

CABINET



Report subject	Update on BCP Council's Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic
Meeting date	27 May 2020
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	This report provides a further update to the report summarising the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, which was presented to Cabinet in April 2020.
Recommendations	It is RECOMMENDED that: the Council's response to the Covid- 19 pandemic be noted.
Reason for recommendations	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
Portfolio Holder(s):	N/A
Corporate Director	N/A
Report Authors	Graham Farrant Corporate Management Board
Wards	All
Classification	For noting

Background

1. This report provides an update on the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the multi-agency emergency response to the pandemic on the Council's services and the way that we are operating. As previously noted, we are still very much in response mode, but have begun to look forward to planning recovery both within the Council and across Dorset.
2. The Corporate Incident Management Team (CIMT) continues to meet regularly, currently three times per week with one more lengthy meeting (Mondays) and two summary meetings (Wednesdays and Fridays). The CIMT co-ordinates with the Dorset Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and the multi-agency approach across Dorset. In addition to the Strategic and Tactical Coordinating Group and workstreams, the LRF has now established a Recovery Coordinating Group.
3. An initial recovery impact assessment (RIA) workshop has been held and the aim is to have a strategy agreed and a high-level plan in place by mid-May. Regional recovery structures have not yet been established but sub-groups covering the key workstreams will be set up by the end of May.
4. There will, of course, be a strong relationship and alignment between the Dorset LRF RCG/RIA, but within that context, it is critical that BCP Council quickly identifies the key strategic and operational issues that will impact the Council in the wake of the Recovery Phase. At this early stage, and accepting that the public sector is still firmly in the Recovery Phase of the pandemic, the key issues are likely to be:
 - a. Smoothly transitioning from the service positions during the recovery phase towards a "new normal" while continuing to provide the support for the most vulnerable in our community. This will be challenging considering the significant differences in service models during the response phase, where some have been operating at substantially increased levels while some have been closed.
 - b. Ensuring that the Council continues to provide extremely strong community leadership during the recovery phase. This has been visible during the response phase across a variety of different perspectives, from playing a much more visible role through initiatives such as Facebook Live through to key strategic leadership in delivering, beyond central government expectations, the Operation Shield programme.
 - c. Addressing the critical financial impact of the pandemic on the agreed budget of the Council, and its ongoing financial sustainability. This will require very strong leadership and will only be successful if we completely embrace and accelerate the already planned Transformation Programme delivering the new BCP Council Operating Model. The Transformation programme identified up to £43m worth of efficiencies that can be achieved through leading edge organisational design, technology enablement and using modern ways of working. This will be brought to Cabinet in June 2020 and set out how the programme can be delivered and funded.
5. Governance and delivery workstreams for the issues outlined above are being developed and mobilised, complimenting the very successful Incident Response Framework that the Council has used/is using to support the recovery phase

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Key Issues and cross-Council projects

Community Response – Community Resilience and Operation Shield

6. The food distribution element of Operation Shield has now been handed over to the national distribution companies. We continue to contact those on the NHS shield list, and are cross-referencing confidential data with adult social care databases.
7. BCP Community Hub continues to provide a Community Response Helpline and an on-line request function has been mobilised. Prescriptions are starting to overtake food as the main issue being raised by callers. During April the team delivered the following:

Calls to helpline	8,532
Community resilience cases resolved	2,905
Proactive calls to Operational shield residents	5,295
Volunteers deployed to support vulnerable residents	1,244
Online requests	526

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

8. Recent national guidance will increase the level of usage of PPE in care settings and plans to move to the national Clipper system for delivery of PPE to the care sector are delayed, which means care providers will continue to be reliant on receiving PPE through the Council, supported by the LRF. Large scale and long-term support to the care provider sector is not sustainable for BCP Council and we continue to raise, both directly and through the LRF, the critical importance of Clipper supply system being introduced nationally at the earliest possible date.

Testing

9. A testing facility opened at Creekmoor Park and Ride on 26 April. The Council prepared and stood up the infrastructure for the site, then handed over the site to the Department for Health and Social Care. We are not expecting huge numbers of BCP staff to need testing based on the numbers of current sickness and the guidance setting out who testing is useful for.

