

Meeting EXECUTIVE
Portfolio Area All
Date 13 MAY 2020



CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) INCIDENT MANAGEMENT REPORT

THIS REPORT IS CONSIDERED AS URGENT DUE TO THE NEED TO UPDATE THE EXECUTIVE ON THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY, TO OUTLINE THE FINANCIAL PRESSURES BEING EXPERIENCED AND TO AGREE THE RECOVERY BASED APPROACH.

KEY DECISION

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Contributor All Response Cell Leads
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To update the Executive on the COVID-19 crisis and the Council's response.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the current position and the Council's emergency response to date be noted.

2.2 That the Officer Key Decisions which have been taken in response to the COVID-19 emergency as set out in paragraph 4.11.2 in the report be noted and endorsed.

2.3 That the recovery phase approach as set out in section 4.13 of the report be approved.

- 2.4 That officers be requested to undertake a review of the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Strategies and report back to the June 2020 Executive meeting.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 What is Coronavirus?

- 3.1.1 Coronaviruses are a family of viruses common across the world in animals and humans. Certain types cause illnesses in people. For example, some cause the common cold; others cause diseases which are much more severe such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), both of which often lead to pneumonia.
- 3.1.2 COVID-19 is the illness seen in people with a new strain of coronavirus not previously seen in humans. People therefore have no immunity to the virus and there are no vaccines to create immunity or anti-viral to decrease the symptoms currently available.
- 3.1.3 On 31 December 2019, Chinese authorities notified the World Health Organisation of an outbreak of pneumonia in Wuhan City, which was later classified as a new disease: COVID-19.
- 3.1.4 On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organisation declared the outbreak of COVID-19 'A Public Health Emergency of International Concern'.
- 3.1.5 On 11 March the World Health Organisation declared that the coronavirus outbreak was a pandemic as there was now significant and ongoing person-to-person spread in multiple countries around the world at the same time. At that time there were 118,000 cases in 114 countries.

3.2 Government Response to the Crisis

- 3.2.1 On 3 March 2020, the Government published its Coronavirus Action Plan ('A guide to what you can expect across the UK') which set out what the UK as a whole had done and planned to do to tackle the current novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The plan set out the proposed phased response: Contain, Delay, Research and Mitigate.
- 3.2.2 On 18 March, the Government announced that all schools in England would be closed with effect from 20 March until further notice for all pupils except children of key workers and the most vulnerable.
- 3.2.3 On 20 March, the Prime Minister announced that all pubs, bars, restaurants, cafes, cinemas, theatres, nightclubs, museums, galleries and gyms must close that night.
- 3.2.4 On 23 March, the Prime Minister announced a more comprehensive lockdown of the UK, banning people from leaving their homes or meeting in groups of more than two people except for a few specific reasons, namely shopping for basic necessities, for one form of exercise a day, for any medical need, and to travel to and from work if absolutely necessary and where it was not possible to work from home.

- 3.2.5 On 25 March, the Coronavirus Act 2020 received royal assent. The Act grants the Government emergency powers to handle the coronavirus pandemic. The Act gave the Government the discretionary power to limit or suspend public gatherings, to detain individuals suspected to be infected by COVID-19, and to intervene or relax regulations in a range of sectors to limit transmission of the disease, ease the burden on public health services and assist healthcare workers and the economically affected. Areas covered by the Act include the NHS, social care, schools, police, border force, local councils, funerals and courts.
- 3.2.6 There has been a great deal of guidance/information sent to Councils from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), Local Government Association (LGA), District Councils Network (DCN), and other Government departments and agencies and the Policy Team have been distributing this information to Response Cell Leads to assist them in their responses. A chronological list of this information is attached at Appendix One for information.

