

ITEM NO. 17

REPORT TO THE COUNCIL MEETING OF 29 JUNE 2020

Meeting: Council
Date: 29 June 2020
Subject: Council Response to COVID-19 Emergency
Report of: Verina Wenham, Chief Officer Governance
Portfolio Holder: Cllr P King Leader
Status: Information – referred from Cabinet
Relevant Ward(s): All

1 Purpose Report

1.1 To update members on the Council's response to date on the COVID-19 emergency as requested by the Leader at the meeting of Cabinet on 1 June 2020. This report outlines the work undertaken by the Council and other partners to date in responding to the threat posed by the outbreak of COVID-19 and sets out ongoing work being undertaken to ensure that all possible steps are taken to prepare and respond to the challenges arising.

2 Recommendations:

2.1 **That the Council considers and notes the work that has been undertaken to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak.**

2.2 **Council notes that there will be quarterly reporting to Cabinet on the progress of the Recovery Plan.**

3 Summary of Reasons for the Recommendations

3.1 The Council has a planned response to emergency situations through the implementation of business continuity plans which have helped develop action plans for both the response and recovery phase of the COVID-19 outbreak. This report summarises the action that has been taken to date to ensure that critical services are maintained, public safety is ensured, support is provided to our communities and businesses as well as providing assurance to our staff, elected members and contractors.

3.2 The report highlights the actions that have been taken through the response phase and sets out the recovery proposals to ensure that the Council is able to adapt to the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak.

- 3.3 There needs to be a clear governance process to monitor the Council's recovery phase and it is suggested that regular updates are provided to the Cabinet to ensure that there is robust monitoring in place.

4 Impact on Communities

- 4.1 The COVID-19 outbreak has had an impact on all the communities within the district. This report highlights the support that the Council has provided with its partners to the communities and the ongoing support that will be provided through the recovery plan to enable communities to recover from the impact of the outbreak.

5 Key Facts

- 5.1 The current coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, which began in December 2019, is a significant challenge for the whole country and the wider world. In response to the World Health Organisations declaration of a pandemic in March 2020 the Council put in place governance arrangements to respond to the impact of COVID-19 on the organisation and its communities.
- 5.2 The COVID-19 Pandemic is probably the most significant issue that has faced the world in the last 50 years. At a national level there has been unprecedented changes to the way society operates, with over 40,000 deaths in the UK. At a regional level organisations have worked together through the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and informal arrangements such as East Midlands Councils, working together to focus our efforts, support each other, and come to a common approach to address literally hundreds of issues that have faced us. The response to COVID-19 has resulted in major disruption and change for both the organisation and many aspects of life across the district.
- 5.3 The Corporate Management Team has been leading the strategic oversight of the operational running of the Council and the wider response to the COVID-19 emergency. Due to the fast-changing nature of the emergency, decisions are required to be made quickly to respond to evolving guidance. Those decisions are delegated to the Joint Chief Executives, who have delegated responsibility for making decisions under Section 138 of the Local Government Act 72. Those decisions were taken in consultation with the Leader/Deputy Leader and relevant portfolio holder and are recorded in the relevant Action Logs.
- 5.4 The Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Opposition receive a weekly briefing from the Joint Chief Executives on the Council's response to COVID-19 and throughout the COVID-19 emergency a weekly member and staff newsletter has been circulated. An email account was also set up as a single point of contact for member enquiries, to coordinate a response during a time of reduced officer capacity.

- 5.5 Portfolio holder and shadow portfolio holder briefings were paused; however, these were restarted during on 11 May 2020. All meetings are carried out remotely, via TEAMS or telephone conference in accordance with the current requirements.
- 5.6 On 11th March 2020 the Joint Chief Executive (NP) called the first meeting of the Council's Strategic Co-ordinating Group ("SCG"). The Joint Chief Executives, Chief Officers and key service managers are members of the SCG. It was agreed subsequently by the SCG that an emergency situation had arisen and that as such the Council's Crisis Management Plan was put in place to ensure that the Council could continue to provide essential services, help people across the district stay safe, particularly the most vulnerable in our communities and support our businesses to remain sustainable.
- 5.7 Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) are multi-agency partnerships made up of Representatives from local public services, including the emergency services, local authorities, the NHS, the Environment Agency, and others. The Leicestershire LRF has been overseeing a co-ordinated response to COVID-19 since early 2020 and has established multi agency management tiers to create a local framework. These are led by a Strategic Co-ordination Group which the Joint Chief Executive (NP) attends on behalf of the Council. Officers attend the other tiers regularly to ensure that we have a joined up and consistent approach within Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland.
- 5.8 Initially the internal/Harborough SCG met daily as urgent decisions were needed at the time as the crisis was and is fast moving. SCG established a Tactical Co-ordinating Group ("TCG") whose remit was to ensure that the Crisis Management Plan was delivered as directed by the SCG. The main focus of the TCG was to implement actions agreed by SCG and act as a conduit between staff and the SCG with particular responsibility for the effective homeworking of staff, and identifying staff from lower priority service who could be redeployed to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.
- 5.9 In addition to the TCG a number of cells were set up to concentrate on providing specific support to set up the community hub and business support. The Community Hub cell was established to set up the community response to the emergency and ensure our most vulnerable resident's needs were being met. The Community Hub cell had its own Terms of Reference and reported in to the TCG.
- 5.10 The NHS has identified around 1.5 million people nationally with certain pre-existing medical conditions who are considered at very high risk of severe illness from Coronavirus because of an underlying health condition. Shielding is a measure to protect people who are clinically extremely vulnerable by minimising interactions with others. All those who were contacted direct by the NHS, which enabled those within this category to get support through that channel. Due to the volume of customers in this cohort, the Council has also supported the County Council in the delivery of this. The Chief Officer, Communities is one of two district council representatives on the Shielding Vulnerable Persons Cell. The shielding group were divided into 4 priorities

with the districts taking responsibility for contacting those in priority 4 to see if they needed any support. In addition, the hub provided befriending and ongoing shopping needs to all of the priorities. These were a partnership approach with the county to ensure all residents' needs were met. Strong officer relationships have been built because of this approach.

