

# **BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**22 OCTOBER 2020**

## **COVID-19 RECOVERY**

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### Summary

This report provides Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Members with the opportunity to scrutinise the latest steps taken by the Council to assist Medway to continue recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

1. Budget and Policy Framework
  - 1.1 Response to an emergency event is a matter for Cabinet. Scrutiny of that response is a matter for the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees. This Committee has the additional responsibility of providing guidance and leadership on the development and co-ordination of the scrutiny function for all of the O&S committees, including guidance on priorities for scrutiny activity.
2. Background
  - 2.1 The Council is a category one responder with legal responsibilities to play a significant role in any emergency event. The Covid-19 pandemic has required a multi-agency response and close liaison between central Government, local government and a variety of partners including through the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF).
  - 2.2 It is usual in an emergency for the planning of the recovery phase to start as soon as a major incident is declared. The work involved is kept separate to enable a focus on both streams of work independently. That is the approach the Council has used for the Covid-19 pandemic in Medway. Unusually the response phase has continued after the start of the recovery phase. The Kent Resilience Forum Strategic Coordinating Group officially ended the response phase on 8 August, with a close eye being kept on infection levels (via the Local Outbreak Control Plan) in Medway and with the capacity to start the response phase quickly if needed.

2.3 As of 7 October the Kent Resilience Forum Strategic Coordinating Group has stood back up and the Council has moved back into a Response phase. This report sets out the work carried out by the Council's Recovery Group.

2.4 The Cabinet has received regular updates of the activity being undertaken as part the response in June 2020 and July 2020 and of the recovery work, on 4 August 2020

<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=53526> and the work of the Finance team, on 25 August 2020

<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=53805>.

### 3. Covid 19 - Recovery Business Support activity

3.1 The teams in Business Support have played an active and significant role in the response and recovery phases of the pandemic. The focus of recovery activity has been to ensure the continued delivery of front-line services to our most vulnerable residents but also the re-activation of essential services such as Libraries, Leisure Centres and our heritage assets. That said, in the recovery phase to date the following activity from teams in Business Support has occurred.

3.2 A Governance Cell led by officers from predominantly Business Support teams have been ensuring that in the context of a dynamic event proper governance has taken place. Where urgent decisions have been needed, they have been taken by the Leader for decisions within Cabinet's delegation and by the Chief Executive for decisions within Council's delegation. These have then been reported to Cabinet and Council, in line with the Council's Constitution.

3.3 All of the services provided by teams in the Business Support Division have continued through the pandemic, with the majority of staff able to work from home. Service Managers have ensured that those arrangements have been appropriate and have completed service recovery plans and risk assessments to enable staff to make their views known. We continue to understand how we can support colleagues and deliver effective public services by seeking feedback from colleagues in the form of a survey. The results have helped us understand what is working and what further activity is required as we maximise the opportunity to move towards the vision of smart working.

3.4 The Capital Projects team have worked to enable the safe re-opening of buildings in line with Government guidance. This has involved a four stage process of advising safety measures needed, Medway Norse completing those works, Internal Audit checking that the works are completed in accordance with the advice and finally a formal sign off of the building as Covid-19 compliant for the use it is needed for. Most recently the Rainham Contact point has been re-opened.

3.5 The Human Resources team have worked to keep colleagues informed about the various employee relations issues linked to the pandemic, with fortnightly meetings with the Trade Unions. They have also provided support to Managers. Proactive work with our occupational health provider means we are able to offer enhanced risk assessments to determine individual risk to Covid-19, ensuring people are supported with the appropriate adjustments. Work continues across 7 work streams as we test policies and procedures

whilst exploring what smarter working can offer us while we continue carving out a new normal as a result of the pandemic.