3.3 Local Government Sector Response

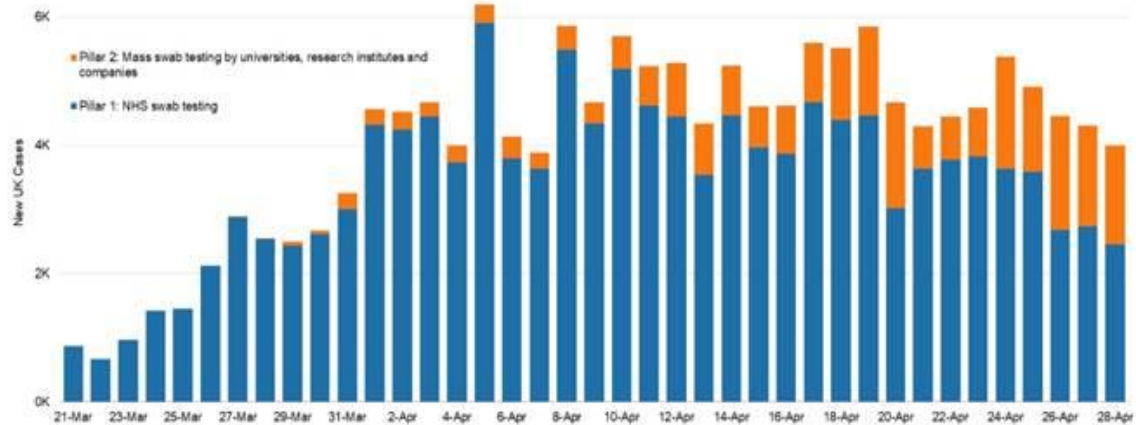
- 3.3.1 A number of representative bodies have provided advice to local authorities and representations to government, to support an effective response from the sector and to make the case for appropriate support from the Government. The Local Government Association has played a supportive role in discussion with government and created a range of guidance to support Councils, as has the East of England LGA. The LGA's Chief Executive, Mark Lloyd provided evidence to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee on 27 April alongside the LGA Chairman and has discussed with them the impacts of COVID-19 on Councils and the work underway to support the vulnerable and support communities, including delivery of PPE, support for homeless people, grants and financial support, and the operation of vital front line services. The LGA have coordinated a financial assessment across local government, estimating over £12bn funding will be required to support Councils to play their crucial frontline roles and enable recovery in local communities.
- 3.3.2 The District Council's Network have been providing support to District and Borough Councils, advocating for support in relation to the financial pressures across the sector and the provision of vital support for frontline services and businesses amongst other matters.

3.4 National Cases of COVID-19

- 3.4.1 The ONS graph overleaf shows that at 28 April 2020, of those tested for COVID-19, 161,145 were confirmed positive. Overall new cases have plateaued at around 4000 per day.

New Cases (UK)

Cases are reported when lab tests are completed. This may be a few days after initial testing. Testing capacity is increasing, the number of observed cases has remained stable over the last 7 days, though there are likely many more cases than currently recorded here.

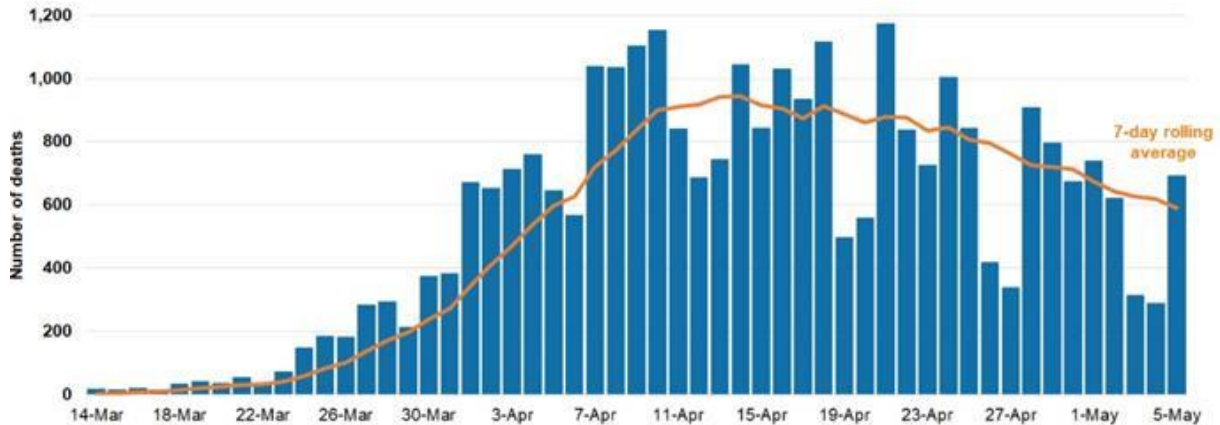


3.5 ONS National Number of Deaths

3.5.1 Of those hospitalised who tested positive for COVID-19 as at 5 May 2020, 29,427 people had sadly died. As there is a significant fluctuation around weekend reporting figures, the 7 day rolling average is shown by a line in the chart below.

