

# CABINET



<b>Report subject</b>	<b>BCP Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic</b>
<b>Meeting date</b>	22 April 2020
<b>Status</b>	Public Report
<b>Executive summary</b>	This report sets out a summary of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and identifies some of the many changes that have taken place to the way that we manage our services and the command structures. Details are given of some of these changes and the budgetary implications are identified along with a need to carry out a fundamental review of the Council's budget for the current financial year.
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>It is RECOMMENDED that the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic be noted.</b>
<b>Reason for recommendations</b>	To ensure that members of the Cabinet are fully informed of the way that services have been managed and changed under the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
<b>Portfolio Holder(s):</b>	N/A
<b>Corporate Director</b>	N/A
<b>Report Authors</b>	Graham Farrant; Chief Executive Corporate Management Board
<b>Wards</b>	All
<b>Classification</b>	For noting

## Background and Development of Response Structures

1. This report presents a summary of the many and varied impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the multi-agency emergency response on the Council's services and the way that we are operating. The summary is intended to demonstrate the very significant implications on the way that the Council operates and the changes that have been made to services and also to the command structures in emergency response.
2. Most emergency planning has been on the basis of a short, sharp emergency response (such as caused by a bomb, terrorist activity or major accident) which then moves into recovery mode quickly. In this pandemic, we are still very much in response mode and that is causing additional strains on the emergency response, although the structures are holding up well so far.
3. Very early in the response we established a Corporate Incident Management Team comprising of the Corporate Management Board along with various specialists including

the Director of Public Health, Head of HR, Director of IT & IS and the Head of Internal Audit and Emergency Planning and also including the Leader of the Council to ensure connectivity between the ongoing incident and the political leadership.

4. Initially the CIMT met weekly but this was soon moved to daily in order to deal with the volume of change required and subsequently down to every other day. The meetings have continued through the weekends and bank holidays as required.
5. The CIMT has provided the Council's coordination within the context of the work of the Dorset Local Resilience Forum (LRF) which is using well established and rehearsed emergency planning governance arrangements to coordinate the multi-agency approach across Dorset. The LRF has stood up a Strategic Coordinating Group, which I attend, meeting three times per week, and a Tactical Coordinating Group meeting twice weekly. In addition, a range of subgroups have been set up, on which we have director-level representation, including:
  - Health and Social Care.
  - Excess Deaths Advisory Group
  - Warning and informing.
  - Workforce
  - Ports & Borders
  - Recovery
6. In order to focus our efforts on the Covid-19 emergency response a separate command structure was set up for dealing with this pandemic alongside the normal rotating emergency planning arrangements whereby a corporate director takes the Gold lead role and a service director takes the Silver role, on rotation. For the Covid-19 response I have adopted the Gold command role on a permanent basis and Matthew Raudsepp, Director of Organisational Development has taken the Silver role on a permanent basis.
7. In order to maintain regular contact across the Council, the internal communication function has been stepped up alongside our public messaging. The Leader has undertaken to write an update message to all councillors and MPs two or three times per week which has helped to maintain contact across the political representation of the Council.
8. In addition, three separate weekly telephone conferences are now held which involve the five Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole MPs and the Leader to update them on the Council (including the Leader of the Opposition), Police and NHS responses (both jointly with Dorset MP's and Dorset Council Leader). In this way we are able to raise issues of local importance to ensure that the MPs are fully briefed and to hear messages from parliament.
9. In addition, the Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government holds a weekly briefing for leaders and chief executives of councils.
10. In addition, the following three regular updates are received:
  - LGA - daily update to chief executives and leaders
  - MHCLG - daily update to Chief Executives
  - LGIU - daily update and weekly summary to members
  - Key Cities – daily updates

11. All relevant daily or weekly communications are forwarded to the CIMT members in order to ensure that our services are maintained in line with government protocols and advice.
12. In addition, the Leader of the Council is in regular contact with the chair of the LGA and a network of other leaders of councils. I am also in contact with the Chief Executive of the LGA and have been supporting MHCLG through participation in a network of nine regional lead Chief Executive's, supporting Phil Norrey, Chief Executive of Devon County Council who is the regional lead for the south-west. The Chief executive of the LGA coordinates the local government response to MHCLG.
13. The corporate directors are also engaged in regional and national dialogue regarding each of their services, as appropriate.

Note: It should be noted that the figures quoted in this report were accurate at the time of drafting but may have changed between drafting and the Cabinet meeting on 22 April.

## **COUNCIL RESPONSE**

### **Key Issues and cross-Council projects**

#### **Community Response – Community Resilience & Operation Shield**

14. There are two aspects to the BCP community response; Community Resilience and Operation Shield. Both are managed under a steering group which brings together multi agency public, private and third sector partners to co-ordinate the community response to Covid-19. The Steering Group includes the Leader of the Council, along with the Portfolio Holder for Tourism, Leisure and Communities and the Leader plus one member of the opposition. The steering group has several subgroups where the Council is working together with partners to ensure that access to food is sufficient for vulnerable and isolated people, food banks are supported, volunteer efforts are co-ordinated, local business support offers are utilised and that communities are supported to create their own projects and initiatives which improve community spirit, reduce the impact of social isolation and provide support to each other.
15. The BCP community volunteering hub has been set up from scratch, which now has over 2100 volunteers registered to support their local communities during this pandemic. 560 volunteers have been deployed to support vulnerable isolated residents by ensuring access to food and essential items, or for support, advice and, in some cases simply contact, due to issues of loneliness. There remains a large cohort of volunteers who have not yet been tasked as the demand for individual matching from helpline calls has not yet met the offer from the significant number coming forward. We continue to explore utilisation options and are keeping in touch with volunteers on a twice weekly basis.
16. In order to support both the community resilience and Operation Shield workstreams, staff from IS & IT, Major Change & PMO, Communities and Business and Economy have worked together to establish a Community Response Helpline (0300 1237052) and completely new and dedicated Contact Centre environment.
17. Under Operation Shield we also set up a short-term distribution centre at the Littledown Leisure Centre to distribute emergency food parcels to extremely vulnerable people identified through the Operation Shield list. Ongoing delivery of food parcels has now been provided by national distribution companies. The community resilience team have also been making proactive calls to ensure the wellbeing of individuals on the Operation Shield list and providing responsive support as required.