- 3.6 Senior Officers from Business Support have led and supported the Gold (Strategic), Silver (Tactical) and Bronze (Delivery) elements of the command structure that was put in place to manage the Council's work in the pandemic.
- 3.7 Finance colleagues have been active in ensuring the efficient and appropriate provision of various funding streams to Medway's businesses and vulnerable individuals. Officers have also continued to complete regular returns to the MHCLG and have worked with other local authorities in lobbying the Government for funding to address Covid-19 related expenditure pressures and losses of income. Largely though the team have continued to deliver business as usual, producing the year end of statement of accounts, paying suppliers, collecting income and working on financial plans for the future.
- 3.8 The Business Change team have focussed on the ideas for getting "Back to Better" generated from across the Council. They have developed this work into themed areas and assisted in the Work Stream 2 of the recovery phase.
- 3.9 Throughout the pandemic the Business Change Team were logging how services were working differently to capture ideas that could be maintained as the new normal.
- 3.10 When the Council moved into the recovery phase from COVID-19 each service produced a comprehensive recovery plan, which included a section on "lessons learnt". The Head of Business Change and Head of Business Intelligence reviewed all recovery plans to identify the key themes to inform an over-arching "Back To Better" plan, which is forming Workstream 2 of the Recovery Coordinating Group.
- 3.11 The key "Back To Better" themes identified by services are:
  - i **Remote and Agile Working**
    - Support use of MS TEAMS
    - End-user device review
    - HR Policy review to support agile working
    - Property rationalisation
  - ii **Remote Meetings with Stakeholders**
    - Increased stakeholder engagement & partnership working
    - Council meetings held & streamed online
    - Opportunity to work differently with young people using technology
  - iii **External Processes**
    - Digital channel shift / Digital By Default
    - Master data management / Single view of customer
    - Automation & self service
    - Review "face-to-face" transaction
  - iv **Internal Processes**
    - More effective absence management system
    - Integrate systems – HR, Payroll & ICT

- More effective storage & sharing of data
- Review print & post arrangements
- Review contracts, commissioning & expenses

**v Cashless**

- Public Health benefits of not handling cash
- Promote use of cashless
- Review business intelligence data to identify opportunities for cashless services
- Implement Smart / Technology solutions  
– e.g. e-ticketing for theatres and events

**vi External Communications**

- Improved utilization of social media
- CRM system to better target customers
- Improved database of local business & groups
- YouTube utilized more – messaging & engagement

3.12 The Business Change Team are now working with services to prioritise and implement projects across these themes, which are being reported to Transformation Board.

3.13 The Medway Task Force has continued its work specifically in Luton & Wayfield but in other parts of Medway throughout the pandemic and during the recovery phase. In August, the Kent Police & Crime Commissioner successfully obtained £111K funding through the Home Office Safer Streets initiative for joint agency activity in a focussed residential area within Gillingham North. This project includes crime prevention activity along with environmental work with the aim of preventing crime and ASB, helping local communities feel even safer and ultimately loving where they live. The Medway Task Force will be co-ordinating this activity during the lifetime of the project alongside teams within front line services.

#### 4. Overview and Scrutiny's involvement

4.1 Members have previously recommended that all the O&S Committees should scrutinise the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic insofar as it relates to their remit.

4.2 The Children and Young People O&S Committee scrutinised the Council's recovery at its meeting on 23 July. The Health and Adult Social Care O&S Committee have recently received a report on Covid-19 support to care homes and, in addition, the last progress report from the Medway NHS Foundation Trust had a particular focus on the impact of Covid. Members agreed at the latest agenda planning meeting to continue with this approach in order to best manage the number of agenda items at meetings.

#### 5. Risk management

5.1 Working alongside partners across the Kent Resilience Forum, Medway Council has implemented the Strategic and Tactical command and control methodology to manage the Council's Response and Recovery to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Subject to the provisions in the scheme of employee

delegations and formal decision making rules as set out in the Council's Constitution, strategic direction and decisions are made by Medway's Gold, in consultation with the Leader, with operational matters and decisions made by the Tactical Recovery Coordination Group.

- 5.2 To support the Response and Recovery Command, the Council has established a network of specialist 'Cells' which lead on functional elements of the Council's Response and Recovery including those tasked with co-ordinating the services for vulnerable adults through Adult Social Care, Schools and Education and Housing, and those responsible with ensuring the Council's core functions continue to operate 'business as usual' wherever possible including Finance, HR and Customer Contact.
- 5.3 Each 'Cell' lead is responsible for maintaining a risk register detailing the impacts of Recovery and Response from Covid-19 on their area of responsibility, following the Council's Risk Management Strategy. Cell leads are 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 are escalated to Tactical Response Coordination Group, and Medway's Gold command as necessary (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.
- 5.4 Each Service Manager has been requested to complete a Service Response template for each of their operations and provide these to their Divisional Cell Lead.
- 5.5 A Governance Cell within the network is 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. This Cell includes officers from Democratic Services, Legal Services, Category Management, Audit & Counter Fraud and the Council's Equalities Lead. This group has arrangements in place to collate and review all action proposed or taken through the Cell risk registers, and has access to all Cell leads to make recommendations to ensure that decisions:
  - Are made in accordance with the guiding principles.
  - 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.
  - Do not create adverse impacts for people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act.

