



**Cabinet**

**Tuesday, 8 December 2020**

**Covid 19: Response and Recovery**

## **Report of the Chief Executive**

### **Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Borough Wide Leadership Councillor S J Robinson**

#### **1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1. Following the report of the Chief Executive to Cabinet on 12 May 2020, this report is to update the Cabinet on work completed to date on response and recovery due to the Covid 19 pandemic.
- 1.2. The report is not intended to provide an update on the financial impact of Covid 19 on the Council; this has been provided in other reports to Councillors in September and November 2020.
- 1.3. This report, and its appendices, covers both the internal work (that which relates directly to Council services) and external work (what has been done to support the local economy and community). The external work includes the work of the Nottinghamshire Local Resilience Forum, which the Council has been an active and leading participant in.
- 1.4. The report also reflects the fact that despite the ongoing unprecedented challenge we face with Covid 19, the Council has continued to progress some of our key strategic projects including the leisure centre and office development at Chapel Lane and the Crematorium.
- 1.5. The report also details at Appendix B the Covid Business Grants Support Policy linked to the council area coming under Tier 3 and then National Covid Restrictions. The details of the grants were agreed following national guidance and discussions across all the districts in Nottinghamshire and in consultation with both of the Portfolio Holders for Finance and Business and Economic Growth. The scheme was launched on 13 November 2020. The Chief Executive and S151 Officer signed off the scheme as a delegated decision under Urgency Powers within the Council's Constitution in order that the delivery of the scheme be achieved without delay.

## 2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet notes:

- a) the work of the officers of the Council and partners in responding to and supporting the recovery from Covid 19; and
- b) the terms of the Covid Business Grants Support Policy.

## 3. Reasons for recommendation

- 3.1. This report is an update on the work done by the Council in responding to and supporting recovery due to the Covid 19 pandemic. It is important to reflect on the work that has been done, but also to consider the future and the priorities for the Council over the next one to two years.
- 3.2. The report is correct at the time of writing but as we have experienced, the situation can change quickly. It is important, therefore, that we remain flexible and responsive to these new challenges and the report reflects the need to do this.

## 4. Supporting information

- 4.1. The report presented to Cabinet in May 2020, provided an update on the work done by the Council in response to the impact of Covid 19. This included the closure of some facilities (contact points, leisure and community centres), the distribution of business rates grants and the redeployment of staff to support the continued delivery of frontline services.
- 4.2. Since May, the Council has continued to adapt and respond to the changing regulations on Covid 19. The restrictions in place were gradually lifted and then reintroduced in recent weeks in response to rising number of cases in Nottinghamshire and then the country as a whole. The following sets out the changes in regulation in chronological order since the previous report in May 2020:

**Table 1**

<b>National lockdown measures begin to ease</b>	
15 June	non-essential retail reopens
4 July	hair dressers/barbers and hospitality industry reopens
11 July	outdoor pools can reopen
13 July	Beauty salons (restricted to treatments not involving high risk areas e.g. face), nail bars, tattoo and massage studios, physical therapy businesses and spas can reopen
25 July	Leisure centres, Indoor pools and gyms can reopen
13 August	Additional close contact services able to reopen
24 September	Rule of 6 introduced and pubs/restaurant closures at 10pm
<b>New Tier system announced (12 October)</b>	
14 October	Nottingham and Nottinghamshire enters Tier 2:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No meeting indoors with people from outside your household (unless in support bubble) including in restaurants/bars</li> </ul>
30 October	<p>Nottingham and Nottinghamshire enters Tier 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal care services closed</li> <li>• All hospitality venues to close unless they are serving a substantial meal</li> <li>• No meeting indoors or outdoors (in private garden or public venue e.g. pub) with people from outside your household (unless in your support bubble)</li> <li>• Alcohol sales from off licence premises prohibited after 9pm</li> <li>• Betting shops, car boot sales and auction houses must close.</li> <li>• Indoor entertainment and tourism venues must close, except for ice-skating rinks, cinemas, concert halls, and theatres.</li> <li>• Saunas and steam rooms must close.</li> <li>• Leisure and sporting facilities can remain open. It is strongly advised that indoor group exercise classes (including dance and fitness classes) should not take place.</li> </ul>
<b>5 November</b>	<b>National Lockdown, for four weeks overriding the Tier 3 measures</b>