- 5.11 In addition to those people who are shielded the Council has supported those people who are vulnerable, but who do not qualify for assistance under the national shielding scheme.
- 5.12 The Harborough Community Hub was established in March to meet the needs of our most vulnerable residents during the COVID-19 emergency. There was recognition that many community groups had started to be established to enable the support of people in their localities. It was decided not to duplicate this but compliment it and not provide the service directly if a service already existed. The hub was a point of contact for all to enable services to be matched to people's needs and provided directly if required, due to complexity or no service provision being in place. The extent of the community support was established quickly by officers and a response network emerged. A structure of Super Ward, Ward Managers and Deputy Ward Managers was in place for referral of cases that came into the hub either to existing networks or for action directly by the ward manager.
- 5.13 A letter was sent to every household telling them about the hub and how to contact us, along with other useful information. We had high numbers of calls for support over the first weeks of the crisis which has now begun to reduce. To date we have supported over 1000 people through the hub. The needs have mostly been food, and we have worked with our food banks to ensure all our residents had enough food to eat. This was achieved by redeploying staff to help in the food banks and with deliveries as required. This was followed by befriending needs which have in the main been referred through to our partners VASL to provide. Medicines were a large requirement in the beginning where our staffs was redeployed to help people get access to medicines, the pharmacists have subsequently managed to deal with this directly, with some ongoing support from the hub and community groups.
- 5.14 The following table shows a breakdown of the request types and numbers

Type of Request for Support	%
Food	73
Medicine	10
Loneliness	5
Financial	2
Housing	1
Wellbeing	1
Other	7

- 5.15 A specific email, telephone number and web address were set up to take referrals and provide information to our residents. We have received a significant number of compliments from our residents about the hub, the work it was undertaken and the difference it has made. In all of this provision the relationship and role of the voluntary and community sector has been vital. They have provided much of the support to our residents and continue to play a vital role in the support offered through the hub.

Through briefing notes and the Cllr weekly newsletter members have been kept up to date with the role and activity of the hub. At the beginning of June we stepped down the hub and now retain a skeleton ward manager structure in place, but the majority of the cases are now being dealt with by the customer services team. We will continue to monitor this and consider the role of the hub going forward.

Business Support

- 5.16 By the end of March, the Council's webpage had been updated to provide advice and signposting service to the support and advice available for businesses. A range of communications, such as social media posts and press releases were issued to tell businesses and stakeholders about the support packages available to them.
- 5.17 In the Budget in March 2020 the Government announced two grant schemes, the Small Business Grant Fund, and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant. Harborough District Council received £19.1 million in grant to distribute to local businesses across the district. Working closely with the Revenues and Benefits Partnership all businesses believed to be eligible were contacted by telephone by the Council. As with the Community Hub, a number of council staff were redeployed to contact the businesses eligible for the grant and directed to complete the council's online form, which had been developed by the Partnership. The risk of fraud or irregularity was a major concern and to address this the Council put in place a robust verification process that the applicant had to follow before the application could be completed and submitted. With respect to the larger multinational businesses, assurances were sought regarding any potential breach of State Aid. Each business was written to confirming that the grant would need to be repaid if there was subsequently found to be a breach of State Aid. As at 15th June 2020 the Council had distributed £20.16 million; the Council had exceeded its grant allocation by 105.62% but BEIS will reimburse the Council for any grant that it has had to self-finance in the interim.
- 5.18 The payment of the grants was overseen by the Finance Cell, which as with the Community Cell, was set up by the SCG. In addition to this, the Finance Cell was tasked with considering the support that could be provided to its commercial and community tenants. Following a recommendation from the Finance Cell a decision was taken by the Joint Chief Executive (BJ) in consultation with the Leader and the Portfolio holder, to waive rental payments for three months from 1 April 2020, for all its tenants who are community organisation

- 5.19 With regard to enforcement of debts during the pandemic, the Council has shown its commitment to aligning with the concerns of national Government and has put measures in place regarding the enforcement of debt. All action to recover debts was suspended for three months to enable residents to keep their businesses and homes during this unprecedented time.

Local Authority Discretionary Grant Fund Scheme (LAGDF)

- 5.21 In early May 2020 BEIS announced a second grant scheme for businesses. The LAGDF scheme is significantly different to the previous scheme in that each of the 315 English Councils have been given discretion to develop their own local scheme within specific BEIS priorities and eligibility criteria. The Council received £1.0 million as an initial grant allocation to distribute to businesses and it launched its scheme on 3 June 2020. The Council's LAGDS scheme was open for two weeks and closed on 17 June 2020. The scheme was developed along with other authorities in Leicestershire; although they are different in detail, they are based on similar eligibility criteria.

Work Force

- 5.22 The Council has a well-established record of working flexibly and many staff were enabled to work from home prior to the outbreak. At the onset of the outbreak staff were encouraged to work from home where possible. On 23rd March 2020, the Government confirmed the "lockdown" measures required people to work from home if it was possible. Staff were advised to work from home and immediate steps were taken to equip any staff who didn't have the facilities for working at home. Staff who are required to attend the Symington building were given advice on social distancing and the building was risk assessed for occupation and measures such as hand sanitiser, signage and increased cleaning routines were implemented. A limit of 20 staff was placed on the Symington Building and two members of the Corporate Management Team were on site daily. Face to face meetings were cancelled and replaced with on line TEAMS meetings.