18. The TogetherWeCan Helpline has received 3500 calls to date, in addition to the, approximately, 3500 daily calls to the Council's Contact Centre for other services. Since the one-off distribution of food has been completed and the national providers are ensuring regular food-parcels are delivered, Operation Shield is now integrated into the Community Resilience team.
19. A major communications campaign 'Together We Can' has been launched to promote the community resilience work and is featured as the banner headline on the Council's Homepage on [bcpcouncil.gov.uk](http://bcpcouncil.gov.uk), which was restructured in response to a need to make this the first item that visitors saw.

### **Personal Protective Equipment**

20. The supply and distribution of appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to mitigate the risk to council staff of virus transmission and to prevent the risk of onward transmission to customers is an important and ongoing challenge for the Council, as it has been nationally. This has primarily been for social care staff in both Adults and Children's, but there have also been concerns about the availability of PPE for non social care workers within the Council, for example for housing outreach workers who may need to use PPE. The approach being taken is to secure supplies from government (via LRF deliveries), and by purchasing direct from local and national suppliers and through donations from businesses and local groups. This has proved successful to date with adequate supplies being maintained, but uncertainty still exists around the resilience of the supply chain and medium-term supplies.
21. Public health guidance has been updated and reissued, and, supported by service risk assessments, gives clear guidance and determines the type of PPE that is distributed to services. The Facilities Management service is effectively coordinating the distribution process.
22. Ongoing concerns exist around the sustainability of PPE supplies to Adults and Children's services providers and partners whose normal supply chain arrangements are proving to be unreliable. The Council continues to support demand from these organisations where our supplies allow, but this is not considered a sustainable solution in the longer term. Representations will continue to be made through appropriate channels to strengthen supplies to these vital service providers. There may also be PPE issues moving forwards from specialist services set up to manage excess deaths.

### **Vulnerable People**

23. Building on our safeguarding arrangements I am chairing a regular meeting with the Corporate Directors for Children's Services; Adult Social Care and Environment and Community in order to identify and address key issues related to vulnerable people and households. Senior representatives of the Dorset Police and Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) will also be invited to attend this meeting.
24. The Safeguarding Adults Board; Children's Safeguarding Partnership and Community Safety Partnership all retain their statutory functions and are developing new working arrangements through this period and are prioritising key current issues, such as concerns about the increased risk of domestic abuse.
25. Staff continue to be reminded about the importance of safeguarding within their roles and the focus remains on ensuring the welfare of the most vulnerable.

26. The Homelessness Reduction Board governance is engaged to make sure that a multi-agency approach continues in order to address the needs of those facing homelessness.

### **Frontline Service Update**

27. There has been a massive impact on all of the Council's services, with many having shut down completely, or being very restricted in scope. These changes have been brought about to comply with government restrictions, to ensure social distancing objectives and in some places because staff shortages have meant that we have had to focus our limited resource on core services only.
28. This section gives a flavour of the impact of the restrictions and the following sections set out in more detail the changes in each directorate.
29. All libraries, leisure centres, museums, heritage attractions and catering outlets have been closed to the public until at least the end of May. Some services have been moved online and detailed discussions are starting about how the cultural enquiry work is accelerated to meet some of the local demand, within that context. The community Resilience Group are also exploring how we can provide some access to cultural experiences during the lockdown and a separate group has been set up to explore this including the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Culture. All wedding bookings for April have been cancelled with a further review due after Easter.
30. Upton Country Park and the Seafront remain open to the public to exercise with increased staff patrols and signage reinforcing the social distancing advice. However, following extensive discussions with Dorset Police, and in line with the actions of most other councils, all of the seafront and destination car parks and many of the smaller local car parks for nature reserves have been closed to help dissuade local people and visitors from driving to those places and therefore helping to reduce numbers and aid social distancing. Seafront staff regularly patrol the seafront area and cliff-tops and will liaise with Police if the areas become more crowded during the lockdown restrictions.
31. Adult Skills and Learning has been heavily impacted with examinations and classes being cancelled, alongside the closure of schools and the cancellation of exams in schools and universities. Much of the learning content is being moved online with careful consideration being given to making this a permanent solution where possible. Particular consideration is being given to providers of English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, and how we can better support the community to engage through improved language skills.
32. Staff from the Passenger Transport Fleet have largely been redeployed, with drivers and operatives helping to deliver prescriptions and food to the most vulnerable. They are also on standby to assist with hospital discharge and distributing leaflets related to the Together We Can campaign.
33. Following liaison with the operating company, Beryl bikes have been made available for free for key workers alongside our car parks in town centres. The Littledown Leisure Centre carpark has been made available for free parking for support staff and visitors at the Royal Bournemouth Hospital.
34. Overall car parking income has dropped to very low levels and this will have a significant negative impact on the Council's budget which is set out in more detail below.

