [wellbeing advice](#) and [support for vulnerable people](#).
- 13.8 Working with subject matter experts, the team has updated more than 500 pages across the site including [parking](#), [Council Tax](#), [housing benefit](#), [crematorium and cemeteries](#), [schools](#), [support for the creative sector](#) and [translation pages](#).
- 13.9 Unique page views to Medway.gov.uk increased by 67.88% (15 March to 2 June 2020) compared to the same period in 2019.
- 13.10 Between 15 March and 5 May, the [main Coronavirus landing page](#) was viewed more than 125,000 times and the Service updates page more than 71,500 times.

### **Feedback about the website**

- 13.11 Customer feedback via the website has been very positive:
- Found all the information I wanted. Thank you
  - Always up to date! Thanks
  - Info good and up to date, clear and precise... job well done!!
- 13.12 The team has created new online services (transactions) in record time to support customers and staff, including:
1. [apply for a business support grant](#), allowing businesses to check their eligibility and apply for support. From 31 March to 30 April 2020, this new service received 5,181 page views, 3,459 applications and paid out more than £20m in grants successfully.
  2. [Book a visit to a household waste and recycling centre](#), on behalf of both Medway Council and Kent County Council. In three weeks since go live, there have been almost 65,000 bookings for Kent and Medway (7,600 for the two Medway sites).
  3. [Apply for a discretionary business grant](#), allowing small-business owners to get extra support. In the first week, it has been completed nearly 200 times.
  4. An emergency food shopping delivery service, an internal process to allow Public health and Leisure colleagues to capture the customer’s details,



payment and shopping list, record the delivery and issue a receipt. The form has been completed more than 400 times.

## 14. Financial Implications

- 14.1 At the beginning of the national response to the emerging Covid-19 pandemic in the UK, on 16 March the Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick assured Local Government Leaders that: *“This government stands with local councils at this difficult time. Everyone needs to play their part to help the most vulnerable in society and support their local economy. The government will do whatever is necessary to support these efforts.”*
- 14.2 The Government has since announced a wide range of financial support packages for individuals, businesses and public sector bodies leading the Response, including emergency funding for councils. The Government has also commenced monthly data collection returns, requiring authorities to estimate the financial impact of the Covid-19. The data collection instructions set out that the exercise is for planning purposes, to help the Government identify where the greatest pressures are likely to be going forward and inform their assessment of likely future costs.
- 14.3 In terms of direct financial support for local authorities, Medway received an initial £6.628million of emergency un-ringfenced grant funding in March 2020. Following submission of the first data return to MHCLG, a second tranche of £7.648million emergency funding was received in April.
- 14.4 The most significant elements of the wider packages of support announced are the Expanded Business Rates Relief scheme (nearly £30million), the Small Business Grant and Discretionary Business Grant schemes (over £40million) and the Council Tax Hardship scheme (around £2million), which are all fully funded directly by the Government. All other funding announced directed at local authorities has been ring-fenced to specific activities and associated new burdens.
- 14.5 While the specific requirements of the data collection returns to MHCLG changed between the first and second response, the financial impact on Medway Council estimated was broadly consistent between the two, and indicated:
- Additional expenditure beyond that budgeted resulting from Covid-19 of circa £17million,
  - Income shortfalls resulting from Covid-19 of circa £37million,
  - Financial support of c£14m.
- 14.6 These estimates indicate a net pressure for Medway Council in 2020/21 of around £40million, and working with colleagues and partners across the sector, we continue to lobby the government to ensure local authorities are appropriately supported to manage the financial burdens of the Covid-19 response and recovery.

## 15. Legal Implications

- 15.1 The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 places certain legal responsibilities on public sector organisations to assist in the response and other phases of a civil emergency. Once the Covid-19 pandemic was treated as an emergency event, the Council had to comply with legal requirements as a category one responder. This has involved involvement in the Kent Resilience Forum at strategic and tactical levels with multi-agency partners to guide and deliver the Kent and Medway response.

## 16. Risk Management

### **Governance process**

- 16.1 Since the Council implemented the Emergency Planning procedures in response to the Covid-19 Pandemic, a risk assessment in line with the Council's Risk Management Strategy has formed the basis of all decision making and governance arrangements throughout the Response.
- 16.2 Each Cell Lead has been responsible for maintaining a risk register detailing the impacts of COVID19 on their area of responsibility, following the Council's Risk Management Strategy. Cell leads have been responsible for managing risks scored below CII – significant likelihood, crucial impact (as such risks would routinely be managed on service/operational risk registers) while issues arising from risks scored at CII or above have been escalated to the SILVER and Gold commands (as such risks would routinely be managed through the Council's Strategic Risk Register). In addition, financial thresholds have been agreed to ensure that where a decision being made would commit the Council to new expenditure or result in the loss of income, appropriate financial authorisation is in place.
- 16.3 A Governance group within the Cell structure has been responsible for providing assurance on the effectiveness of risk management and the implications of actions taken through the Covid-19 response. While the Council's Corporate Risk Register Remains reflective of the key risks facing the organisation in the wider context, formal arrangements to monitor the Corporate Risk Register were paused during the initial response to enable staff to focus on managing risks in the Covid-19 Response. The Governance group will work alongside the Strategic Risk Management Group to resume routine monitoring of strategic risks as soon as possible during 2020/21, beginning with a fundamental review of the Corporate Risk Register in light of the Covid-19 Response and Recovery.
- 16.4 The Governance cell is also working to ensure the impacts of decisions made have been considered appropriately to ensure all decisions taken are sound and are in line with the Council's governance mechanisms. The Cell aims to ensure decisions:
- are made in accordance with appropriate Member and Officer decision making powers, according to the law and in line with the Council's constitution,
  - comply with relevant legislation and regulations,

- are made within the Council's financial rules and are within the approved budget,
- do not significantly weaken the Council's control environment or pose a significant fraud risk, and
- do not create adverse impacts for people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act.

## 17. Recommendations

- 17.1 The Cabinet is asked to note the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 17.2 The Cabinet is asked to agree to delegate authority to the Director of Public Health in consultation with the Leader to submit the Outbreak Control Plan, as described in section 4 of the report.

## 18. Suggested Reasons for Decisions

- 18.1 To highlight the role that the Council has played in responding to COVID-19 as well as supporting the process in place for managing the restarting of services post lockdown and longer-term recovery.

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### Appendices

None

### Background papers

None