Remote Meetings

- 5.23 Regulations made under the Coronavirus Act 2020 enable all local authority meetings before 7 May 2021 to be held remotely. The Council had the first remote meeting on 21st April 2020 when the planning committee was conducted remotely. There have been two other planning committees and one Cabinet meeting held remotely.

Staff Wellbeing

- 5.24 Whilst operating remotely staffs have continued to get corporate briefings each week, monthly one to one meeting with their manager and team meetings have continued to be held remotely. The staff wellbeing cell formed quickly and immediately implemented several measures to help staff stay

connected with each other and ensure that the staff's health and wellbeing is being addressed.

On 23rd March 2020, the face to face customer services were withdrawn due to the risks that the service posed to both staff and members of the public. The service was replaced with telephone or e mail responses and appointments with staff could be arranged for telephone consultations if necessary. The change to this type of arrangement has not seemed to have caused any problems for our customers and we have not received any negative comments about these arrangements

Redeployment During the Crisis and ongoing Recovery

- 5.25 Across the whole council, the staff have been hugely supportive in keeping essential services functioning including but not limited to, Lifeline, Development Management, Finance, Customer Services, Housing, Environmental Services and Safeguarding. Staff have adapted quickly to an increasing volume of work, and in some cases, very different work in relation to the COVID-19 Response, whilst juggling challenges at home with schooling and other caring responsibilities.

In addition a large number of staff, over 120 so far from a headcount of 220, in addition to their usual role have stepped up and taken on other roles and responsibilities, supporting the council in its crisis response, including businesses and vulnerable residents. One member of staff for example was a super ward manager in one of our busiest wards dealing with some very complex cases, whilst volunteer driving for jubilee foodbank and performing his role within a statutory service function. There has been no member of staff unless through illness, who has been unable to work remotely or in the office throughout the whole of the pandemic so far.

Some of the roles that we have redeployed include:

Community Hub

Super ward managers, ward managers and deputies – a total of 38 people from nearly all service areas across the council have been involved with the Community Hub, including writing and configuring the software, preparing letters to all residents, taking calls, replying to emails and making deliveries. The Hub is a valuable source of support to our community and the feedback has been very positive.

Business support calls for grants

A team of more than 25 staff, including from HR, Economic Development, Harborough Innovation Centre, CMT Support, Democratic Services, Elections, Concierge, Regulatory Services, the Leisure Team and Revenue and Benefits, spent many hours making calls, sending emails and making contact through social media to businesses within our district to help them to apply for a grant.

Environmental crime patrol support

Our Civil Enforcement Officers have been key in helping their Environmental Services Colleagues patrolling the district looking for illegal fly tipping and dog fouling.

Support getting flats ready for homeless families

The Housing team, supported by the Facilities team, has done a great job in getting flats ready for homeless families in a really short timescale.

Foodbank and medicine drops in Lutterworth and Harborough

A number of staff have been working closely with our foodbanks; ensuring deliveries are made to our vulnerable residents. Teams supporting the foodbanks and medicine deliveries include Regulatory Services, HR, Strategic Planning, Development Management, Democratic Services, Elections and Parking.

Support for the Farmers Market

Help has been needed to cover the Market Hall and the Farmers market when that reopens and the Quick Response team have stepped in to help and are rostered to the end of the year to assist with the setting up of the market and social distancing.

Triage calls to vulnerable people in our community

Supporting the customer services team, staff from Elections, Concierge and the Economic Development teams have stepped in to help make calls to those listed as priority for vulnerable residents, checking if they need any further support.

Recovery Theme Groups

Ongoing support from numerous and various staff from right across the council are involved with the four themes to ensure the swift delivery by drawing on skills, expertise and experience.

5.26 Impact on service provision and decisions taken

In line with government guidance, free parking was approved by the Joint Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader and the Portfolio Holder on Council owned carparks for three months from 1 April 2020. This supported NHS workers, key workers, and those helping vulnerable people, and took into account health and safety concerns that were raised by officers and the public. The Council will keep this under review the re-introduction of parking charges is part of the Council's Recovery Plan which is referred to later in this report.

5.27 Closure of Businesses

The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 gave the Council the power to use enforcement powers to ensure that the restrictions are upheld. The Council's Regulatory and Licensing Teams have been leading on this work and providing guidance and support to ensure that businesses are aware of their obligations. Cross boundary and multi-agency working have been prevalent which has helped to support a consistent approach throughout Leicestershire and Rutland. The Team is also working with those same businesses as part of the Recovery Plan to ensure that those businesses that can and want to reopen on 15 June 2020 are able to.

5.28 Leisure Centres

On 20 March Market Harborough and Lutterworth Leisure Centres were closed following a period of ensuring social distancing and hygiene requirements were upheld. Following a request from the operator Everyone Active, financial support has been agreed to cover a portion of salary costs not being covered by the government's furlough scheme as well as the costs of two staff members maintaining equipment and providing other essential ongoing work for three months expiring on 30 June 2020. In addition, it has been agreed that management fee has been waived for this period. This decision was taken by the Joint Chief Executive (BJ) in consultation with the Leader and the Deputy Leader, following external advice from the Council's retained leisure consultant and external solicitor. Similar requests were made by Everyone Active to its other local authority clients.

5.29 Household Waste, Recycling and Grounds Maintenance

The Council's contractor FCC has continued to provide an excellent service by continuing to keep all environmental services operating during this period. Household waste, recycling collections and green waste collections have continued unaffected. Bulky waste collections were suspended in the first week of the lockdown, however, were reintroduced during week four.