4.3. In September and October, the number of cases began to rise in some areas and local lock down measures were put in place across the country. In response to this, the Government introduced the three-tier system from 14 October. Due to the infection levels in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire at the time, the area was placed in Tier 2. However, infection rates and hospital admissions continued to rise and so the area was placed in Tier 3 on 30 October. This meant (as outlined above) further restrictions some of which were national and some locally agreed restrictions e.g. no alcohol sales after 9pm from off licenses.

4.4. Despite efforts to avoid it, increasing levels across the country and projections of peaks higher than in the first lock down, Government placed the country in a national lockdown on 5 November. It is intended that this will end on 2 December, but this will depend on decreasing rates across the country. If the national lockdown is lifted areas will be placed back into a tier system. At the time of writing, it is not known which tier Nottingham and Nottinghamshire will be placed in or if the tiers will be the same as previously, but plans are being progressed to ensure we are as ready as we can be for what comes next.

### **Impact of Covid 19**

4.5. The impact of Covid 19 on the global, national and local economy is significant, but the full impact is not yet known as business support packages currently in place, e.g. furlough, could be delaying future unemployment challenges and restrictions remain in place for the foreseeable future. Areas across the world continue to be in local or national lockdowns.

- 4.6. The D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership has pulled together a group of analysts from the local universities, colleges, local authorities, business groups and Government to help understand the [impact of Covid 19 on our local economy](#).
- 4.7. Data on this is included in Appendix C however some headlines for Rushcliffe are:
- -38.1% decline in Gross Value Added<sup>1</sup> in Quarter 2;
  - 183% increase in unemployment claimants when comparing February (1030) with August 2020 (2480);
  - 30% of the employed population are furloughed (July 2020); and
  - Across D2N2 (Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire) the claimant rate in September 2020 is 80,570; the last peak was in September 2011 when the count was 54,710.
- 4.8. Prior to the second national lockdown, business indicators had started to look more positive as the manufacturing and service sector saw an increase in demand in August 2020. However, the second national lockdown will have an impact on that, but data on that impact is not yet available.
- 4.9. The D2N2 Growth Hub have also done a business survey to further understand the impact of Covid 19 on local businesses. In August:
- 82% of respondents were trading;
  - 62% furloughed staff (compared to 71% in the period from April to August), and 13% made staff redundant (compared to 6% in period from April to August); and
  - 55% of respondents report a severe decline in sales (over 50% decline).
- 4.10. A key area of concern from the growth hub survey is businesses reporting an issue with cash flow prior to the second national lock down. It is unclear at this stage what the impact of this lockdown will have on viability for those businesses.

### **Local Resilience Forum**

- 4.11. The Local Resilience Forum (LRF) is a partnership of all local agencies that have a part to play in planning for and responding to major emergencies. Partners include 'blue-light' emergency services, local authorities, health services and others. The purpose of the LRF is to ensure effective multi-agency collaboration in the delivery of duties under the Civil Contingencies Act. Alongside this, the aim of the LRF is to establish and maintain effective multi-agency arrangements to respond to major incidents and emergencies, and to minimise the impact of those incidents on the public, property and environment of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.

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<sup>1</sup> GVA is one way of measuring economic output which is used by researchers to measure the contribution made to the economy by individual producers, industries, sectors or regions. The figure is a quantitative assessment of the value of goods and services produced minus the cost of inputs and materials used in the production process.