Vulnerable People

10. 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) also attend this meeting.
11. Colleagues continue to be reminded about the importance of safeguarding within their roles and our focus remains on ensuring the welfare of the most vulnerable.

12. The Homelessness Reduction Board governance is now up and running, and ensures that a multi-agency approach continues in order to address the needs of those facing homelessness.

Social Distancing and Managing Open Spaces

13. A BCP Council representative attends the Warning and Informing workstream of the LRF. This includes Dorset Police, Public Health and Dorset Council and coordinates our response to issues around social distancing, overcrowding in key locations, staff abuse and policing. There is clear evidence from various services that lockdown restrictions are impacting on people's behaviours, and occasionally our colleagues have been subjected to incidents of abuse. We have supported the #unacceptable behaviour campaign across Dorset to highlight incidences of abuse and to be clear that as authorities we will not hesitate to deal with perpetrators through the toughest legal avenues available.

Frontline Service Update

14. I reported in April on the massive impact on all of the Council's services, and the closures or restricted services across all our directorates. The situation continues to evolve and within that we have been able to reinstate green waste collection in April and are currently engaging in the national preparations to re-open household waste recycling centres. Other services will continue to be reviewed on a regular basis and reinstated in a new format wherever possible.

Public Health

15. The public health response continues to focus on ensuring BCP Council and partners in the Integrated Care System are responding to the local outbreak effectively. As of 1 May there were 400 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the BCP area. Across Dorset and BCP there have been 117 deaths from hospitals and 46 from care homes.
16. Key activities have included the new local testing facility, and preparation for the launch of a workforce wellbeing offer called "Our Dorset" which includes a range of resources designed to support mental health. The team has also continued to develop local advice and guidance on using personal protective equipment for Council and community facing roles as the national guidance has changed.
17. Public Health intelligence specialists continue to support the Epidemiology Cell through the Local Resilience Forum 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. The group has produced some summary findings highlighting the impact of the pandemic with social distancing measures. The key message is that the peak has been delayed while social distancing has been effective. Any change to the social distancing measures will require effective local surveillance, contact tracing and testing to be in place in order to contain and limit the transmission of new cases.

Adult Social Care and Dorset wide health and social care issues

18. There has been a rise in the number of Care Homes where there are outbreaks or suspected outbreaks of COVID19. Across Dorset and BCP (as of 1 May 2020) there have been 46 deaths in care homes and in approximately 33% of care

homes Public Health England has led a multi-agency process to investigate possible COVID19 outbreaks and ensure appropriate support to homes where an outbreak has occurred. We continue to work with all partners, (including Care Home providers to implement national guidance and action-planning on prevention and infection control and to support specific homes with outbreaks. The Council and the Dorset Local Resilience Forum continue to supply adult social care providers with the PPE required by national guidance when the providers cannot access this through their supply chains. This will continue until a new national supply chain for PPE for social care providers has been implemented.

19. Nationally led approaches have been implemented so that Adult Social Care sector staff and care home residents have access to testing for COVID19 and all people moving from a hospital to a care home are tested prior to admission to the care home.
20. We continue to work with the NHS and Dorset Council to ensure that people can be discharged swiftly and safely from hospital. This includes working with the home and residential and nursing care market to ensure sufficient capacity including 150 new block booked residential and nursing care beds; social workers and brokerage staff working on 7 day a week, 8 am to 8pm rotas, to implement discharging plans for individual residents and additional expenditure on equipment services provided by the Dorset Integrated Community Equipment Services.
21. Contingency plans have been put in place to set up an accommodation based rapid discharge service in a local hotel but this service has not yet been stood-up as rapid response and home-care capacity has meant it has been possible to facilitate people's return to their own homes. The need for this contingency plan will be kept under review. The additional costs for these services are funded from a pooled budget with the Dorset CCG to which the Council is required only to commit the funding which it would have otherwise spent on hospital discharge and all other expenditure is funded through the NHS. This multi-agency work has enabled the hospitals to have significantly lower occupancy than is normal and to have the capacity to address the needs of people requiring hospital treatment both in relation to COVID19 and for all other reasons.
22. Due to social distancing rules and to ensure the protection of people with medical conditions, day centres remain closed and all day service providers have reviewed and revised their operations, developing innovative and personalised service and support responses so that service users and their carers are supported through this period. Where a provider is no longer providing a service, funding from the Council has been ceased and people who receive Direct Payments have also been advised to cease their payments to these providers. People who would normally pay a Fairer Contribution towards the cost of their day service are only being billed if the service which they are receiving each week is comparable with support provided within a day centre session (a half day) or more. People who are receiving advice, guidance and low level support are not being billed. This is in line with the Fairer Contribution policies of the three predecessor Councils to which BCP Council is currently working.