The grounds maintenance and street cleansing was reduced to a basic service at the start of the lockdown period, protecting staff but also providing a pool of staff that could be used to ensure that the waste collection could continue to operate. The service has now been re-instated in full.

The Council has been working with FCC to ensure that their staff are protected as much as possible and are following Government guidance. Whilst there are concerns around social distancing these are being mitigated wherever possible. A system of "one in one out" was adopted at the depot and all staff were provided with the appropriate PPE to carry out their duties safely.

5.30 Elections

Regarding elections, Regulations postponed the Police and Crime Commissioners election until 6 May 2021 and local by-elections and other polls, either scheduled or which would otherwise arise before that date. The Council has taken the necessary steps to stand down preparations that were made.

5.31 Homelessness

Following government guidance, all rough sleepers have been offered and provided with housing by the homelessness team. In the early days of the crisis the team worked hard to rehouse those who were in accommodation such as the travel lodge that was closed with very little notice. As a result of this we do have homeless people being accommodated outside of the district. At the time of writing we had 16 households in temporary accommodation, 4 in self-contained accommodation and 12 in B& B provision. Of these 5 of them are being housed due to COVID-19 as we would not normally have a duty to provide accommodation to them.

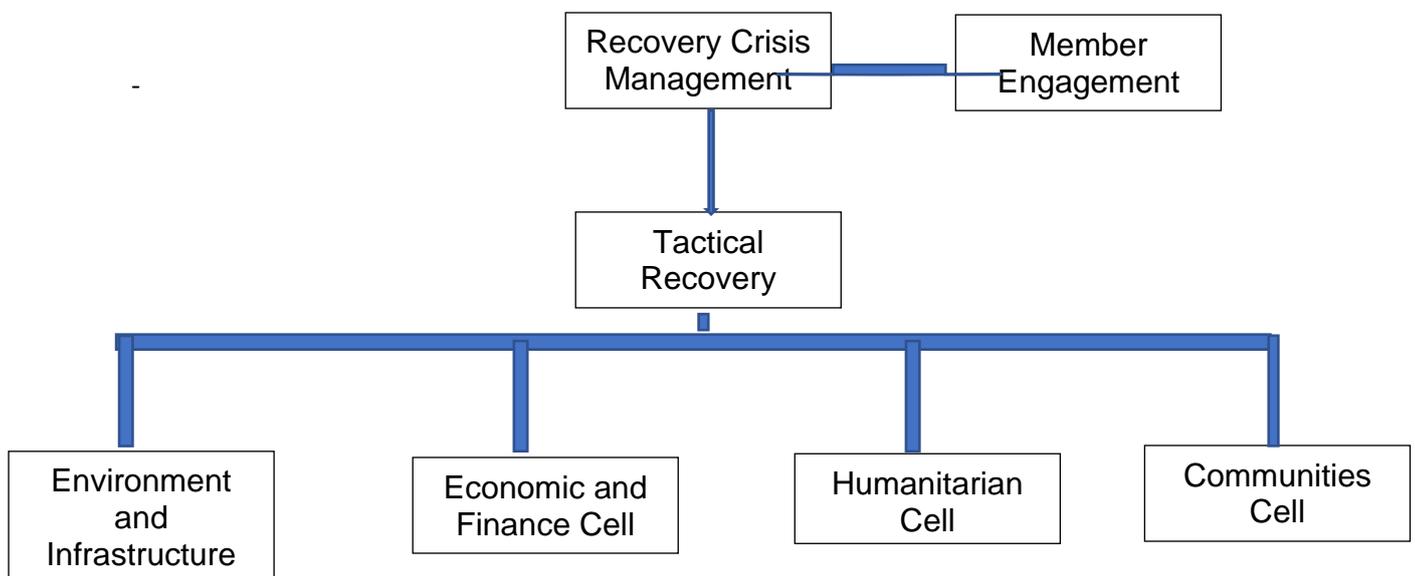
5.32 Other Services

The Council's Offices and Customer Services, Market Hall, play areas, tennis courts, bowls pavilions and public toilets were closed in accordance with Government Guidance. This situation has been kept under regular review by the TCG and some of these are now beginning to reopen.

5.33 RECOVERY

We are now in the recovery phase of the crisis and the structure of our groups outlined above has been refreshed to reflect this. The Recovery Crisis Management Group (CMG) and Recovery Tactical Crisis Group (RTCG) were established on 14th April 2020 with the aim of supporting recovery. There were some key themes identified that were based on the LRF model to aid recovery, these are displayed in the diagram below.

HDC Recovery structure



- 5.34 Recovery is the process of rebuilding and restoring following an emergency such as the COVID-19 outbreak. It can often take many months for localities to recover. It is unusual for such an emergency situation to effect the whole district, normally the recovery operation is quite localised following incidents such as fires, chemical leak etc. In the current situation it is likely to take many months to complete the recovery phase.
- 5.35 The approach to the recovery process would normally aim to return service delivery to the demand levels that previously existed. However, it is clear that the changes that have occurred over the last three months will have changed the demand levels and service delivery options so that there will be a “new normal” established.
- 5.36 There also needs to be recognition of the changes that have been made in service delivery and the recovery phase needs to capture the benefits that have been realised through different ways of working.
- 5.37 Each of these groups and subgroups have developed action plans, these have been through the TCG and RCMG, to ensure they are fit for purpose. The action plans are constantly reviewed and updated to reflect our communities’ needs and information coming from the Government around recovery. A lesson learnt log was started early in the processes and is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure we are applying any lessons learnt in response to recovery. We also ensure we are able to access all of the relevant local and national groups to ensure we share our experiences and learn from others in our approach.
- 5.38 The four themes cover all the areas of the recovery phase and their action plans are summarised below:

Humanitarian Theme Recovery Plan Summary

The Humanitarian Cell covers the following key areas

Support the welfare of people and communities affected by COVID-19.

