

# **BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**26 NOVEMBER 2020**

## **COVID-19 RESPONSE PHASE 2**

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### Summary

This report provides Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members with the opportunity to scrutinise the latest steps taken by the Council to assist Medway to in the second Response phase of 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 The Medway and Kent response to the Covid-19 pandemic has been dynamic. After the start of the official emergency response in March 2020, Members will be aware that The Kent Resilience Forum Strategic Coordinating Group officially ended the first 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 On 7 October the Kent Resilience Forum Strategic Coordinating Group stood response back up and the Council has moved back into a second response phase. This report sets out the work carried out in four discrete areas within

Business Support Teams.

### 3. Business Support Teams

3.1 **Silver Command:** The Chief Legal Officer has shared the responsibility for Silver Command with the Assistant Director for Frontline Services (alternate weeks) supported by a range of teams including several from the Business Support Directorate, such as Property & Capital Projects, Human Resources, the Medway Task Force. When needed input has been given by other teams such as Democratic Services. The Council has moved back to at least weekly Silver (Tactical) meetings on a Monday, Gold (Strategic) meetings on a Wednesday, and played an active in Kent Resilience Forum Tactical and Strategic Co-ordinating Group meetings. Members have been briefed and Communications colleague have continued to provide regular external and internal information provision to residents, Members and colleagues.

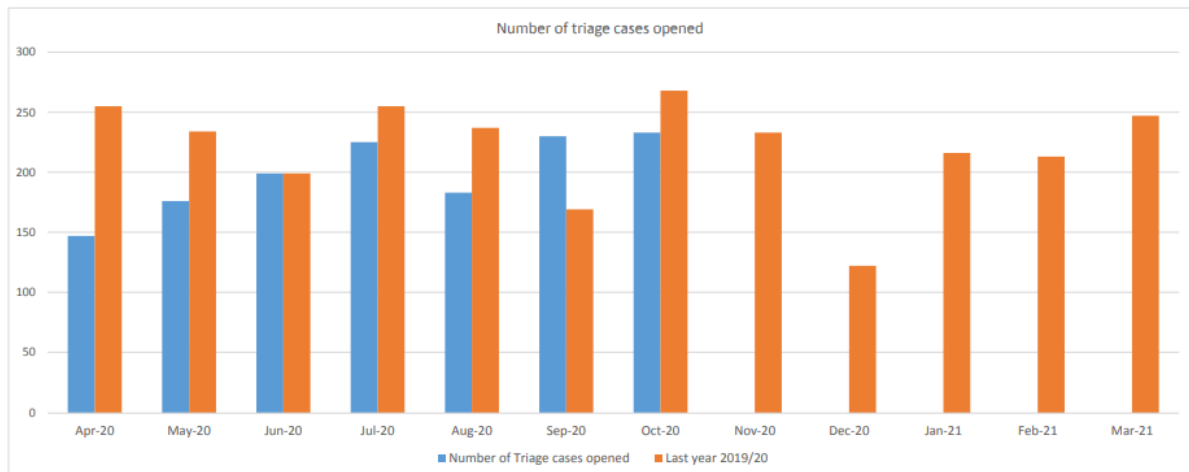
3.2 **Finance:** Medway Revenues and Benefits have implemented the Test and Trace Isolation Payments Scheme in line with the Government guidance, to support individuals on low incomes who cannot work and lose income as a result of being told to Isolate by the national service. Officers have also continued 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, paying suppliers, collecting income, producing the Medium Term Financial Strategy, Capital Strategy and Draft Budget. Since the last Covid-19 update to the Business Support O&S Committee on 22 October, the government has announced further support for local authorities, residents and businesses, as follows:

- £6.286million in a fourth tranche of Emergency Support for Local Authorities,
- £58,176 in a second tranche of the Additional Home to School and college Transport grant,
- £145,000 for Supporting Clinically Extremely Vulnerable People,
- £908,596 for the Winter Support Grant Scheme, and
- A total of £9.097million for the mandatory and discretionary elements of the Local Restrictions Support Grant Scheme.