Daily COVID-19 Recorded Deaths (UK)

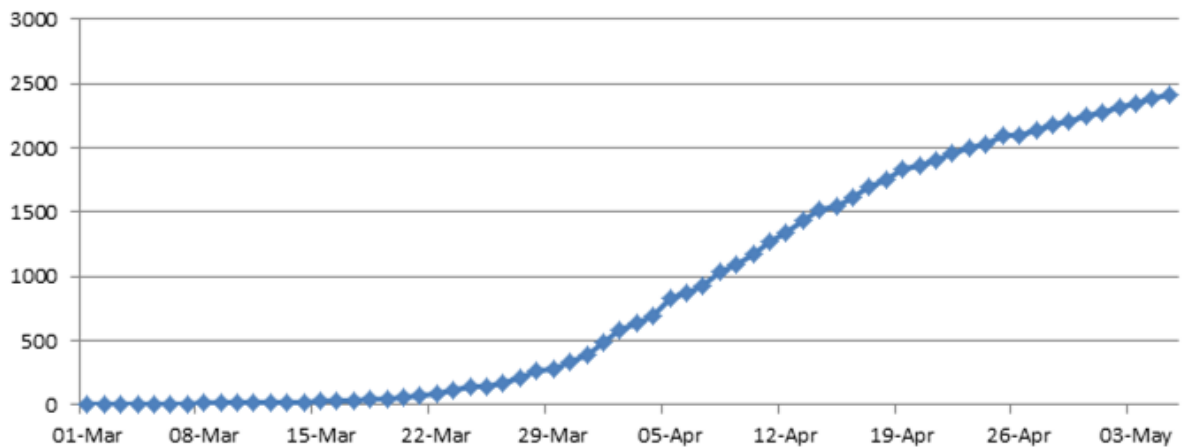
There were an additional 693 deaths of people who had tested positive for coronavirus.



3.6 Hertfordshire Cases of COVID-19

3.6.1 In Hertfordshire, by 5 May there had been 2,411 confirmed cases of COVID-19. As a proportion of cases in the country, Hertfordshire has just above 1.2% of the UK total confirmed cases but is home to 1.4% of the UK population. The chart overleaf shows the increase in cases in Hertfordshire from 1 March to 5 May 2020.

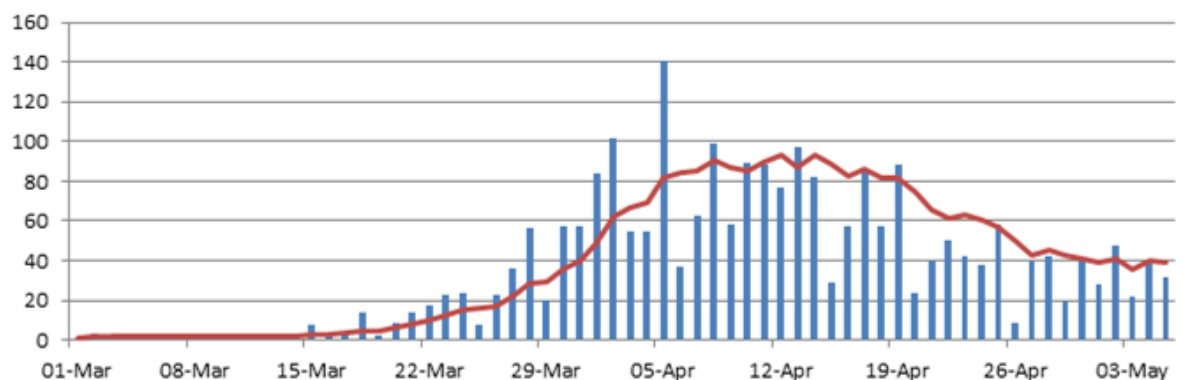
ONS Cases of COVID-19 in Hertfordshire (1 March to 5 May 2020)



3.6.2 The graph below shows the daily confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Hertfordshire (bars) with the rolling seven-day average (line) since the first confirmed case at the start of March through to 5 May. Focusing on the rolling average helps even out weekend dips in hospital recording.

It shows that the rolling average peaks around 90 cases a day for just over a week around the middle of April. It also shows how the social distancing measures have forced the Hertfordshire curve down (despite the increased testing capacity) and this has enabled the “r” (rate of viral transmission per person) to drop below 1.