- Safeguarding is critical in identifying and supporting the most vulnerable residents and through the community hub the number of cases and seriousness of them has risen considerably. 51 cases in the period from 5th March to 3rd June as apposed with 25 for the same period last year.
- The staff policies are being strengthened to support staff specifically regarding domestic violence and financial wellbeing
- This cell links into the Community Recovery Cell to support initiatives where appropriate and access resources and materials that can be accessed by officers as well as our community.

Agree prioritisation of remobilising services

- A list was established early in the crisis with which services, tasks and projects had been stopped or partially stopped as a direct impact of COVID-19 and the reasons. Some tasks had completely stopped mainly due to demand, job evaluation for example or replaced with a different function due to the response such as business grants, community hub.
- Team plans have been updated to include the list of services, tasks and projects with planned resume dates and has been fed into TEN and have been RAG rated to monitor progress. There are very few services that ceased for any period and the majority are already up and functioning or were run differently such as customer services, the remaining services not functioning are planned in. Some functions had to be restricted or suspended due to government instructions such as home visits and face to face public meetings.

Establishing memorial or other remembrance services in addition to supporting bereaved families.

- The council is following guidance from the LRF for the bereaved during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Funeral directors locally are operating and managing the national guidance of 10 people per ceremony
- The undertakers have taken the lead with the current amended funeral arrangements; no HDC officer currently attends to keep numbers low at this time.
- Welfare funerals have a robust process already in place, the volume per year is usually very low and can be managed remotely
- The chapel of Rest is currently closed due it being an indoor small space and therefore difficult to observe social distancing. The cemeteries are open as normal as they are an outdoor open space.

Developing and introducing HR policies using the learning from COVID-19 for example new flexible working scheme, revised home working policy etc

- An audit has been undertaken of all services areas to look at how services will function differently both in terms of approach and delivery and the impact on resources as home working will be continuing for the long term potentially permanently and there is no intention to return to how services were run mostly office based before COVID-19.
- This audit has enabled a roll out plan to be drawn up that addresses equipment and furniture requests on a priority basis.
- Redesign of services to include less face to face meetings, move to appointments, virtual meetings and appointments, an approach that has been suggested and welcomed by staff.

- Regular communications have been issued throughout to staff and members through the whole and will continue during the whole of the recovery. The engagement with staff has been critical and to ensure not only are they up to date but involved and informed at every stage which encourages positive engagement, commitment and is aiding a speedy and efficient recovery.
- Ensuring that staff receive training to support the new ways of working.

Engagement with elected members around remote working arrangements particularly virtual meetings and training and support requirements

- During this fast-changing environment, it is vital to keep members up to date with the new approaches to the way we need to work and are engaged.
- Virtual meetings are already in place and will continue to evolve with the familiarisation of technology but it's important to identify the requirement of working remotely and by working with the Leader and Shadow Leader we are able to establish equipment and training needs to enable more efficient working, explore cost savings through 'paper light' working, the use of electronic papers and documents and voting process
- An audit will be needed to identify the technology used by members and ensure the IT equipment is fit for purpose and support can be provided effectively by the IT team in the new virtual world.

Ensuring a comprehensive framework of workplace-based support is available to all staff through the recovery from the crisis including support for their mental and physical health and for their daily lives including childcare and other caring responsibilities they may have.

- Since the beginning of the pandemic the Wellbeing cell was set up to respond promptly to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure staff have health and well-being support during this difficult and unprecedented time.

A well-being response cell was initiated to:

- provide appropriate health and well-being support during the COVID-19 crisis.
- provide 'virtual' social activities.
- Help staff to keep in touch whilst working virtually and flexibly and help to adapt and return to the new normal as part of the recovery phase.
- The council benefits from a large team of qualified mental health first aiders who volunteer to make themselves available for colleagues to contact if they have concerns about their own mental health or that of a colleague. Prolonged homeworking can contribute to feelings of isolation, and less face to face contact makes it harder to identify potential issues quickly and offer support. As a result, stress levels and anxiety can increase in some who may struggle with adapting to the changes in the way we work or concerned about their health and that of their family.

Mental Health first aiders listen to and support colleagues, helping them to find appropriate guidance and advice.

A suite of learning resource has been created for staff to access remotely via an online toolkit. Modules on offer include: Coronavirus, managing remote workers, email stress, a healthy lifestyle and mental health awareness.

Regular support materials are provided in the weekly staff update to support home schooling, working from home, mental health and financial and wellbeing as well as social engagement by way of an HDC wellbeing Facebook page.

The LGA recently published the council's case study from the Wellbeing Cell as a great example of ongoing staff support during a very challenge time

Ensure the Council maintains compliance with current and new legislative requirements for health, safety and welfare including revised risk assessments, guidance, instruction, and training in relation to COVID-19 and government regulations.

Health and Safety underpins every aspect of the way we work, the way we interact with the public and resident and businesses. Risk assessments are completed prior to any activity taking place and updated considering changes in government guideline. The Health & Safety Officer and Facilities Officer meet regularly with the HR Manager to identify areas that need focus such as supporting the independent partners in the Symington building to re-open safely and close liaison and collaboration with partners, regular communication regarding the latest health and hygiene advise and working safely at home for the staff.