Further details on these schemes are set out at Appendix 1.

3.3 **Track & Trace:** The local test and trace service went live on Friday 13 November. The service are referred positive COVID cases who the national Track & Trace team are unable to contact, who have a Medway postcode. Our local team will then call the residents and issue the same guidance and run through the same script, and process as the national team use, to advise residents on what steps to take. The script will also include advice on self-isolation payments if appropriate and support from our vulnerable people hub if needed. Early indications are that we will be referred 20% of cases (as this is the average of cases that cannot be reached by the national team). Our volume of work will depend on infection rates. We have recruited a team of five people to carry out the function.

- 3.4 **Housing:** While government have not given a second 'everyone in' instruction, Medway Council has been preparing our approach to ensuring that as many people sleeping rough get accommodation and assistance for the approaching winter months. As part of our Rough Sleeping Initiative, our outreach team go out several times a week, up to several times daily, to verify who is currently out sleeping rough. People who are known to be sleeping rough will be offered accommodation and any support they feel able to accept. We know that some people are not ready to accept either of these at the present time, but the offer is regularly made and will continue to be available.
- 3.5 We have brought into use a local hotel in addition to existing Temporary Accommodation units and have a minimum 25 bedspaces available at any one time this is defined as emergency accommodation. We have on site security and a visiting concierge service to manage any issues and offer support. Our RSI team is working to help alongside commissioned support services, more broadly the Council is working with partners from the voluntary and community sector to provide additional volunteers who are suitably trained and have the requisite checks in place
- 3.6 Officers meet with Public Health and other partners every week to discuss how we keep service users and staff safe and we focus on getting minimising the risks of any COVID outbreak. There is a dedicated Homelessness Nurse who focusses on this group and arranges a day of appointments once per week and registers people with GPs. In addition to this there is a Mental Health Nurse as part of the Housing Team who works alongside Outreach Officers and will refer people who need additional input. We are working with partners in commissioned Drug and Alcohol Treatment services and they have supplied training to volunteers and are making sure people can access any necessary prescriptions and help.
- 3.7 Out of Hours provision is available outside of working hours to support staff in the Hotel provision and allow access to accommodation where this is required. We currently have 20 people who were recently sleeping rough in emergency accommodation and we have rehoused 60 people since the start of the first lockdown. These people have been getting ongoing support to help them manage their new homes.
- 3.8 In addition to this, the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) will be operating normally this year, so when the temperature is forecast to be zero or below, people who are sleeping rough can access emergency accommodation by contacting Kingsley House. Officers are also working with the voluntary sector to provide night shelter options in COVID secure way.
- 3.9 Operations at Kingsley House are functioning close to business as usual with an appointment service that is delivered via the phone on the first instance. Numbers approaching for assistance has recovered to normal levels following a quieter period of time during the initial national lockdown. Changes to legislation and a stay on evictions, that has now ceased, means that approaches are likely to remain lower in comparison to last year for the remainder of 2020/21.



#### 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.

#### 5. Risk management

- 5.1 In the second response phase and the continuing recover work, the Council has re-established a network of specialist 'Cells' which lead on functional elements of the Council's response and recovery including "critical cells" for those tasked with co-ordinating the services for vulnerable adults through Adult Social Care, Schools and Education and Housing, plus those responsible with ensuring the Council's core functions continue to operate 'business as usual' wherever possible including Finance, HR and Customer Contact.
- 5.2 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 Silver, 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.
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 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 councils' 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.

5.5 The Silver and Gold Command is assisted in risk management and planning the second phase of the response through the information shared by colleagues from Public Health about local infection rates. Assumptions about what is possible after 2 December 2020 when the Government has indicated its intention to review the continuation of the second lockdown have been made to enable an efficient and timely response from the Council.

## 6 Financial and legal implications

6.1 The financial implications are set out in the body of the report.

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.

## 7. Recommendation

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

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### Appendices

Appendix 1 - Covid-19 related grants received in 2020/21

### Background papers

None