- 4.12. The multi-agency Local Resilience Forum response to any emergency is led by a Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) chaired by the Police. The aim of the Covid 19 SCG is to establish and maintain effective multi-agency arrangements to respond to the pandemic. The group have been meeting since 13 February 2020. The agreed Covid 19 principles of the SCG are:
- Saving and protecting human life;
  - Containing the emergency – limiting its escalation or spread and mitigating its impacts;
  - Providing the public with proportionate advice and information, in line with national advice and guidance;
  - Restoring life to a new normality, for as many people as possible, as fast and as fairly as possible;
  - Ensuring plans are in place to maintain normal services at an appropriate level should the situation escalate;
  - Reducing harm; and
  - Protecting the health and safety of all staff.
- 4.13. Planning work is informed by the government's revised 'Reasonable Worst Case Scenario' (RWCS) Planning Assumptions. These are a scenario to use as a basis for planning rather than a prediction of what will happen. Specific details from the RWCS have been made available to those colleagues and partners who lead local planning work for Covid 19 response and recovery.
- 4.14. The management structure for Covid 19 response is shown at Appendix A.
- 4.15. Officers from Rushcliffe Borough Council have been active participants in the weekly Strategic Coordinating Group and Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG). With a range of officers sitting on the subgroups set up following pre-prepared LRF plans and to focus on key work areas. Rushcliffe Borough Council currently co- chair the Local Authorities group to help lead and shape the work.
- 4.16. Due to the long running nature of this incident response and recovery work is running concurrently. The recovery structure was stood up in May, and both structures and set of staff coordinate their activities through the SCG.

## **Recovery**

- 4.17. The LRF Recovery Co-ordinating Group (RCG) was established with the strategic aim to support Nottinghamshire communities, businesses and public services, to recover from the impacts of Covid 19. The group is also aiming to advance long term opportunities for better physical and mental health, tackling climate change, better health outcomes and founding a sustainable fast-growing local economy. The recovery strategy is based on key themes of:
- health and care;
  - humanitarian and community;
  - business and economy; and
  - transport and infrastructure.

- 4.18. The initial focus of the strategy is on immediate recovery with a view to longer term renewal across the City and the County. This is accompanied by an Action Plan for delivery by partners working together through recovery subgroups. The LRF management structure for Covid 19 recovery is shown at Appendix A.
- 4.19. To support the response and recovery at a Rushcliffe level, the Council established groups of relevant officers to lead and coordinate this work. Initially this was a Covid Internal Response Team which then became a Covid Internal Recovery Team. A Covid External recovery team was also established. Both of these groups report into a Covid Executive Management Team meeting, which currently meets on a weekly basis.

### **Track and trace and mass vaccinations**

- 4.20. In addition to the national contact tracing service the County Council now undertake further telephone work with potential case contacts and work is underway as part of the Contain framework for district and borough councils to provide additional support and information to maximise the overall contact tracing effort.
- 4.21. The Council will support this activity more directly in more complex outbreak settings for example in the hospitality sector however the data continues to show that general community spread particularly amongst households remains the biggest issue. In addition to the standard testing programme it has also been announced that the more rapid tests or Lateral Flow Tests will be made available for Public Health Directors to deploy. The approach currently being adopted by the County Council is likely to involve the rolling out of such tests to key cohorts and groups in a very targeted way unlike the mass testing that has been taking place in Liverpool.
- 4.22. There has been significant coverage in the media about a mass vaccination programme using the recently developed vaccines some of which are still to be fully tested and approved for use. This will be a significant programme of activity that is likely to commence before the end of the year and is being led by the NHS but with the full support of the LRF given the scale of the task. It is understood that priority will be given to the elderly and vulnerable groups and those working in the health and care sector before a tiered roll out to the rest of the population next year.

### **RBC internal response/recovery group**

- 4.23. The Internal response/recovery group is in place to ensure the continued operation of the Council to support things such as the redeployment of staff, ensuring the Arena, Depot and other Council work places are covid secure, introducing necessary new policies and procedures for managing and supporting staff, managing the closure of Council owned community buildings and parks etc (as required) and supporting staff to work remotely.
- 4.24. With immediate effect at the end of March, all staff that could were encouraged to work from home, Rushcliffe was in a strong position to support this with the

IT systems already in place to support remote working. In addition, all face to face meetings were cancelled including council meetings. These are now operating via Zoom and Teams and work is well underway to implement a hybrid meeting solution. This would enable people to access meetings remotely if they wish to or attend in person if they are able to.