ONS Daily cases of COVID-19 in Hertfordshire (1 March to 5 May 2020)



3.7 Deaths in Hertfordshire and Stevenage by setting

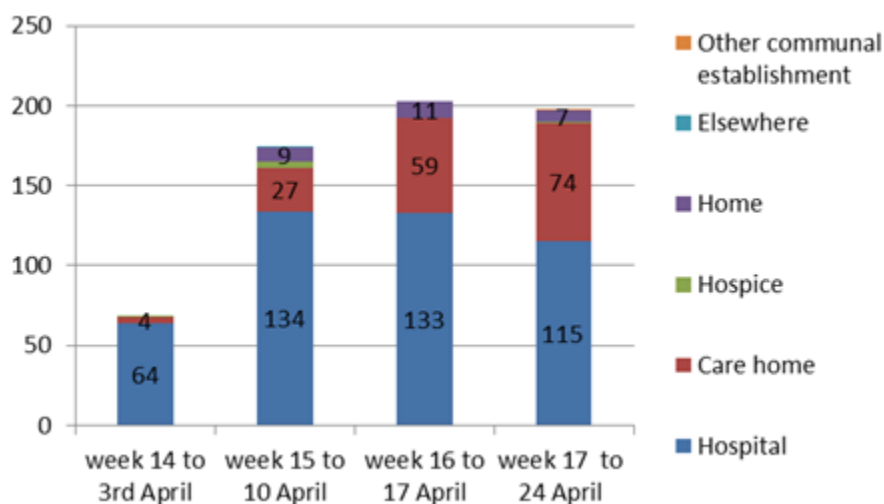
3.7.1 The table overleaf sets out recent information published by the ONS in relation to deaths by setting. ONS data which goes up until the week ending 24 April shows a total of 645 coronavirus-related deaths across Hertfordshire and 33 deaths in Stevenage across all settings.

ONS Deaths in all settings between 1 March and 24 April 2020 in Hertfordshire

Area name	Population 2018 estimate				Covid-19 Deaths by setting							
	Population	% pop.	# 65+	% 65+ Herts	% of deaths	all settings	Home	Hospital	Care home	Hospice	Other communal	Elsewhere
Broxbourne	96,876	8.2	17,305	8.6	8.2%	53	4	40	7	2	0	0
Dacorum	154,280	13.0	26,479	13.2	11.3%	73	3	54	15	0	1	0
East Herts	148,105	12.5	26,528	13.2	10.9%	70	4	44	21	1	0	0
Hertsmere	104,205	8.8	18,941	9.4	20.0%	129	6	87	35	0	0	1
North Herts	133,214	11.2	25,243	12.5	7.1%	46	1	28	16	1	0	0
St Albans	147,373	12.4	25,026	12.4	11.3%	73	0	58	15	0	0	0
Stevenage	87,754	7.4	13,341	6.6	5.1%	33	1	15	17	0	0	0
Three Rivers	93,045	7.9	16,891	8.4	6.4%	41	2	31	8	0	0	0
Watford	96,767	8.2	12,651	6.3	11.0%	71	2	50	19	0	0	0
Welwy Hatfield	122,746	10.4	18,837	9.4	8.7%	56	4	39	11	2	0	0
Hertfordshire	1,184,365	100.0	201,242	100.0	100.0%	645	27	446	164	6	1	1

3.7.2 The graph below shows the same data for Hertfordshire by week. It shows that in the first week almost all COVID-19 suspected deaths occurred in hospital with just 4% of deaths taking place in care homes in the County. In the second week the number of suspected COVID-19 deaths in care homes in the County increased to 14.8%, with a further increase to 29.9% by the third week and to well over 37.4% by week four.

ONS COVID-19 deaths by setting by week

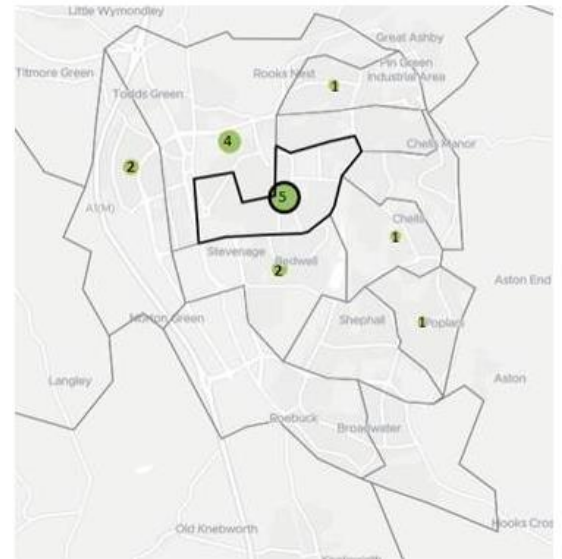


3.7.3 Hertfordshire as at 5 May had the sixth highest number of deaths in absolute terms in England behind Kent, Essex, Birmingham, Hampshire, Lancashire and Surrey.