23. Statutory Safeguarding and Mental Health Act duties continue to be delivered with changes in how services are delivered to reduce direct contact with members of the members of the public who have underlying health conditions and in line with national rules for social distancing. During April 2020, there has been some increase in the number of safeguarding referrals received by Adult Social Care. Increased referrals have mainly been made by Police and Ambulance staff and it is positive to see the proactive approach to identifying concerns being taken across agencies. Additional resources have been directed to ensuring that all safeguarding referrals are addressed in a timely way.
24. The Coronavirus Act makes provision for Councils to decide not to implement specific provisions of the Care Act 2014 during the pandemic period if the Council's staffing levels or the capacity of the local care market are diverted to hospital discharge work and/or are significantly depleted by staff sickness. The Council has had to enact Easements only at Level Two of the Coronavirus Act (which is the lowest level of Easements) as a result of the national social distancing rules which predominantly relate to the closure of day centre and day services following a comprehensive review of the impact of the pandemic on the ability of the Council to fulfil its Care Act duties.

Children's Services

25. We are continuing to monitor capacity within the schools and early years sector to ensure support for key workers' children and vulnerable children as defined within the guidance.
26. As at 5 May 13% of our vulnerable pupils, excluding Children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP), were attending school, which includes 22% of children subject to child protection plans attending school. 7% of our children with EHCP are attending school. This work remains an area of concerted focus and we expect will also be helped with the anticipated easing of the lock down.
27. We understand that there are a range of issues underpinning the number of vulnerable children attending schools, ranging from understandable parental decisions in line with the government messages, some parents and carers being in the shielded community, and some schools not yet being clear on their offer. We are working with the Head Teachers community and the Regional School Commissioner to target support to schools during May. We are also working through some of the staffing issues that some schools face with the impacts of some of their staff being within the shielded community.
28. We are working well with the Early Years sector to ensure sufficient capacity in the market over the coming weeks and months in anticipation of the easements; currently we are content with the sufficiency of provision for key workers and vulnerable children.
29. The demand for services has not significantly increased through the last few weeks. We remain concerned about the lower number of referrals being received regarding children who may have suffered child sexual abuse, and domestic abuse. We are working through the potential impacts of unmet need that may become visible to the safeguarding services over the coming months.

Business and economy

30. The Council continues to distribute the Government-funded financial support for the economy including business rate reliefs and grants. To date (1 May) 4902 eligible businesses have received grants amounting to £62,475,000 from the Small Business Grants Fund (SBGF) and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Grants Fund (RHLBGF).
31. The Economic Development team is providing communications to businesses via our e-newsletter and twitter feed which has had many positive comments and developing positive case studies. Business e-newsletter subscriptions have gone up to 7,429 subscribers (+910 new subscriber since April 1), and our Twitter feed now has 551 followers (an increase of over 25%). The main BCP e-newsletter now has 37,878 subscribers (+983 new subscribers since April 1).
32. We have continued to co-ordinate business support offers with the wider initiatives including the “TogetherWeCan” campaign, and the supply of PPE. Over 170 companies have engaged directly, either offering donations or access to their PPE products.
33. Major regeneration projects are continuing to progress, in particular the purchase of the Former Power Station Site in Poole and Council investment in the Winter Gardens Project, Bournemouth will be presented for approval at Cabinet in May and will also be subject to approval by Council. Preparation work, commissioning of consultants and bid writing is continuing for the Poole Regeneration Programme, Future High Streets Fund and the Town Fund in Boscombe. All reports and bids are taking account of the likely impacts of COVID19.
34. The Destination Management Board and BAHA are engaged with business support and an initial assessment of the impact to the sector.
A recent survey was completed by 159 businesses of which 83% are temporarily closed. Estimates of loss are between 3 and 6 months depending on the nature of the business. The longer the situation continues the higher the chances that businesses will not be able to survive:
 - 77% likely or highly likely to survive if ends in June 2020
 - 40% if continues until September 2020
 - 23% if measures still in place in December 2020
 - Long-term more than half of restaurants, attractions, international education, events and transport businesses do not think they can survive.