## 6 Financial and legal implications

- 6.1 The financial implications are set out in the body of the report. A summary of the grant funding made available to Medway Council, in response to the pandemic, is included at Appendix 1.
- 6.2 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 (KRF) at strategic and tactical levels with multi-agency partners to guide and deliver the Kent and Medway response.
- 6.3 In line with best practice, KRF partners began preparing for the recovery phase as soon as a civil emergency was declared. The Council has a key role in leading the local community back to such normality as is possible after any emergency event. In this instance the response phase has been re-convened, with the rise on Covid cases being experienced nationally. Although numbers remain relatively low in Medway, this is a precautionary step to ensure readiness should any local lockdown measures or decisions be needed.

## 7. Recommendation

- 7.1 That Members consider and scrutinise the Council's role in the recovery phase of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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### Appendices

Appendix 1 - A summary of the grant funding made available to Medway Council, in response to the pandemic.

### Background papers

None

**Grant Funding made available to the Council in response to the pandemic**

**Appendix 1**

<b>Covid 19 Grant Funding</b>	<b>Revenue Allocation £</b>	<b>Grant conditions</b>
Emergency Funding second allocation	7,648,146	Non-ringfenced grant. Requirement for monthly return to be submitted to the government to set out how this funding has been allocated.
Business Grants Scheme (including discretionary scheme)	39,712,000	Grant ring-fenced to provide grants (through the national mandatory scheme, and the locally agreed discretionary scheme) to Businesses. Grant issued on reconciliation basis with any overspend funded by government, and any underspend clawed back. Requirement to carry out post-payment assurance work to identify any fraudulent payments. Requirement to submit monthly data to government on allocation of funding.
Council Tax Hardship fund	2,056,371	Grant ring-fenced to provide Council Tax relief to vulnerable people and households affected most by Covid-19. Grant issued on reconciliation basis with any overspend funded by government, and any underspend clawed back. Requirement to submit weekly data to government on the number of businesses eligible, number of actual payments made and value per scheme.
Reopening high streets safely fund	246,396	Funding allocation to be claimed based on evidenced work in line with the guidance (not a grant in advance of activity) aiming to enable councils to support their business communities with measures that enable safe trading in public places. Requirement to submit to government checks on audit trail and spot checks on expenditure in advance of funds being released based on satisfactory claims.
Active Travel fund Phase 1 (£242,500 - £30k revenue, £212,500 capital)	30,000	Grant ring-fenced to expenditure in line with 'bid' submitted by local authority at outset of the scheme.
Test, track and trace fund	1,592,918	Grant ring-fenced to expenditure lawfully incurred or to be incurred in relation to the mitigation against and management of local outbreaks of Covid-19. The Chief Executive and Chief Internal Auditor of each of the recipient authorities are required to sign and return a declaration to the government confirming that the grant conditions have been complied with.
Infection Control Fund Tranche 1	2,091,910	Grant ringfenced to provide support to adult social care providers to reduce the rate of Covid-19 transmission in and between care homes and support wider workforce resilience to deliver