3.7.4 The graph below shows the ONS data in relation to the number of deaths in Stevenage in all settings by Ward. Of the 103 deaths recorded by the ONS in Stevenage between 1 March and 17 April, sixteen were COVID-19 related. Of these sixteen COVID-19 related deaths, almost a third of the total (5 out of 16) were recorded in the Pin Green ward.

ONS Number of deaths in Stevenage by Ward

ONS code	Ward name (ONS)	All deaths	Covid-19 deaths	% Covid-19
Stevenage 001	St Nicolas	5	1	20.0%
Stevenage 002	Woodfield & Old Town	23	4	17.4%
Stevenage 003	Martins Wood	5	0	0.0%
Stevenage 004	Chells North	4	0	0.0%
Stevenage 005	Symonds Green	7	2	28.6%
Stevenage 006	Pin Green	16	5	31.3%
Stevenage 007	Chells South	4	1	25.0%
Stevenage 008	Bedwell	11	2	18.2%
Stevenage 009	Poplars	10	1	10.0%
Stevenage 010	Shephall	6	0	0.0%
Stevenage 011	Roebuck	9	0	0.0%
Stevenage 012	Broadwater & Bragbury End	3	0	0.0%
Stevenage	Stevenage	103	16	15.5%



3.8 East and North Herts Health Trust

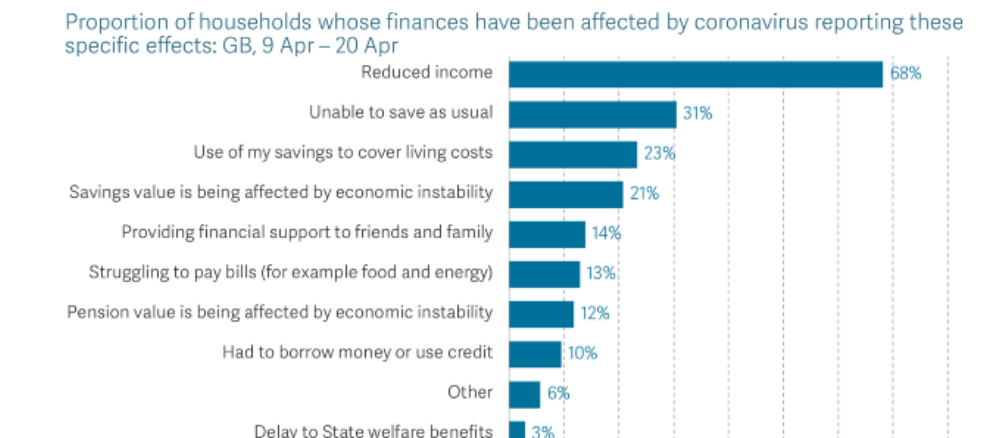
3.8.1 As at 29 April the Trust is experiencing a downward trend. Bed capacity is at 58 per cent for COVID-19 patients and 60 per cent for non COVID-19 patients. ICU capacity is at 41 percent. 55 per cent of mortuary capacity is available plus further off site provision.

3.9 Economic Effects of COVID-19

3.9.1 The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) has warned that the pandemic could see the UK economy shrink by a record 35% by June 2020. The OBR said this figure is based on an assumption that the current lockdown would last for three months. It is estimated two million people have applied for universal credit since the government advised people to stay at home due to COVID-19. Works and Pensions Secretary, Therese Coffey reported to MPs that this figure is six times the normal claimant rate and in one week there had been a tenfold increase in claims.

The impact that the economic crisis is having on household finances is shown in the graph below.

Figure 1: A majority of households are experiencing falls in income



3.9.2 UK businesses have applied for 6.3 million workers to be furloughed under the government's job retention scheme since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak. Government figures show applications worth £8 Billion had been made by businesses as of 3 May 2020.