Environment and Community

Housing

35. Multi-agency work continues to support residents who are vulnerable and in housing need. As well as approximately 100 single people initially accommodated we continue to make basic service provision available for those 10-15 people across BCP choosing to remain rough sleeping outside, including support for all of them and sanitation facilities in both Bournemouth and Poole town centres. The Housing Options team are currently housing around 300 single people in temporary accommodation, who may have previously either been rough sleeping or precariously housed. Support packages are being put into place with

the help of our many partners to sustain the placements and discussions with MHCLG continue to determine an exit strategy.

36. The Operations Centre continues to deliver an out of hours service for the Council and responds to all telecare customer calls across BCP 24/7.
37. Our focus on essential services means that a backlog of repairs and maintenance is building which will be a challenge for the Service once lockdown is lifted. We need to understand what this reduction of works requests and orders over the last few weeks means for the longer term. Some repairs may have been resolved by the tenant in the meantime, whereas it is likely that many will still be required or perhaps will have worsened and incur greater costs. At the start of March 2020, the teams were completing approximately 350 responsive repairs per week compared with just over 100 per week more recently, so the backlog is likely to be building at something over 200 per week.

Environment

38. Residual, recycling, food waste and commercial collection services continue to operate as normal, and garden waste collection services have been recommenced successfully.
39. The Council's Household waste recycling centres are still closed at the time of drafting, but DEFRA have issued guidance that Local Authorities should plan to re-open sites providing that safe working practices can be maintained. These will include restrictions on the number of vehicles allowed on site at any one time. The commercial waste tipping over the weighbridge will be re-introduced at both Nuffield and Millhams, operating within normal hours.
40. A reactive service for urgent safety matters across the wider highway network continues, as well as work to complete lower category outstanding highway defects while non-critical highway improvement schemes remain suspended. Plans are being developed to fully relaunch these services from 1 June, subject to supply chain providers reopening and where current social distancing measures can be achieved.
41. CIMT has agreed that the Service should continue with procuring the pre Covid-19 fleet replacement needs. This comprises fleet assets to the value of £2.188m including 8 mini sweepers for use across the conurbation and 8 recycling collection vehicles for the Bournemouth locality, with options to procure further vehicles over the next 2 years, but with no guarantees on future orders.
42. The Port of Poole Mortality Support Facility (MSF) is now fully functional with robust operating procedures, administration processes and governance arrangements in place. Prior to opening, a comprehensive training package was provided for MSF staff who had volunteered from BCP, DWFRS, Team Rubicon and retired police officers.
43. General amenity, highways verge and back up grass cutting remain suspended. Gang mowing has commenced throughout a selected range of larger destination parks and playing fields in order to facilitate their usage for exercise whilst

allowing social distancing to be maintained. To date one cycle of grass cutting has been completed throughout these sites.

Communities

44. Work on several key areas is underway: developing projects with volunteers, work on food security including food-focused neighbourhood community networks; community development projects (over 100 have been promoted through our web pages); and developing a single point of contact on financial advice with Citizens Advice Bureau and other partners
45. 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 and our Community Safety Partnership is developing a Domestic Abuse Response Strategy which sets the partnership response to issues of domestic abuse in the context of Covid 19. 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. Tactical multi agency partnership meetings continue in order to monitor crime and disorder issues across BCP which now feed in to a fortnightly Community Safety Partnership whose structure has been temporarily amended to account for the need to respond in these exceptional times.
46. 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. The environmental health service are supporting the roll out of essential training on infection control to care home settings.

Resources

Technical Resilience

47. There has continued to be an enormous effort by the IT teams to support our systems and to maintain the roll-out of modern and remote ways of working, including building and deploying 690 new laptops and 285 mobile phones.
48. The Application Development and Infrastructure teams have continued to roll out Microsoft Teams and aim to have all staff enabled to use this remote collaboration software by the end of July.
49. Due to issues with the supply chain (Covid-19 lockdown and social distancing restrictions) MLL Telecom are no longer able to successfully migrate all Poole sites onto the new wide area network (WAN), prior to the incumbent, KCOM, contract expiry on July 3 2020. CIMT has agreed to extend the current KCOM wide area network (WAN) contract to enable the safe migration of legacy Poole site circuits to the new BCP WAN, which creates an additional financial pressure of £190k.