Covid 19 Grant Funding	Revenue Allocation £	Grant conditions
		<p>infection control. Grant paid in two instalments, with 75% of allocation to be paid to social care providers on 'per bed' basis with discretion over 25% to providers to support workforce resilience.</p> <p>Requirement to return a care home support plan to government (completed by 29 May) and to submit two high-level returns specifying how the grant has been spent for both instalments.</p> <p>Requirement to fully allocate the grant within two months of receipt of the second instalment, as such returns due by 30 September.</p>
Emergency Funding third allocation	2,506,451	<p>Non-ringfenced grant.</p> <p>Requirement for monthly return to be submitted to the government to set out how this funding has been allocated.</p>
Emergency Assistance Grant for Food & Supplies	336,715	<p>Non-ringfenced grant, with use of the fund discretionary and intended to be used to support those who are struggling to afford food and other essentials due to Covid-19.</p> <p>Funding intended to be spent within 12 weeks but required to be spent within 2020/21 financial year.</p>
Wellbeing for Education Return Grant	36,594	<p>Non-ringfenced grant aimed to support the aims of the Wellbeing for Education Return project which seeks to better equip education settings to support pupils and students' wellbeing and psychosocial recovery as they return to full-time education this autumn.</p>
Next Steps Accommodation Fund	233,959	<p>Grant ringfenced to activity to achieve move-on for those rough sleepers accommodated during the pandemic and a sustained reduction in rough sleeping in your local area.</p> <p>Requirement to submit monthly data returns to government including measurement of performance indicators set out in the grant conditions.</p>
Additional Dedicated Home to School and College Transport	241,824	<p>Grant ringfenced to ensuring there is sufficient transport capacity so children and young people can get to school and college safely and on time.</p> <p>Requirement to submit data to government on expenditure, arrangements implemented, capacity and fare revenues.</p> <p>Requirement to return any unused funds to the government.</p> <p>The Chief Executive and Chief Internal Auditor of each of the recipient authorities are required to sign and return a declaration to the government confirming that the grant conditions have been complied with.</p>



Covid 19 Grant Funding	Revenue Allocation £	Grant conditions
Infection Control Fund Tranche 2	2,194,649	<p>Grant ringfenced to provide support to adult social care providers, largely unchanged from Tranche 1. Grant issued in two instalments, with local authorities required to confirm to the government by 31 October, confirming that they have put in place a winter plan, and that they are working with care providers in their area on business continuity plans.</p> <p>Grant must be fully spent on infection control measures by 31 March 2021 (i.e. expenditure incurred on or before that date).</p> <p>Grant cannot be used retrospectively to compensate for expenditure incurred before 1 October 2020.</p> <p>Grant must not be used to compensate for activities for which the local authority has already earmarked or allocated expenditure.</p> <p>Requirement for monthly returns to be submitted detailing how the grant has been spent to date and spending plans for the balance, first return due 23 November with the final return due on 30 April 2021.</p> <p>Local authorities must put in place sufficient processes to assure themselves that this fund is correctly spent by providers.</p>
Compliance and enforcement grant	153,367	<p>Grant ringfenced for compliance and enforcement activity to control the spread of COVID-19 across individuals, businesses and in the community. The Section 151 officer will be required to certify that any expenditure using this grant was used for the purposes of compliance and enforcement activity.</p> <p>Local authorities required to record grant spend in "Other – lockdown compliance and reopening costs" in MHCLG's Local authority COVID-19 monthly financial returns.</p> <p>Three monthly report required to be "light touch qualitative, and where possible quantitative...to provide detail of the activity funded using this grant and impact on compliance on COVID-19 secure regulations/guidance"</p>
Test and Trace Isolation Payment scheme (mandatory isolation support payments)	127,500	<p>Grant ringfenced to deliver mandatory Isolation Payments Scheme in line with government guidance. Requirement to "conduct post-payment chequest to prevent fraud" based on monthly spot check of 10% of payments made.</p> <p>Grant issued on reconciliation basis with any overspend funded by government, and any underspend clawed back.</p>

Covid 19 Grant Funding	Revenue Allocation £	Grant conditions
		Requirement to provide row-level information to NHS Test and Trace; T&T IDs of applicants, outcome of applications, mandatory/discretionary payments made and reasons for rejected applications. Timescales/frequency TBC.
Test and Trace Isolation Payment scheme (discretionary fund)	76,733	Grant ringfenced to deliver discretionary Isolation Payments Scheme in line with government guidance. Requirement to "conduct post-payment chequest to prevent fraud" based on monthly spot check of 10% of payments made. Grant issued is cash limited and any overpayment would not be funded by government. Requirement to provide row-level information to NHS Test and Trace; T&T IDs of applicants, outcome of applications, mandatory/discretionary payments made and reasons for rejected applications. Timescales/frequency TBC.
Test and Trace Isolation Payment scheme (new burdens funding)	153,367	Non-ringfenced grant
Local Restrictions Support Grant scheme (mandatory grant payments)	TBC	Likely to be similar requirements to T&T Isolation Payments Scheme above.
Local Restrictions Support Grant scheme (discretionary fund)	TBC	Likely to be similar requirements to T&T Isolation Payments Scheme above.
Local Restrictions Support Grant scheme (new burdens funding)	TBC	Likely to be non-ringfenced grant
	<b>59,438,900</b>	