## **Public Health**

35. The public health response has focused on ensuring BCP Council and partners in the Integrated Care System are responding to the local outbreak effectively. The Director of Public Health links regularly with Public Health England to ensure critical Council and health services are able to respond in a timely and effective manner. This includes being a member of the Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) of the Local Resilience Forum to ensure that the multi-agency response to the Covid-19 emergency is being led well and in accordance with an appropriate strategy, and adequately resourced. The Director of Public Health and Assistant Director of Public Health Rachel Partridge attend BCP Council's Corporate Incident Management Team to provide advice and guidance where required to Directors and members working on the response.
36. Public Health consultants are supporting the Director to provide health protection advice working closely with PHE South West. This involves the tactical level groups in health and care, supporting BCP Council's community response work, and working closely with Dorset CCG colleagues in responding to outbreaks in complex settings such as care homes. The response is 7 days a week organised on a rota basis to cover the BCP and Dorset Council area, particularly where outbreak control meetings are required at weekends.
37. Key activities in the past few weeks have included ensuring safe access in line with national guidance to essential public health services such as sexual health, drug and alcohol treatment and children and young people's public health nursing. The team has also developed local advice and guidance on using personal protective equipment for Council and community facing roles, based on national guidance, and providing a significant communications effort to reinforce key Government messages and support the Warning and Informing cell of the SCG. Public Health intelligence specialists are supporting an epidemiology cell through the SCG to support the development of planning assumptions for groups considering excess death planning, the likely impact of the outbreak on local health services, and timescales for recovery. Public health is also leading a group with Dorset CCG to develop additional mental health and wellbeing support during and beyond the outbreak.

## **Adult Social Care and Dorset wide health & social care issues**

38. Working across NHS and with Adult Social Care to implement new processes for discharging people from hospital in order to ensure that local hospitals have sufficient capacity to treat patients with Covid-19 symptoms and diagnosis. Social work and brokerage staff are working new working patterns to cover 8am to 8pm seven days per week. Residents being discharged from hospital are not being financially assessed for their care costs. The additional costs of these placements are covered by a pooled budget between BCP Council and Dorset CCG with additional funding provided through the NHS as part of the governments national funding increases to free hospital bed spaces without delay. Hospital occupancy levels have reduced very significantly and have dropped, at times, to below 50% in preparation for the surge that is expected.
39. We are working with NHS, Dorset Council and the wider social care market to ensure sufficient access to home and residential and nursing care to ensure rapid discharge of patients from hospital. New block contracts have been agreed for this specific period with care providers. A contract with a local hotel is being considered as a base for domiciliary care if a resident cannot immediately return to their own home.

40. The Council is also providing increased support to the Adult Social Care Sector including payments to cover their additional costs of Covid-19; support with PPE supplies and support alongside Public Health and Dorset CCG for homes when a home is caring for residents with Covid-19 symptoms or diagnosis.
41. Statutory safeguarding and Mental Health Act duties continue to be delivered. Where it is possible to do so, work is conducted on telephone and video conferencing in order to enact social distancing guidance and to protect the health of vulnerable people.
42. Social Services is providing continuity of response to current and potential service users and carers with most assessment; review and support work now carried out on telephone or video conferencing. A specific focus has been on working with Tricuro to ensure the well-being and support of individuals and their families where a service user is no longer able to attend a day service due to social distancing rules. The management of the two Adult Social Care Front Doors is now under single line management and there is close working with the Community Hub.
43. The Coronavirus Act makes provision for Councils through a process of formal decision-making to decide not to implement certain provisions of the Care Act 2014 during the pandemic period if the Council's staffing and resourcing levels are diverted to hospital discharge work and/or are significantly depleted by staff sickness. Senior managers and the Principal Social Worker are reviewing the current and likely future operating model for Adult Social Care to consider if and how these Easement provisions and guidance will be enacted by BCP Council.
44. The NHS plan to concentrate resources on the existing hospital network (Poole, Dorchester, Salisbury and Bournemouth) but in the forecast surge period extra Intensive Care Unit capacity may be needed. The NHS are leading a multi-agency working group to establish options for increasing capacity and are undertaking the necessary planning for a short-term facility. Key challenges to overcome include the high levels of additional staffing required, access to equipment which is in short supply nationally, such as ventilators, and a host of other logistical issues.

### **Children's Services**

45. Children's Services has worked with schools and the early years sector to ensure there is sufficient capacity to support key worker children and vulnerable children as defined within the guidance. The capacity is monitored daily and a brokerage service established to operate seven days a week.
46. Free school meals are available to all eligible pupils either through a meal provided at school or a nationally administered voucher scheme now funded by Government. Local arrangements were put in place prior to the announcement of the national scheme and covered the Easter holiday period also.
47. Vulnerable children are also supported by the community resilience project to ensure access to food, this includes our care experienced young people.
48. The Department for Education, Ofsted and the Regional School Commissioner have formed regional 'React teams' and support / challenge weekly meetings with DCS's established from 1 April. The focus is on the take up of school places by vulnerable pupils; as at 9 April 7% of our vulnerable pupils were attending school. This is a concern and area of concerted focus. Capacity was successfully sought from the React team to support the Heads and LA and will join the service in week beginning 13 April.

49. Child protection and children in care services continue to be delivered within statutory guidelines which have not been changed by recent guidance, by way of face to face and virtual contact. Our response to potential services users is prioritised through the front door and Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) arrangements. Where staffing allows early help targeted work continues. Open access Youth services have been suspended. Three Children's Centres have been closed with resources targeted at areas of greatest need.
50. Capacity to meet the needs of Children in Care has been strengthened with the block booking of provision to meet anticipated need and has already been used where a parent was hospitalised with Covid-19 and no existing carers were able to care for the children. The market is responding positively and to date capacity has been sufficient to meet needs, but price increases have been noted in the SW region. Plans have also been agreed with the BCP Fostering Panel chair to accelerate prospective foster carer applications safely and to increase short term capacity through approving existing staff to offer care.