Communications

50. We continue to use a range of communications channels to ensure that our communities receive information as quickly as possible, including social media, press releases and TV and other media interviews as appropriate.
51. The Leader has introduced a weekly live question and answer session for members of the public via Facebook and this has been very successful and well received.
52. Weekly telephone conferences continue with the five Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole MPs, chaired by the Leader. These calls have enabled discussions about important issues including PPE, local mortuary arrangements, relationships with private care providers and the Council's budget. The MPs have agreed to lobby on our behalf on specific issues as a result. The Leader is also publishing a regular email to all councillors and MPs to ensure they are all kept fully informed of local issues.
53. Internal communication to both staff and councillors has continued to be an important focus with a range of internal communications with colleagues during April, including Chief Executive's video blogs, a Facebook group has been established and regular newsletters and written updates.

Finance

54. The last report set out the situation on liquidity, the expenditure controls we have set in place and the financial management structure. These remain the same and the focus now is on balancing the budget. The second tranche of the £11.1 million award from the Covid-19 Emergency fund has now been received, bringing the government's financial support up to £22m, to support the council in funding our estimated £53m gap in the current financial year. The budget reports to cabinet will provide further detail on our response and budget pressures.
55. The Council continues to experience significant reductions in its incomes streams: Council Tax, Business Rates, rent, licence fees and from fees and charges. Financial Regulations allow Service Directors to increase existing fees and charges in consultation with their Portfolio Holder and the Chief Finance Officer. Service Directors have been asked to exercise this delegation in respect of any fee increases for 2020/21 which are not subject to consultation.

People and wellbeing

56. Maintaining the required staff capacity to deliver our critical services continues to be a priority and we have now supported the re-direction of 652 staff who are not being fully utilised due to changes in their services, who are now involved in projects such as Operation Shield, the Community Hub and PPE distribution.
57. The majority of the Council's employees are working, and many are working enhanced hours to support our collective response. At the time of writing there are 286 current absences due to self-isolation and 100 cases of sickness related to Covid-19, which is a small increase to absence reported in April.

58. CIMT has agreed in principle to utilise the Job Retention Scheme (JRS) or “furlough”, for staff within our traded services, with roles that have specific grant funding allocated to them, income generating roles where income generation has ceased and employees who cannot be re-directed. The driver for this decision has been a financial pressure to recover and mitigate staff costs. The first tranche to be furloughed will most likely be 84 BBML staff and approximately 145 support staff from across the Academy Trusts we support. BCP Council is validating the data that has been submitted for Council employees selected for furlough which is currently 393 employees and will be submitted by the end of May.
59. Staff wellbeing continues to be a focus. An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) has been authorised for procurement and the selection and implementation of this should be in place by the end of May, which will provide enhanced support to all our employees at a reduced cost.

Council Governance and Decision Making

60. 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 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, scheduled for 10 June. The next Council meeting has been brought forward to 7 July and will consider the budget changes which are to be considered in detail by the Cabinet on 24 June
61. The Council has successfully held a number of remote virtual meetings, including Licensing sub-Committee, Overview and Scrutiny Board, Cabinet and Planning Committee through use of the Skype for Business application and with live broadcast via YouTube. These meetings have all operated successfully and have included specific provisions to enable licensing and planning decisions to be informed by the required input from applicants and objectors to applications.

Conclusions:

62. The Covid-19 pandemic continues to have a major impact on the way that the Council delivers our services, how we support our communities and how we are working. All services have been affected and the forecast is that these effects will continue until well into the summer. Any release from lockdown is expected to be gradual and partial and I will report in more detail on the opportunities to reinstate services and move towards reset to the next Cabinet meeting. However, in the meantime, we continue in “Respond” mode and to make short-term decisions to ensure that the spread of infection is limited and our communities and colleagues are protected.

Background papers

63. N/A

Appendices

There are no appendices to this report.