- 4.25. The Arena has remained open for officers to work from through the pandemic but use has been restricted to 40 desks (there are 120 available in total) which have to be booked. This helps ensure social distancing can be maintained and the Arena is a Covid secure environment. In addition, the desk booking system supports track and trace should there be a positive case.
- 4.26. The Council have maintained a high level of service delivery since the start of the pandemic, shifting resources where required. To date, the direct impact of Covid 19 on the Council in terms of staff sickness or those self-isolating has been, of the approx. 260 employees:
- nine employees have had Covid 19; and
  - 56 self-isolating (this includes those that isolated and continued to work and those who did not work).
- 4.27. There has been an increase in demand in many areas including Environmental Health who have supported and enforced business compliance through the numerous changes in regulation (as outlined in table 1). Increased demand has also been seen in Revenues, Benefits and Finance supporting the payment of grants to businesses and residents. In addition, the waste and recycling teams have seen an increase in the waste collected due to most of us being at home much more than ever before:
- Glass recycling tonnage collected average is around 250 tonnes per month but is now at 300 tonnes; and
  - Tonnages in grey and blue bins increased by around 10%.
- 4.28. Due to the national restrictions the leisure centres were closed from the end of March 2020 until 25 July 2020. The centres were once again closed due to National lockdown in place from 5 November. The significant financial impact of this has been covered in other reports. Officers from the Council are working closely with colleagues from Parkwood and Mitie to support the safe reopening of the leisure centres. This has included regular meetings and site visits during lockdown to discuss re-opening plans and phased re-introductions of sports as guided by national governing bodies Discussions were held with the indoor bowling club and a decision made to cancel their bowling season to allow for easier use of the area to accommodate larger group classes. Officers have continued to carry out checks when open on cleanliness and compliance in line with with covid secure workplaces and have been receiving regular reports on usage, customer feedback and plans on how certain age groups can be encouraged to return as in certain age groups memberships remain frozen and are yet to be re-activated. Customer feedback has also been regularly reviewed through social media channels. The Council was successful in obtaining Sport England funding to appoint Knight Kavanage and Page as a specialist

consultancy firm to support the work we were doing with our leisure providers, provide challenge and industry specific knowledge. KKP have recently highlighted some of the work Rushcliffe have been doing as an exemplar of good practice when comparing with other councils they are also supporting.

- 4.29. Performance reporting has been updated to highlight areas where it is anticipated performance targets will be missed and these are reported on to the Executive Management Team and the Corporate Overview Group quarterly.

### **RBC external recovery group**

- 4.30. The objectives of the external recovery group are:

- Focus on the economic recovery of Rushcliffe, ensuring the right support for businesses aligned to the work of the D2N2 LEP Response Board;
- Support businesses to re-open in line with Government guidelines – advice to open and trade safely;
- Explore opportunities to lead and support a green economic recovery, working with business to understand how their working practices have changed and how this can be maintained in the long term;
- Support our residents/community and identify ways to harness the community engagement/empowerment; and
- Regular and consistent communication on all aspects of recovery work to the local community and businesses.

- 4.31. Appendix C provides more detail on the work of the external recovery group including the support provided to businesses and the local community. This includes:

- Setting up a dedicated business support webpage which has received over 14,000 views;
- Hosting virtual business networking and ‘ask the expert’ webinars;
- ‘Reach Rushcliffe’ funding to support local initiatives that aim to tackle loneliness and social isolation;
- More than 350 Environmental Health visits providing advice on being Covid compliant;
- Rent holidays for some commercial tenants; and
- Supporting the safe re-opening of local markets including offering rent free periods for stall holders.