### **Business and economy**

51. On 17 March, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a broad range of financial support for the whole economy and a number of these measures included further business rate reliefs, grants, and funding arrangements with implications for local authorities. This included a commitment to fully compensate local authorities for their impact. Some of the key measures announced to date include:
52. Business Rates Relief: Businesses in the retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors will pay no business rates in 2020/21. This "business rates holiday" applies to all businesses in these sectors regardless of rateable value.
53. Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Grants Fund (RHLBGF): Businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors with rateable values of less than £51,000 will also receive a cash grant of up to £25,000. In other words, they will not pay any business rates in 2020/21 and they will receive a grant of up to £25,000.
54. Small Business Grants Fund (SBGF): All businesses in receipt of small business rates relief (SBRR), regardless of sector, will be eligible for a cash payment of £10,000. It will not be available to some recipients of SBRR such as beach hut owners.
55. BCP Council has received an initial allocation of £128.8 million to make the RHLBGF and SBGF payments. As at 9 April, out of 7,200 local businesses who appear to be eligible the following payments had been made:
- |                                 |                        |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| 990 Businesses * £10,000 =      | £9.900 million         |
| 397 Businesses * £25,000 =      | £9.925 million         |
| <b>Total 1,387 Businesses =</b> | <b>£19.825 million</b> |
56. In addition to providing this support as fast as possible the Council also instigated the following protocol:
- Any resident or business who believes that they will have difficulty in paying their council tax, business rates or in fulfilling their lease or licence agreement or in paying a fee or charge to the Council, during this period, should make direct contact with us. For all customers contacting us we will look to take a reduced payment or enable a three-month payment break. This will mean for example that for someone who was due to pay us £1,500 a month over twelve months during 2020/21 we will now agree they make no



payments during April, May or June and instead agree that they may pay us £2,000 per month from July 2020 to March 2021.

57. Arrangements have also been put in cases of hardship for any businesses with a lease or licence with the Council.
58. We have also identified some categories of business who are not covered by the government support packages and where there is real need for additional support. This category includes, for example, numerous small businesses and start-up companies paying all-inclusive rent and rates charges to their landlord, and businesses that are not in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors.
59. In line with Government guidance issued in the form of a procurement policy note the Council has put in place arrangements to maintain payments to business as usual suppliers in line with existing contractual payments and terms in cases where the service is not being provided or has been reduced as a direct result of Covid-19. This measure is specifically designed to support the cash flow of our main suppliers and includes the Council paying invoices earlier than the normal 30 day payment term.
60. Through the Economic Development team, significant effort has been put into working with Dorset Growth Hub, Dorset Business Gateway and Chambers of Commerce to:
  - Provide free business advice via webinars on how to manage in a situation like this
  - Communicate consistent messages about Government support
  - Answer questions
  - Capture and feedback impact/information
  - Capture and feed in offers of support
  - Providing clear and daily communications to businesses via our e-newsletter and twitter feed which has had many positive comments and thank-you's, and developing testimonials/case studies. E-newsletter subscriptions have gone up to 6601 (31.03.20) and our Twitter feed now has 530 followers (an increase of 25%).
  - Have one to one communication with major employers through existing strong relationships to help them through this time, providing real time information and brokerage to influence their strategy. As a result, many redundancies have been avoided.
  - Matching over 100 offers of help from businesses with areas of need, working closely with the Programme Management Office, Communities and Social care teams. Examples include the provision of PPE, hand sanitizer being produced from alcohol and plastics cutting, all in line with guidelines and requirements.
  - Working on the Together We Can initiative specifically noting the offers of business support and food supply, making sure these are qualified and matched with demand.
61. Major regeneration projects are continuing, in particular the purchase of the Former Power Station Site in Poole and Council investment in the Winter Gardens Project, Bournemouth. Both of these investments are subject to approval at forthcoming Cabinet and Council meetings. Whilst normal working practices are challenging, preparation work, commissioning of consultants and bid writing is taking place regarding the Poole Regeneration Programme, Future High Streets Fund and the Town Fund in Boscombe.
62. The £79M Transforming Cities Fund Programme has also been mobilised.
63. The Destination Management Board and BAHA are engaged with business support and an initial assessment of the impact to the sector. A survey of those businesses will be sent next week and repeated at intervals over the coming months to help gauge the

impact and aid recovery planning. Detailed initial estimates of the economic impact on the tourism industry across the conurbation have been produced and show that a 3-month impact will lose approximately 5000 jobs and £245m lost revenue. A 6-month impact will see 9000 jobs and a revenue loss of £507m. Any extensive closure of the industry will effectively result in a lost season, and that may be difficult for the industry to recover from, other than in a changed configuration with potential significant disinvestment.

64. The cultural sector expressed grave concerns at the outset of the crisis about their ability to survive but have since taken advantage of the funding and support offered by the Arts Council and the Heritage Fund. Whilst the individual organisations such as the BSO and the Lighthouse are still concerned about their long-term future, they appear to be in a better position than they were initially.
65. The Leisure trusts, including YMCA, SLM and BHLive are not in such a good position and are in a very precarious financial predicament which is reflected nationally. The Local Government Association are seeking guidance from DCMS on support for these types of businesses and Council officers and the trust officers are inputting into this process and expressing the urgency of the situation.

## **Environment and Community**

### **Housing**

66. Within Housing significant multi-agency work continues to support residents who are vulnerable and in housing need. Over 100 single people were accommodated over the 5 days commencing 23 March following the government's directive to house all rough sleepers. All but around 10 people rough sleeping came inside, and we are making basic service provision available for those choosing to remain outside, including ongoing support and sanitation facilities in the town centre. Over the last few weeks the Housing Options team have since housed in temporary accommodation around 250 singles who may have previously been precariously housed. Support packages are being mobilised to sustain the placements and discussions are ongoing with MHCLG to determine an exit strategy. This will be an issue for all Councils, which could result in increased funding demands which have been previously unaffordable.
67. Council Housing services across the 10,000 tenancies in the Bournemouth and Poole neighbourhoods have been reshaped to deliver only the essential housing management services alongside only emergency repairs and essential compliance works. Resident welfare phone calls are being made to the most vulnerable tenants. Voids are being held for emergency rehousing. Housing Associations are delivering a consistent service to their tenants.
68. This approach will deal with the demand during the lockdown period but is likely to lead a build-up of demand for maintenance and repairs which will be difficult to respond to when the lockdown is raised and during recovery. These services will need careful planning and ramp-up during recovery.
69. The Operations Centre continues to deliver a 24/7 out of hours service for the Council and responds to all telecare customer calls across BCP 24/7. The service is training additional staff to ensure continued service resilience.