Community Theme Recovery Plan Summary

- 5.39 Partnership work with the community, charities and voluntary sector will continue to play a central part of recovery planning. Regular engagement and communication will be central to maintaining the strong partnerships a volunteer base that has built up over the last couple of months along with taking a partnership approach to challenges and problem solving.
- 5.40 To assist in preparation of the Community Recovery Plan the Council recently undertook a survey of the 70+ community groups known at our Hub and who have supported vulnerable people during the crisis. Just over 20 groups have responded to the survey, mainly but not exclusively from larger settlements. The Council has been unable to get a response from most groups suggesting they have now disbanded. The groups that responded have indicated that:
- They would like to continue to provide support during recovery phase and see a definite need.
 - They have around 673 active volunteers
 - They helped 751 residents in first week of June

All were all satisfied with the support provided by HDC with 72% rating support good to excellent.

- 5.41 The groups have also told us their key challenges and opportunities moving forward. We are currently analysing responses but concerns around mental health support and more formal volunteer management feature highly. We will continue to engage the community sector and provide regular email bulletins on funding, government guidance and service updates from HDC.
- 5.42 The community plan includes Housing and Homelessness with HDC engaged in homelessness prevention work with six other Leicestershire districts plus City. Key priorities for recovery include supporting Hospital discharge teams to ensure safe and appropriate housing is available to those leaving hospital. There is also work progressing to mitigate the impact of an anticipated spike in private rent evictions (currently no court action allowed until 23 August) as well as ensuring homeless households can access key services including mental health, domestic abuse and substance abuse. The group are also looking at barriers preventing homeless households moving on into longer term housing.
- 5.43 The work to support vulnerable and complex families is being led by the Harborough District Think Family Partnership, which HDC leads. It is made up of frontline professionals from Health, Education, Charities, and the Early Help service from LCC. This group has been coordinating services to ensure support is in place for the most vulnerable families as well as children and young people remaining at home or returning to school.
- 5.44 The Community Safety Partnership is supporting the reopening of the night - time economy (NTE). There are weekly meetings between Police, Fire and HDC Licensing and Community Safety Teams with local Street Pastors and PubWatch also engaged. The NTE includes pubs, clubs, leisure, restaurants, and takeaways open after 8pm. There is a strong focus on engaging, explaining and encouraging safe enjoyment of the NTE but high risk premises and potential flash points have been identified and steps are in place to ensure a presence on the streets and use enforcement powers where necessary. HDC are currently engaging businesses on their reopening plans and this work will only continue as the Government releases more guidance on this matter.

Economic and Finance Theme Recovery Plan Summary

- 5.45 A crucial aspect concerning the recovery of the Economy is to ensure that businesses have the financial support they need to sustain themselves and recover from the crisis. The Council are ensuring that any costs associated with this support are captured in the context of the Councils' Medium-Term Financial Strategy and national financial Frameworks.
- 5.46 It is important to ensure we provide business support to ensure the safe reopening of the District's town and other centres including the night-time

economy. The Plan has been supported by an understanding of the support businesses need for sustainable and safe reopening.

- 5.47 The planning work has sought to align inwards investment opportunities with the recovery plans and bring regeneration opportunities that are aligned with the recovery plans. It is also important to bring regular regeneration opportunities back online at the earliest opportunity to further support recovery.
- 5.48 The recovery framework also monitors and picks up sector specific support with tailored support provided as and when required. The Plan aims to bring regular operational arrangements (such as relating to the HIC and Grown on Space) back online at the earliest opportunity.
- 5.49 In terms of communications it is important to ensure that businesses are aware of the opportunities and advice available to them, together with their responsibilities and how to fulfil those.
- 5.50 This recovery plan also picks up the digital dimension. There is an awareness of the changing digital needs of the Business Sector. The Plan includes measures to support and promote digital development across the Harborough District.
- 5.51 Turning to outcomes, the Economic and Finance Plan aims to deliver a strongly recovering business sector across the District and to proactively act to support and promote digital development across the District. It is also important to ensure that businesses feel confident and supported as recovery gains momentum.
- 5.52 A further key outcome is that businesses have the right information to be able to take up and benefit from grant opportunities that can support their recovery and future prosperity. It is also a key objective to ensure that the public are confident and safe when using town and other centres across the District and that people are visiting and enjoying those centres.
- 5.53 Clearly it is important to ensure that growth in inward investment is maximised as a key output and that all associated regeneration re-commences at an early stage. A well-managed and sustainable financial plan is also a key output.

Town Centre Recovery Plan

- 5.54 The Plan includes a package of measures including, road closures, additional pavement markings and suspension of car parking to enable the public to social distance and feel confident and safe when using our reopened centres. Pavement markings have been placed at key pinch -point locations in town centres to remind the public to socially distance. Sanitizer stations have been located at key points around Market Harborough and Lutterworth Town Centres to reduce risk and further increase public confidence.

- 5.55 Regarding public transport the Plan aims to ensure that the public understand the rules around the use of public transport and ensure passengers feel safe when waiting.
- 5.56 The Plan includes the innovative Harborough Helpers who are present in the town centres of Market Harborough and Lutterworth, clearly visible wearing high visibility clothing, to further support the safe operation of businesses and the public in maintaining social distancing outside retail premises. The helpers also provide advice and reassurance for the public enjoying the town centres and area available to answer any questions or queries the public may have.
- 5.57 Advice and support is also on offer to businesses to assist them in meeting their obligations and thereby reduce risk.
- 5.58 Communications are at the heart of the Town Centre Plan. The Plan ensures that businesses are aware of the opportunities and advice available to them and their responsibilities. The communication strategy also ensure that residents know that town and other centres are open for business and feel confident to visit their local centres. A further important element is to ensure residents understand how re-opening will impact on them. An important part of the communication strategy has been and is to ensure clear messages and advance notification are both available ahead of the reintroduction of car parking charges. It has been and will continue to be important to ensure that communications are fully aligned with those of our partners.
- 5.59 In terms of finance, the cost of the delivery of the reopening Plan is being managed and monitored in the context of the Councils MTFs and national financial frameworks. Costs are being recovered where possible from national funding sources, such as the Government's Reopening High Streets Fund.
- 5.60 Turning to outcomes, the Plan aims to ensure that the public feel safe when visiting our town and other centres. The measures set out in the Plan encourage the public to respect social distancing guidelines. The Plan is in place to ensure businesses feel supported where needed and confident to re-open. An important part of the Plan is to ensure that businesses are meeting their obligations to enable social distancing in their premises.
- 5.61 A key output is to ensure that our communications campaigns, help and advice meet the needs of the public and businesses. A well- managed financial plan is crucial, and it is also important that we understand the impacts the provisions of the Plan are having through monitoring and review where needed. It is important that operational interventions evolve and adapt, and circumstances needs and guidance changes and evolves.