- 4.32. To support councils with the safe reopening of their high streets funding was allocated from the European Regional Development Fund for specific activities including increased signage, business support and public information/awareness campaigns. Rushcliffe was allocated £106,208 for this and this has supported activity to date including:

- The appointment of a Covid 19 Communications and Information Officer;
- High Street Ambassadors to provide assurance and advice in town centres;



- Temporary changes to the public realm including the implementation of one-way systems;
- Increased social distancing signage in town centres;
- Two business support programmes delivered by external consultants; and
- A shop local/shop safe PR campaign.

### **Finance and business grants**

- 4.33. Finance updates have been provided to Council and Cabinet (in September and November 2020) and these have reflected the level of grants provided to local businesses as part of the Small Business Grant Fund, Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant and the Local Authority Discretionary Grant Fund.
- 4.34. Further business support grants were announced as part of the Tier system and subsequently for the national lock down. The application form to apply for these was made available on Wednesday, 11 November and is planned to close on 27 November. One application form is available and once a business applies the application will be assessed to see which grants they are entitled to (tier 2, 3 and national lock down). Appendix B details the overall policy for Covid Business Support Grants agreed with both of the Portfolio Holders for Finance and Business and Economic Growth. The scheme was launched on 13 November. The Chief Executive and S151 Officer signed off the scheme as a delegated decision under Urgency Powers within the Council's Constitution in order that the delivery of the scheme be achieved without delay.
- 4.35. At the time of writing, the Council has made approximately 500 payments amounting to £1.7m (total funds available of £3.9m). The intention is to passport as much financial support to those businesses in need as quickly as possible. This is as well as the previous discretionary and mandatory grant schemes where in excess of £19m was paid to over 1,500 businesses.
- 4.36. With regards to Council Tax Support, we have committed in excess of £0.441m in Hardship Fund allocations, i.e. circa 2,600 payments and 86% of the £0.515m budget.
- 4.37. The Council is also mindful of the impact on both business rates and council tax collection. Data to 16 October 2020, shows collection rates for Council Tax has reduced by 0.9% equating to approximately £0.796m of cash not received. Business Rates are currently behind by £0.57m (2.57%), although £0.6m of this relates to a newly rated property. The aforementioned reductions in cash received will create a deficit and a burden on future income streams albeit the County Council will take a significant proportion of the Council Tax deficit. Recent government announcements mean this deficit can now be spread over three years and this should reduce the burden in each year, nonetheless the burden will still be there.
- 4.38. The Test and Trace scheme entitles eligible individuals to a Test and Trace Support Payment or discretionary support payment of £500 and aims to support people on low incomes who are unable to work from home if they are told to

self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace and will lose income as a result. The Council went live with the scheme on 9 October 2020. The scheme will last until 31 January 2021, and Rushcliffe received funding of £30k for the main scheme and £18k for the discretionary scheme along with £24k for the set-up and administering the scheme for the four months it is in place. Additional funding can be requested only for the main scheme. At the time of writing 150 claims have been received, 37 main scheme payments (totalling £18,500) and 27 discretionary scheme payments (totalling £13,500) have been made and 64 applications rejected.

### **Future Challenge**

- 4.39. As covered in other reports to Cabinet and Council the pandemic has had a significant impact on the Council's budget. The anticipated budget gap caused by the pandemic is partially offset by additional government grants and in-year efficiencies with an overall net in-year position of £0.244m budget gap. This position does not take into account the effects of the implementation of further restrictions from 14 October 2020, nor does it include potential income from the reimbursement of lost fees and charges. It is likely that income levels will not return to pre-Covid levels for some time and, therefore, the Council must ensure it can support the shortfall. The Council's MTFs in March will cover the position going forward and the impact on the Council's revenue and capital budgets and reserves.
- 4.40. The pandemic has highlighted some new ways of working for the Council, most notably with the majority of staff working from home for most, if not all, of the week. Whilst this creates its own challenges for staff engagement and morale, it has also been very positive for many reporting a better work/life balance and a positive impact on the environment with reduced car use. Officers are, therefore, considering evolving ways of working for the future to build on the opportunity presented by the pandemic. In response to the budget challenges, the Council is also working proactively to identify efficiencies across the Council and opportunities to deliver in new and different ways to help support financial sustainability.
- 4.41. The future of the leisure industry remains uncertain with the five centres in Rushcliffe currently closed due to the national lockdown. Financial support has been provided to Parkwood to ensure their continued viability. It is unclear what impact the continued need for social distancing, and so reduced capacity, and the extended period of closure will have in the medium to long term on the leisure industry. Officers from the Council will continue to work closely with Parkwood and Mitie to support them with this as much as we can.
- 4.42. The pandemic has had a significant impact on our high streets with retail and hospitality being forced to close for extended periods. Business support grants and furlough have provided much needed support but the longer-term issue of consumer confidence and an increased shift to online will mean the impact of Covid 19 will be felt for some time to come. The Council will continue to take a proactive approach to supporting our businesses both on and off the high street. The Local Growth Boards established in areas of the Borough will be used to