### **Environment**

70. Residual, recycling, food waste and commercial collection services continue to operate as normal. This included the successful transfer to BCP Council of waste collection and

cleansing services for Christchurch residents on 1st April 2020, which in itself would have been a big story during business as usual but was barely noticed during the lockdown.

71. Garden waste collection services were suspended on 23 March 2020 due to staffing shortages and is under review with a potential recommencement date of 20 April 2020 should staffing levels permit and remain stable as we go through the month.
72. Cleansing services continue to operate as normal with dog waste bins being prioritised. There is currently no evidence of increased levels of illegal fly-tipping activity to date, although local hotspots have reported cases.
73. The Council's Household waste recycling centres are temporarily closed in line with Government instructions for prohibiting non-essential travel and being unable to satisfy social distancing guidance on sites. However, we are continually reviewing the position with MHCLG and Defra in line with national guidance.
74. Highway inspection and associated response repairs are continuing to be completed across the priority road network. A reactive service for urgent safety matters across the wider highway network is also resourced and being delivered. Non-critical highway improvement schemes have been suspended due to resourcing limitations (staff and materials) and the ability to maintain a safe working environment in some cases.
75. Fleet workshops are operating on a rotational basis for resilience purposes, supporting service unit's vehicle needs including reallocating vehicle assets to support critical services. Again, there is 2 metre social distancing amongst the workforce where this can practicably be achieved.
76. Grounds maintenance non-critical functions have ceased including general amenity grass cutting and shrub pruning, although this is also reviewed regularly and will be brought back into service as soon as we can. All greenspaces and associated facilities are being checked regularly to ensure public safety. Rubbish & dog waste bins are being emptied on a demand-led basis.
77. Play parks have been closed along with paddling pools, ball courts, skate parks, golf courses, tennis courts and athletics tracks. Visitor centres, council operated cafes and garden nursery have also been closed, although we are reviewing whether an online service can be provided from the Kings Park nursery. Many car parks associated with these parks and open spaces have been closed off as directed by Dorset Police.
78. The Coroner has been allowed to appoint an Area Coroner for an initial 12-month period, pending future competitive recruitment process to any future permanent position.
79. In the Registrars service weddings have been cancelled and the service has been suspended. Additional staff are being trained to carry out the registration of deaths should that become necessary due to staff shortages or increased registrations.
80. Poole crematorium is now closed with all cremations now consolidated at Bournemouth crematorium. However, business continuity and resilience arrangements will facilitate increased numbers of cremations in line with expected demand.
81. The service has also been heavily involved with an LRF cell planning for an increase in deaths across Dorset. Should that happen, contingency arrangements have been explored and put in place around increased mortuary capacity, body-storage and funeral arrangements.

82. In accordance with the Dorset LRF Excess Deaths Framework, the strategic multi agency Excess Deaths Advisory Group has been established with accountability for all aspects of the death management pathway. The two local authorities are the lead organisations for this work and co-chair the group. There are currently three interconnected cells dealing with the response to community deaths, logistics and excess deaths coordination.
83. An expansion of mortuary provision at Holly Tree Lodge is now in place and contingency arrangements for specialist storage sites are being put in place in BCP and Dorset. These will utilise staff identified through the LRF multi-agency workforce capabilities including some redeployed BCP Council staff.

## **Communities**

84. The focus of the Covid-19 response within Communities has been on the Community Resilience and Operation Shield project with significant staff resources across the Directorate and the Council all working together to deliver this critical work.
85. Within the Community Engagement service, we continue to work with community centres in our landlord capacity and have been supporting community associations with advice and guidance. Community markets in Boscombe, Poole and Christchurch have been suspended.
86. Within the Safer Communities service, we continue to support the administration and delivery of Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) in order to manage risks relating to domestic abuse. Our restorative justice and domestic abuse perpetrator programmes are working remotely, and we continue to provide outreach support to those experiencing domestic abuse. Our Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS) service is still operational in Boscombe, Bournemouth town centre and Poole town centre and we are working with Police colleagues to support management of the lock down as well as dealing with issues of anti-social behaviour and low-level criminality in these areas.
87. The private sector housing enforcement team have moved to carry out only critical inspections. The service remains able to respond to urgent requests and enforce housing standards issues as required. The service is also continuing to work through enforcement issues relating to the remediation of the ACM clad high-rise buildings in BCP.
88. The licensing teams continue to function, with remote Licensing Committee meetings taking place from 14 April. Taxi license renewals have been suspended for 6 months and all other licenses are being extended on a case by case basis.
89. CCTV monitoring continues to operate across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole with remote monitoring in place for business continuity of this business-critical function.
90. Within Regulatory Services, food inspections have ceased. However, we are providing advice to businesses who now wish to function as a take-away service. Trading Standards and Environmental Health staff are responsible for enforcing the closure of non-essential businesses and there has been some activity around this. Trading Standards, Environmental Health and the Enforcement and Protection services remain functional, albeit with reduced staff capacity. In practice, service demands have reduced in most areas which has allowed for a focus on issues arising from the pandemic. Examples of peaks in demand as a result of the current crisis include an increase in out of hours noise complaints, increasing complaints regarding bonfires since the household

waste recycling centres have been closed, which require advice being given or enforcement visits to detect nuisance. The Trading Standards teams are responding to issues of possible profiteering. The team continue to enforce on all these issues.