Harborough Market

- 5.62 Regarding the Harborough Market a plan has been put in place that will ensure the staggered and gradual reopening of different parts and elements of the Market Hall over time and as circumstances allow. At the heart of the Plan has been and is the need of the market traders returning to business. In the

light of this the Plan has sought to put in place guidance, advice and measures to assist and help the traders to get back to work.

- 5.63 The Market Plan also ensures that the public can confidently and safely access and make full use of the re-opened market and enjoy it. Further phases of the reopening of the market are included in the Plan and will be given effect to as circumstances and conditions allow.
- 5.64 The outcomes of the Market Plan are focused around supporting and enabling the re-opening of a vibrant and well used market. That the market traders supported and confident to trade and welcome their customers. That the public feel safe and confident in using the market and enjoy the experience as much as possible. To put in place a gradual and stepped reopening of aspects of the full market offer with good trader take-up and usage by the public.

Environment and Infrastructure Theme Recovery Plan Summary

- 5.65 The focus here is to identify and put in place changes to the local environment and infrastructure to support safe economic recovery.
- 5.66 Measures are aligned with the Government's phased recovery plan; a significant step of which allowed for the reopening of non-essential retail from 15 June. To plan for this and to support local retailers and businesses and provide safe shopping environments within our town and village centres, a number of changes to our road and parking arrangements have been put in place in conjunction with Leicestershire County Council Highways. Pavements have been widened through pedestrianisation schemes and through the suspension of 'on-street' car parking. Such schemes are designed to enable social distancing and provide space for shoppers to queue safely outside shops, where social distancing requirements limit the number of customers in each shop at any one time. Schemes were implemented on 13,14 and 15th of June ready for non-essential shops to reopen from 15th June. Monitoring arrangements have been put in place and the success of these schemes will continue to be monitored to ensure objectives are met.
- 5.67 Further measures have also included the safe and gradual reopening of tennis courts, bowls clubs and some public toilets with ongoing consideration of further reopening also iteratively underway, in line with government guidance as it emerges and develops moving forward. A process has also been put in line to consider applications to extend construction hours to enable construction sites to continue to operate safely, again in line with government guidance.
- 5.68 Monitoring the economic impact of the crisis on the development industry and resulting changes to land use will be a significant focus over the medium and long term. Such monitoring information will be vital in planning for ongoing recovery over the longer term.
- 5.69 The initial focus has been on our workforce and the reopening of the Town Centres. The reopening of the night-time economy will be the next key piece

of work, but we are retaining focus of the medium- and long-term needs surrounding recovery as well.

- 5.70 There is also recognition around the opportunity the recovery provides to look at how we provide services and ensure we are focusing on the needs of our district but considering the considerable cost of the COVID-19 crisis.
- 5.71 The Recovery process is on target and we are responding to the community's needs. We have asked a third party Entec SI to overview our response and approach to recovery. This will ensure that we are considering all aspects that we need to and are applying best practice to our recovery processes.

Next Steps/What next?

- 5.72 The vast majority of Council services were not suspended or stopped and continued to be available to the public to some degree during the lockdown period supported by staff working remotely in many instances made possible by the resilience of the Council's ICT platform.
- 5.73 The TCG and SCG have monitored services closely to ensure that as soon as national guidance allows that there is a plan in place to restore services that have been stopped or where some aspects of service provision may have been reduced because of social distancing concerns (for example site visits/meetings).
- 5.74 Alternative means of carrying out meetings have been utilised utilising video conferencing technologies and including holding remote committee meetings utilising MS Teams. These have largely proven effective and work is continuing to iron out any minor teething issues and ensure that the Council can continue to consider reports and take decisions in a way that is safe for all parties involved, complies with government guidance and allows maximum openness and transparency to the public.

Performance Management

- 5.75 The Council's performance controls have come back into full operation. This means that Key Performance Indicator data and Key Activity updates will continue to be collected and reported with the usual frequency (quarterly reports to the Cabinet and Scrutiny). The Performance Improvement Board resumed its monthly schedule of meetings from Tuesday 23 June 2020.
- 5.76 Risk and Opportunity Management will continue to be reported in the same manner, and with the same frequency, as before: quarterly reports to the Cabinet and the Governance and Audit Committee.

Emerging issues

- 5.77 Homelessness is an area of concern coming out of the crisis; this is due to job losses and people's ability to pay their bills etc. Landlords have been unable to evict anybody during the crisis and as this is lifted, we could see a spike in

households being made homeless. The Council is mitigating this by working with housing providers and through our preventative approach.

5.78 Through the Community Hub we have built a strong community network of support and volunteers, we want to be able to maintain and enhance this through a partnership approach to the needs of our communities. Discussions have started around the future needs and roles of these groups but want to ensure we build on these relationships going forward.

5.79 The mental health impacts of the crisis are still unknown but are expected to rise in adverse mental health and want to ensure we can respond. Through the crisis we have seen increased safeguarding referrals and domestic violence. We continue to work in partnership to respond to this, but more effort will be required in these areas of work going forward.