engage with partners to help shape a sustainable future for Rushcliffe's high streets and economy.

- 4.43. In terms of future plans, Appendix C sets those out in more detail. Throughout the pandemic, the Council has had to redeploy staff in response to significant increases in demand in some areas. However, this has not currently impacted on the delivery of key corporate projects including the leisure and office development at Chapel Lane, Abbey Road and the Crematorium. Whilst there have been delays to some of these, this is due to the pandemic rather than an internal capacity issue. Officers will continue to progress these projects along with others as outlined in the appendices.

## **5. Alternative options considered and reasons for rejection**

This is an update report on the work done in response to the Covid 19 pandemic. For the different areas of work different options were considered by Officers and Councillors as required. The response and recovery will continue to be flexible to be able to respond to changes in regulations.

## **6. Risks and uncertainties**

Covid in itself creates much risk for the Council both in its ability to deliver its corporate priorities and the impact on the Council's budget.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1. Financial Implications**

These are covered in the report particularly paragraphs 4.33 to 4.39.

### **7.2. Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications associated with this report, decisions have been taken in accordance with the constitution.

### **7.3. Equalities Implications**

The pandemic has had a disproportionate economic impact on some people including young people. This impact is being considered in the recovery work with activity being targeted across Rushcliffe, Nottinghamshire and the wider D2N2 area as required.

### **7.4. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications**

While the pandemic has had an impact on crime and disorder, most notably an increase in reports of domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour in some parks/open spaces, there are no crime and disorder implications associated with the contents of this report.

## 8. Link to Corporate Priorities

Quality of Life	The response and recovery from Covid 19 is in place to ensure we maintain the quality of life for our residents.
Efficient Services	<p>In response to Covid 19, staff have had to be redeployed to ensure essential services for our residents could be maintained.</p> <p>The pandemic has had a significant impact on Council budgets and, therefore, a review will be required of service delivery across the whole Council to support further efficiencies.</p>
Sustainable Growth	<p>The pandemic has had a significant impact on our businesses and, therefore, a package of support (from national and local government) has been put in place to support those businesses who have been most impacted.</p> <p>We will continue to work with our partners to support our businesses to survive the pandemic and grow as the economy recovers.</p>
The Environment	The focus of recovery is supporting a green economic recovery. This includes for the Council adapting the way we work, e.g. continued working from home, but also supporting our businesses to change the way they work too.

## 9. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet notes:

- a) the work of the officers of the Council and partners in responding to and supporting the recovery from Covid 19; and
- b) the terms of the Covid Business Grants Support Policy.

<b>For more information contact:</b>	Katherine Marriott Chief Executive 0115 914 8291 <a href="mailto:kmarriott@rushcliffe.gov.uk">kmarriott@rushcliffe.gov.uk</a>
<b>Background papers available for Inspection:</b>	<a href="#">Report to Cabinet May 2020</a> <a href="#">Report to Cabinet November 2020</a>
<b>List of appendices:</b>	Appendix A – LRF response and recovery structures Appendix B - Covid Business Grant Support Policy Appendix C – RBC Recovery Plan