91. The regulatory team are also responsible for the Port Health service and are working with multi agency partners to ensure that an appropriate response to incidents at the ports is provided as well as business as usual activity around shellfish sampling and ships sanitation.
92. Environmental Health are now directed by Public Health England to be the lead agency on the management of infectious diseases such as Norovirus. Systems are in place to fully support this.
93. Finally, our Corporate Health and Safety and Fire Safety teams continue to support teams and managers across the Council to ensure our duties to staff are met and our assets remain safe.

### **Council Governance and Decision Making**

94. In light of the necessity to ensure compliance with the requirements relating to social distancing the decision was made not to hold the planned meeting of the Council which had been due to take place on 31 March 2020. The meeting had been due to consider various recommendations relating to the Council's Constitution which had been recommended by the Audit and Governance Committee, and these items will be considered at a future Council meeting.
95. Two items of business were due to come before the Council meeting which were urgent decisions and had been considered by Cabinet at its most recent meeting. These related to the adoption of the Heathlands Supplementary Planning Document which had been subject to detailed consultation and Cabinet consideration, and the amendments to the Financial Regulations to ensure they were updated in accordance with good practice for the start of the new financial year. These decisions were taken as officer decisions by the Chief Executive pursuant to the urgency provisions contained within the Council's Constitution following consultation with the Leader and Group Leader of the Opposition. These decisions are published on the website and will be reported to Council at the next meeting.
96. New Regulations which enable councils to make committee and council decisions virtually came into effect on 4 April 2020. These amend the legislation to enable meetings to be held in a virtual place, so long as certain conditions are complied with. One of these is that all members of the committee who wish to attend are able to do so remotely and be heard and hear the debate. The other key requirement is that members of the public are able to access the meeting by listening to it or watching it as it takes place. The Council has been able to establish a mechanism for remote virtual meetings to take place through use of the Skype for Business application and will broadcast meetings via YouTube.
97. We will need to make some amendments to procedures to enable meetings to proceed including provision for the public to submit questions and make statements in writing before meetings take place and for answers to the questions to be provided on-line. Specific provisions will be made to enable licensing and planning decisions to be made via this process enabling the required input from applicants and objectors to applications in licensing for example to take place in accordance with the specific requirements relating to such cases.

98. It is proposed that the only formal meetings of councillors which will take place will be those which are required to take essential and important decisions, ensure a level of scrutiny and public engagement, and maintain transparency in decision making. All other councillor meetings will be deferred or cancelled, as appropriate. A full revised list of meetings which are currently planned will be published on the Council's website and has been agreed following consultation with the Leader of the Council and Leader of the Opposition. This will be subject to change depending upon business requirements and the need to take decisions.

## **Resources**

### **Technical Resilience**

99. The IT & IS service is fully functioning on a "working from home" basis, with some staff attending site as required to carry out technical support where this is necessary and cannot be carried out remotely. There has been an enormous effort to build and deploy 688 new laptops and 183 mobile phones in recent weeks. These have been issued to staff who have been identified by services as being high priority and the effectiveness of this rapid roll-out has been widely recognised.
100. Alongside the delivery of new equipment, the team have worked hard on the optimisation of the Office 365 environment to support staff to work from home where they have appropriate personal equipment at home. There are a few methods available for these staff to securely navigate to their business applications in support of home working.
101. The Application Development and Infrastructure teams have built, developed and released a new and dedicated environment within Microsoft Dynamics, as well as accelerating the roll out of other remote collaboration environments such as Microsoft Teams. This is in direct response to the requirements of #TogetherWeCan campaign as well as being a first step towards the provision of a telephony solution to support the Customer Contact Centre staff to work from home.
102. IT is an area where we have seen a rapid transformation in the way that our colleagues are working, and this has been the one area where there is a potential benefit being seen arising from the adversity of the pandemic. Whilst many colleagues have been enabled to work from home or in remote locations, the main civic locations of Bournemouth Town Hall, Christchurch Civic Offices and Poole Civic Centre remain open for work and can be adapted to comply with social distancing rules.

## **Communications**

103. Effective communication is vital in times of emergency, and the Council has a duty to ensure its communities and its workforce are appropriately informed and supported in order to show community leadership and to fulfil its duty of care to its staff. The Council is contributing to the Warning and Informing workstream of the Dorset LRF in addition to delivering its own extensive communications activities. These are designed to ensure our communities and businesses are appropriately informed with key messaging throughout the crisis.
104. A particular focus is on the protection of vulnerable people and ensuring their awareness of, and access to, vital Council support at this difficult time through the Together We Can campaign. A range of communications channels are being sustained on a seven days a week basis to ensure that our communities receive

information as quickly as possible, including social media, press releases and TV and other media interviews as appropriate.

105. Internal communication has been increased to ensure our colleagues have the information and guidance they need to safely fulfil their duties, and to keep fully informed on the various changes that may affect their work. This is particularly important as a significant proportion of our colleagues are operating remotely during this period. Staff e-newsletters are being circulated weekly, and key issues and messaging is supported through my regular video briefing and directorate messaging from the corporate directors.
106. In addition, the Leader of the Council is publishing a regular email to all councillors and MPs twice a week, or more frequently if required to ensure they are all kept as fully informed as is possible.

