

Chichester District Council

The Cabinet

12 May 2020

Response to Covid-19

1. Contacts

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2. Executive Summary

This report sets out the Council's response to date of Covid 19. The appendix to this report provides a service by service briefing.
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3. Recommendations

- 3.1 To note and comment on the Council's response to Covid19 (C19) emergency to date.
- 3.2 That a report on the financial implications of C19 on the Council's finances is prepared for consideration by Corporate Governance and Audit Committee, Cabinet and Council.
- 3.3 That a Recovery Framework Document is developed for consideration by Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and Council.

4. Background

- 4.1 This report sets out the Council's response so far to the C19 emergency.
- 4.2 The Council, under the Civil Contingency Act 2004, has a duty to prepare for Civil Emergencies. Its responsibilities are twofold:
 - to work with category 1 responders (police, fire, local authorities, NHS etc.) to plan, respond and recover from emergencies; and
 - that the Council has in place Business Continuity Management plans, processes and procedures to ensure the continuity of its services in an emergency.

This report concentrates on the Council's response to date. In due course there will be wider scrutiny of the role the Council played in preparing, responding and recovering from this emergency.

4.3 The Council has a Generic Emergency Plan together with a number of specific emergency plans, such as an Influenza Plan, to deal with a wide range of emergencies. These plans are outwards facing and specifically set out the Council's role and statutory responsibilities in responding to emergencies. It also has a Business Continuity Plan that specifically focuses on the Council's ability to operate its services during an emergency. Both the Emergency Plan and the Business Continuity Plan is kept under review by the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee.

4.4 The Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) regularly undertakes a review of its critical services via a process called Business Impact Analysis (BIA). The BIA sets out in priority order which services need to continue to operate during an emergency. During this emergency SLT has deemed the following services as critical:

- Chichester Contract Services household waste and fly tipping
- The majority of our housing services such as rough sleepers and homelessness
- Community Services
- Revenue and Benefit Services and the Contact Centre
- Business Support
- Key support services such PR, ICT, HR, Emergency Planning, Payroll and Finance.

Further details on how these services have operated can be found in the appendix. During the recovery phase of this emergency the list of critical services listed above may change.

4.5 In the early stage of C19 an Emergency Management Team was established to respond and oversee the emergency. This team is led by the Chief Executive and consists of all of the directors, divisional managers from the critical services, officers from emergency planning and the PR Manager. The team initially were meeting twice a week, but this has recently moved to weekly. Before lockdown was implemented the EMT undertook a full assessment of what was needed in order for the critical services to continue to operate. This included an assessment of the number of staff needed in each critical service team. A number of staff from other teams were transferred into these services either; to support them due to an increase in demand (i.e. revenue and benefits), or to maintain the service where workforce levels had fallen due staff with long term health conditions or self-isolating because of displaying symptoms of C19 (i.e. waste collection).

4.6 Although not deemed critical to this emergency there are some services where it was felt important to maintain the current level of service (i.e. Development Management and Local Plan) in order to focus on the Council's key priorities. There are other services where the service levels have been reduced and or stopped altogether due to Government restrictions (i.e. the Novium). In addition there have been some new services that we have been required to provide such as the Regulation of Business Closures.

4.7 In early March all teams were asked test their business continuity plans and by the end of March all plans were operational. All office based staff have available appropriate equipment to work from home and they all have access to the full suite of

ICT systems as well as the corporate telephone system. Teams and individuals communicate via audio and video conferencing.

4.8 In the first month of the emergency the Council's critical services' teams worked endlessly into the evenings and over the weekends to ensure their services were up and running so that they could provide much needed support to our communities and businesses. The Chief Executive would especially like to thank the following teams for their outstanding commitment to public service:

- Chichester Contract Services who have continued to collect residual waste, recycling, green waste and fly tipping services;
- The Communities team who have worked in partnership with West Sussex County Council to set up the Community Hub to support the most vulnerable in our communities;
- The ICT team who have ensured all our office based staff can work productively from home;
- The Housing team who at very short notice managed to find accommodation for all rough sleepers in the district and is currently experiencing a peak in demand in homelessness applications;
- Revenue, Benefits and the Contact Centre Teams who have had to deal with an increase in demand as well as administering the Hardship Fund and the Business Rate Grants. The Council is in the top quartile for paying the Business Rate Grants and the Contact Centre has answered 95% of telephone calls within one minute;
- The Communications team has worked tirelessly to keep all our stakeholders well informed during this emergency;
- The Corporate Health and Safety and Emergency Planning team for providing advice on how to keep our staff and customers safe as well as leading on PPE guidance for the West Sussex district and boroughs;
- The Health Protection team who have implemented the Business Closure Regulations;
- The Finance team who have had to provide much more information both internally and externally on the financial implications of C19;
- HR and Payroll team who continue to provide advice and support to staff and for ensuring staff are paid on time;
- The Economic Development team who have provided support to businesses. During this emergency they have experienced a 400% increase in demand for their services.

4.9 In addition the Chief Executive would like to thank all staff for all their hard work, patience and support during these challenging times, especially those staff that have willingly transferred from their current role into one of the critical services teams because without their support the critical services would not have been able to operate effectively.

4.10 It is not always easy for staff to work from home, especially those with young children. A supportive and flexible approach has been adopted to take account of individual circumstances and a staff survey is being undertaken to understand how staff are doing and to identify any additional support that they need.

4.11 The impact on the Council's finances is considerable. The Council relies heavily on fees and charges to fund its services and these sources of income have been

significantly impacted by lockdown. Bad debts are also expected to increase as more people and businesses struggle pay to their council tax, business rates and rents. At the time of writing this report it is not clear when or how quickly the current restrictions will be lifted, but as a district that relies heavily on the retail and tourism industry, many of the Council's income streams are unlikely to recover quickly and some may never recover to pre C19 levels. It is too early to predict the full impact at this stage, but we could see the Council's income reduce by up to £8m this year with further on-going significant reductions in future years. So far the Council has received two tranches of Government Funding: £40k and £1.211m for C19. It is not known whether any further funding will be made, but it is highly unlikely to be anywhere near sufficient to cover the losses that the Council will incur during this emergency.

4.12 Over the coming months officers will be working closely with members on redefining the Council's priorities for its communities and businesses and a new budget may need to be produced. Reports will be prepared for Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Corporate Governance and Audit Committee, Cabinet and Council setting out in more detail the impact on the Council's budget and reserves and a recovery framework will be developed for members to consider.

4.13 In May, virtual Committee, Cabinet and Council meetings will commence.

5. Resource and Legal Implications

5.1 Although not yet fully quantified, there are significant risks to the Council's finances that will need to be mitigated to ensure that the Council meets its statutory requirement to prepare a balanced budget. The appendix to the report provides additional information on the impact on the Council's finances.

5.2 A number of urgent decisions have been made during this emergency. All urgent decisions have been made in accordance to the Council's Constitution and are reported elsewhere on this agenda or will be reported to Council later this month.

6. Consultation

6.1 The Leader and the Leader of the Opposition have been consulted on all key decisions throughout this emergency. Weekly meetings have been held with Cabinet members and all group leaders. All members have had access to a help desk where they can raise questions on C19 or other service related issues.

7. Community Impact and Corporate Risks

7.1 The longer the emergency continues the greater the impact on our communities and businesses. At the appropriate time the Council will need to agree its recovery response to C19.

8. Other Implications

None.

9. Appendices

Appendix 1 service updates of C19

10. Background Papers

None.