6 Legal Issues

6.1 As set out in the body of this report

7 Resource Issues

7.1 As at the 17th June 2020, the forecast outturn direct net expenditure of the impact of COVID 19 on the Council is £1.6 million. A detailed analysis is shown in Appendix A . A summary of the impact is set out in Table 1 below.

Estimated financial impact of Covid 19 epidemic on HDC					Table 1	
Service	Additional Expenditure		Lost Income £000	Planned savings now unachievable? £000	Tax Loss £000	Total £000
	Revenue £000	Capital £000				
Finance	71	27	58	60		216
Communities	804	0	100	0		904
Regulatory	118	0	517	40		675
Planning & Regeneration	7	0	109	62		178
Corporate	50	0	0	0		50
Gross Service Cost & Loss	1,050	27	784	162		2,023
Tax Loss					670	670
Total Gross Cost to HDC						2,693
Government Support (Grant)						(1,050)
Net Cost to HDC						1,643

7.2 The Council currently has a General Fund (Unallocated) Reserve of £6.9 million; if it receives no further support from the government the Net Cost noted above will have to be met directly from the Reserve.

7.3 Members will recall that they approved a one year budget for 2020/21 at the Council meeting on 24 February 2020. The budget report referenced to the 10 February 2020 Cabinet budget report which included the following commentary:

Paragraph 3.9 “The revenue budget is proposed to be balanced by drawing down reserves of £1.985 million in 2020/21...”

Paragraph 6.10”...for 2021/22 onwards. The S151 Officer advises that it is not sustainable for the Council to continue to draw down the same amount of reserves being used to balance the 2020/21 budget over the longer term.”

- 7.4 To illustrate the impact of the £1.6 million net COVID 19 spend on the Council’s reserves; if the currently approved 2020/21 budget is rolled forward with only minor annual increases for inflation, and no changes to central or local government financing.
- 7.5 The Table below shows that regardless of whether a) all reserves are considered or only the b) general Fund (Unallocated) Reserve that the Council is facing a potential future deficit budget position. In respect of applying:

All reserves, a deficit budget position occurs in 2024/25 (shown in A in the Table below)

the General Fund only, a deficit budget position occurs a year earlier in 2023/24. This assumes that Earmarked Reserves are used to finance other service-related expenditure and not to support the overall financial sustainability of the Council.

Estimated reserves impact of Covid 19 epidemic on HDC				Table 2				
				2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
				£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Current 2020/21 Budget - rolled forward to 2024/25								
Forecast Budget Gap to be Financed from Reserves	237	2,150	2,397	2,660	2,896			
Reserves								
- General Fund (Unallocated) Reserves	(6,899)							
- Earmarked Reserves	(4,500)							
Net Reserves	(11,162)	(9,012)	(6,615)	(3,955)	(1,059)			
(A) Current 2020/21 Budget + self-financed Covid-19 expenditure; financed from ALL Reserves								
Forecast Budget Gap to be Financed from Reserves	237	2,150	2,397	2,660	2,896			
Forecast Covid-19 expenditure	1,643							
Total expenditure	1,880	2,150	2,397	2,660	2,896			
All Reserves								
- General Fund (Unallocated) Reserves	(6,899)							
- Earmarked Reserves	(4,500)							
Net Reserves	(9,519)	(7,369)	(4,972)	(2,312)	584			
(A) Current 2020/21 Budget + self-financed Covid-19 expenditure; financed from General Fund (Unallocated) Reserves only								
Total expenditure	1,880	2,150	2,397	2,660	2,896			
- General Fund (Unallocated) Reserves	(6,899)							
Net General Fund (Unallocated) Reserve	(5,019)	(2,869)	(472)	2,188	5,084			

7.6 As 2020/21 progresses the direct impact of Covid-19 on the Councils available resources will crystalize; however it is recommended that the Council continues to lobby government to ensure that the impact of Covid-19 does not fall onto the local Council Tax payer.

8 Equality Implications

8.1 The safeguarding of our most vulnerable residents has been paramount throughout the response to the outbreak. The Council has adapted its reporting procedures to ensure that safeguarding measures are still implemented despite most of the staff operating remotely. The community hub has ensured that our vulnerable communities are supported and the risk to those communities reduced.

9 Impact on the Organisation

9.1 The Council has been responding to the COVID-19 crisis and focussing on the delivery of critical services and additional services which have been required to meet local need. This has resulted in resources being diverted from corporate plan activities and further work will be required to fully assess the impact of this on the future delivery of the Corporate Plan.

10 Community Safety Implications

10.1 The nature of lockdown on the community has the potential to increase domestic abuse, neighbour disputes and noise nuisance as residents spend more time at home in close proximity. Working with our partner agencies support has been provided and where necessary enforcement action has been taken to remedy situations.

11. Carbon Management Implications

11.1 There are Carbon Management benefits which have been identified from reduced emissions and these are being addressed in the Environment and Infrastructure theme in the recovery plan.

12. Risk Management Implications

12.1 There is a specific risk register for COVID-19 response.

13. Consultation

13.1 The relevant portfolio holders have been consulted.

14. Options Considered

14.1 The report seeks to outline actions that have been taken and highlight the principles of the recovery plan, therefore no options have been considered.

15. Background Papers

15.1 Not applicable – Report for Information Only

Previous report(s): None

Information Issued Under Sensitive Issue Procedure:

Ward Members Notified:

Appendices: *list any appendices here including title and filename in brackets (e.g. Performance Data 2010 (perfdata.doc)).*

Appendix A: *Detailed analysis – exempt by virtue of paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972*