## Finance

107. At an early stage in this public health emergency the Council put in place several measures to protect its financial position. These included:
108. **Liquidity:** At an early stage, before the impact on financial institutions became known and before the government provided assurance around their overall economic response inter-local authority lending became very restricted. In response the Council acted to protect its position by ensuring any resources were kept fluid and could be recalled at short notice. In addition, when the Council began to receive the resources to support local businesses it changed its Treasury Management Policy to allow more than 25% of its portfolio to be held with the Debt Management Office (Treasury) which will ensure none of these resources were subject to any further credit risk.
109. **Expenditure Controls:** As a temporary measure, only revenue or capital expenditure which supports the Council's response to Covid-19 will now be incurred unless:
- it honours a pre-existing contractual commitment.
  - the expenditure directly (as opposed to incidentally) supports;
    - safeguarding services to vulnerable members of our community
    - the delivery of those services which the Council has decided to continue to provide to its community during this period.
    - services or projects transparently being funded by a source external to the Council (such as grant funded).
110. This change was widely communicated across the Council, including to all councillors and appears to have been effective in reducing demand for new spending.
111. **Vacancy Control:** A Council wide vacancy freeze has been implemented, with individual decisions to recruit requiring approval by the Head of HR in consultation with the relevant corporate director.
112. **Financial Management Structure:** Arrangement have been put in place to ensure all additional expenditure incurred in direct response to Covid-19 is clearly and transparently recorded with weekly monitoring information being provided.
113. These immediate measures are designed to protect the Council's financial position while it undertakes a more formal fundamental review of the 2020/21 Budget. This review will be particularly focused on the impact on the Council's key income streams be that Council Tax (£217 million), Business Rates (£58 million) or Fees and Charges (£67 million).

114. As the Cabinet will see from the body of this report there have been massive changes made to all of the Council's services in a very short space of time, and with little ability to forecast the exact full financial impact of the combination of decisions on the Council's budget.
115. In support of the financial position the Council has been awarded £11.1 million from the Covid-19 Emergency fund for local government to support the vital role we play in supporting our community and local economy. This funding is intended to help us address some of the immediate pressures we face across all the services we deliver particularly;
- Meeting the increased demand for adult social care and enable us to provide additional support to social care providers. The Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) will separately be funding the additional costs of discharging and keeping people out of hospital, including social care costs (commissioned by the local authority).
  - Meet the cost of extra demand and higher business-as-usual costs of providing children's social care.
  - Provide additional support for the homeless and rough sleepers, including where self-isolation is needed.
  - Support those at higher risk of severe illness from Covid-19, who were asked to self-isolate in their homes for the duration of the pandemic.
  - Meet pressures across other services, as a result of reduced income, rising costs or increased demand.
116. This grant funding was received upfront on 27 March. The government expect this grant to cover all costs incurred in the first phase of the response, but with a commitment to keep this under review. BCP Council is required to provide regular monitoring information on how it is applying these resources.
117. The government has made it clear, through informal briefings by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government that it does not want local government to fail due to reduced cashflow or short-term budget pressures caused by the Covid-19 response, but has not yet published plans for how it will fully support our budget for the current financial year.

### **Council Tax – Local Council Tax Support Scheme**

118. BCP Council has also been allocated £3.1 million from a national £500m hardship fund designed to support “economically vulnerable people and households”. The expectation is that we will use these resources to provide all recipients of working age local council tax support ('LCTS') during the financial year 2020/21 with a further reduction in their annual council tax bill of £150. Where a taxpayer's liability for 2020/21 is, following the application of council tax support, less than £150, then the liability would be reduced to nil. Where a taxpayer's liability for 2020/21 is nil, no reduction to the council tax bill will be available. Arrangements are being made to automatically rebill the impacted council taxpayers.
119. Regarding Universal Credit which is administered by the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) the Chancellor announced the standard rate will increase by £20 a week for one year from 6 April 2020. This increase was in specific response to the additional expenses and financial hardship that recipients face as a result of Covid-19. To ensure this amount is retained by the recipients the Council has decided it would



be reasonable and ethical to disregard it for the purposes of any adult social care financial assessments.

### **People and wellbeing**

120. Maintaining the required staff capacity to deliver our critical services is the priority and work is ongoing to support re-directing staff who are not being fully utilised due to changes in their services. 166 employees have been contacted with a view to them being redirected to support projects such as Operation Shield, the Community Hub and PPE distribution.
121. The majority of the Council's employees are working, and many are working enhanced hours to support our collective response. Only 30 employees have been identified who are currently unable to work from home. At the time of writing there are 188 current absences due to self-isolation and 66 cases of sickness related to Covid-19, although some specific teams have reported up to 50% absence in some cases.
122. We are also awaiting further government guidance in relation to the Job Retention Scheme (JRS) or "furlough", as re-direction has been the priority to date. There is clear potential to utilise the national scheme, firstly with our traded services and with roles that have specific grant funding allocated to them. No decision has yet been taken to utilise the scheme more widely at this time.
123. Staff wellbeing is also a clear focus, with several offerings being made available to support colleagues and we are utilising the Pan-Dorset forum to understand other resources that may be available. We have a strong online offer and bereavement support but need to enhance our Mental Health First Aider capacity, trauma support and also we need to put in place a Mental Health and Wellbeing single point of contact and process for our employees.

### **RECOVERY**

124. While we are still very much in the "Response" phase, it is accepted Best Practice to establish the "Recovery" process(es) as soon as possible. A proposal has been submitted to the Dorset wide Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) to establish a Recovery Coordinating Group (RCG) at pan-Dorset level and to undertake an initial Recovery Impact Analysis (RIA).
125. Within this structure, each local Authority will lead a Recovery Working Group (RWG) for their area and establish Recovery Workstreams appropriate to the needs for their communities identified and expressed within the RIA. For BCP Council, it is anticipated that these Recovery Workstreams will be aligned with the Priority Themes expressed in our Corporate Strategy and Delivery Plans. The Leader of the Council (supported by Cllr Mike Brooke) and Leader of the Opposition will be actively engaged in the Recovery Group for the Council.
126. At this early stage, and in order to provide clear leadership and focus, Julian Osgathorpe will be leading on organisational recovery and the potential to accelerate our Transformation Programme. Bill Cotton will lead on the Place-based recovery effort.

### **Role of councillors in Response and Recovery phases**

127. The role of councillors during an emergency generally becomes more prominent as the Council moves into and through the recovery phases. During the response phase the role tends to be fairly limited as decisions tend to be taken within the LRF and

CIMT framework by officers using professional judgement. Because this phase is normally only brief, that works effectively to get the immediate response in place to a specific emergency. The role of councillors then generally grows as they provide much-needed community leadership and reassurance with a key role to communicate with the local community and to represent their views and requirements in decision-making and resource allocation. Even during the response phase there is normally a key role for the Leader of the Council in communicating the core issues to the community and demonstrating community leadership.

128. During the Covid-19 we have been in response mode for a number of weeks and the Leader has been communicating with councillors and communities regularly. However, it has been difficult to engage fully with all councillors because of the dynamic nature of the emergency and the sheer volume of work that has been done to remodel services and to work with partners within the LRF framework.
129. Officers have prepared Appendix 1 which summarises the roles of councillors during this emergency response and which will be circulated to all councillors. In general, it describes the roles that many councillors perform in normal times and which have become more important during this emergency response, but there may be some elements which are useful to individual councillors within their ward, particularly those who were newly elected last May.
130. It is expected that the roles of councillors will become increasingly prominent as the Council moves into the recovery phase with many long-term decisions to be taken, particularly about the allocation of resources and the shape of services as the Council restarts them.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1 – Role of BCP Councillors in Response to Covid-19**



## **Role of BCP Councillors in Response to Covid-19**

### **Introduction**

The Council has moved into emergency response mode of operation in recognition of the seriousness and far-reaching consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. BCP Council is a Category One responder under the Civil Contingencies Act and that provides a legal framework for the way that we need to respond to local issues and how we will work with our partners under the Local Resilience Forum, which are largely officer-led responses through necessity.

As a result of that change the role of councillors in both leading the organisation and in providing ongoing community leadership has changed. This paper is intended to help to frame the role of councillors within that context.

This is a rapidly changing environment and this guidance may need to be updated regularly.

Meetings of councillors have effectively been reduced to the core of critical meetings that are required to operate the Council as a whole and decisions being sought will be reduced to those absolutely necessary. However, there remains a valid and important role for councillors in holding the executive to account and in providing that critical political leadership where policy choices still have to be made.

The LGA have provided a useful guide for councillors during this Covid-19 outbreak which can be viewed [here](#).

### **BCP Community Response**

Councillors will be aware that we have developed a community response across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole under the “Together We Can” campaign. Information about how this operates can be viewed on the Council’s website [here](#).

### **BCP Community Leadership**

As councillors, you play a key community leadership role – you know your wards and communities well and you can support the community response by;

- **using your knowledge** – Community mapping is critical to our community resilience effort. We are developing community resources as live documents which we will review regularly and make available online. Your awareness of existing community groups, knowledge of vulnerable residents, and scope to link into some of the new community forums, including online forums using social media is invaluable to this work.
- **monitoring local activity** – Using your local networks and contacts you will be aware of rising local tensions, or local areas or issues of concern. Please consider how best to feed those into the appropriate systems for resolution, using the suggestions below, or maybe just for noting.
- **providing a link between our residents and communities to key services** – Use your networks within BCP Council to access information and report issues to the correct point of contact.
- **promoting consistent messaging of local and national level messages about the outbreak and the advice being given** – Provide reassurance to residents and help people to understand how to access help – as well as how to provide it. There is a lot of information on the [BCP website](#) to help with this. It is usually best, given the fast-changing nature of the information, to refer people to the official sources of guidance such as the Gov.uk website, rather than trying to interpret that guidance, or issuing your own version of the guidance.
- **identifying vulnerable residents** – Report concerns about vulnerable residents directly through the Community Response Helpline on 0300 1237052, to [communities@bcpcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:communities@bcpcouncil.gov.uk) or by completing the e-form [here](#)
- **identifying local issues** - Report information about community issues arising, for example, community tensions and concerns such as exploitation issues arising. Self-isolation of people who are more vulnerable will provide opportunities for criminals involved in various types of scams. It is important that we are alert to these risks, which you can refer through [communities@bcpcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:communities@bcpcouncil.gov.uk)
- **communicating with local businesses** – Talk to your local businesses to identify support needs and signpost to information through the Council's team via [Adrian Trevett](#) or through the Dorset Chamber of Commerce and Industry at [dorsetchamber.co.uk](http://dorsetchamber.co.uk). Engage with any local businesses who are willing to offer their support for the community response and report these opportunities through to [communities@bcpcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:communities@bcpcouncil.gov.uk)
- **working with local voluntary sector groups** - You will be aware that our BCP communities have been establishing local groups to support residents, many on social media, others through leafletting. It would be helpful for councillors to engage with these groups, particularly using social media. We would ask that you provide support and advice for these local groups – work with them to identify response projects and initiatives that they want to develop and either lead or participate in these – our Community Development team can support this – contact [communities@bcpcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:communities@bcpcouncil.gov.uk)
- **taking part in the volunteer effort** – [register as a volunteer](#) and directly support a vulnerable resident. There is a need for roles where volunteers are directly supporting residents by picking up shopping or other essentials, but we also have a need for remote support if you are self-isolating

**Summary:**

As local community leaders our councillors are a vital link between the Council, and other public services and our communities. Where you can, we would like to enhance the role of councillors in establishing and maintaining those links and helping to direct council services, and those of our public sector partners, towards the most in need in our communities. We hope that this guide will help to achieve that.