3.10 Government help for Individuals and Households

3.10.1 Government recently set out a package of temporary measures to those who are financially affected by COVID-19.

3.10.2 As part of this support package, changes were made to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) arrangements so that individuals who are self-isolating due to suspected or confirmed COVID-19 can claim SSP. This includes individuals who are caring for people self-isolating in the same household. SSP to also be paid from day one rather than day four of absence.

3.10.3 The Minimum Income Floor has been temporarily relaxed for those who are self-employed and receiving Universal Credit who need to self-isolate.

3.10.4 For those who may need financial support from their Local Authority, they could be entitled to support from the £500 million Hardship Fund. Most of this funding will be used to provide more Council Tax relief, either through existing Local Council Tax support schemes or through similar measures.

3.10.5 For those experiencing financial difficulties meeting their mortgage repayments because of COVID-19, they may be entitled to a mortgage or rental holiday for 3 months. This includes landlords whose tenants are experiencing financial difficulties because of COVID-19 to ensure that tenants do not face the threat of eviction for at least 3 months.

3.11 Government help for Businesses

3.11.1 Government recently set out a package of temporary and targeted measures to support businesses through the disruption caused by COVID-19.

3.11.2 As part of this support, all businesses have had access to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, whereby HMRC will reimburse 80% of 'furloughed' workers (i.e. workers who have been asked to stop working but have not been made redundant) wage costs, up to £2,500 per month.

3.11.3 All businesses also had access to the Deferred VAT & Income Tax Payments with deferred VAT payments for 3 months applied from 20 March until 30 June 2020.

3.11.4 Businesses were also supported by the HMRC 'Time to Pay' offer for all firms and individuals who were in temporary financial distress, as a result of COVID-19 and have outstanding tax liabilities.

3.11.5 Larger businesses were supported by the COVID-19 Corporate Financing Facility (CCFF), whereby the Bank of England would buy short term debt to support a company, if it has been affected by a short-term funding squeeze to enable the finance of short-term liabilities.

3.11.6 All Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have had access to the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, which was administered by the British Business Bank and the Reclaiming of Statutory Sick Pay to allow

SMEs to reclaim Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) for sickness absence due to COVID-19 for a period of up to 2 weeks' SSP per eligible employee who has been off work due to COVID-19.

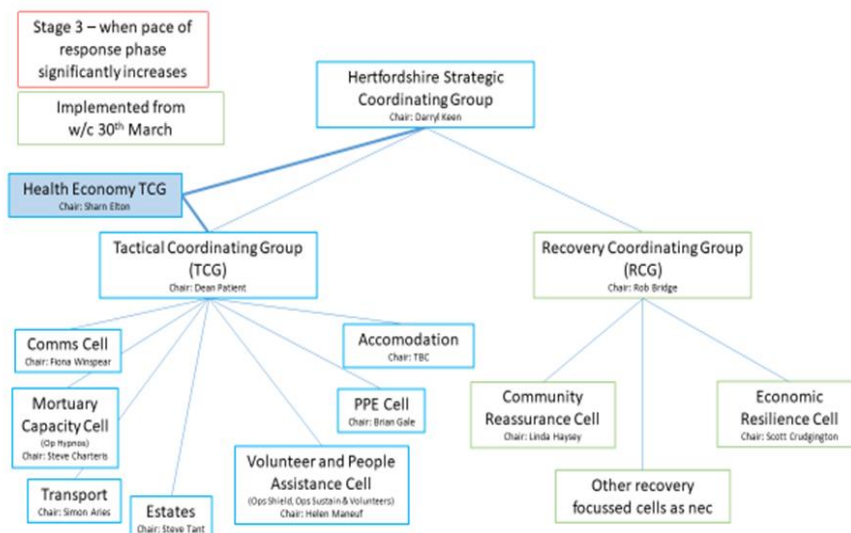
- 3.11.7 Support for self-employed businesses (including members of partnerships) was also introduced through the Self-employment Income Support Scheme to support those who lost income due to coronavirus (COVID-19). The scheme allows the self-employed to claim a taxable grant worth 80% of their trading profits up to a maximum of £2,500 per month for the next 3 months.
- 3.11.8 The Government has also offered cash grants of up to £25,000 for businesses with property, with a rateable value of between £15,000 and £51,000 for the retail, hospitality and leisure sector, as well as a Business Rates Holiday. The Small Business Grant Scheme would provide a one off grant of £10,000 to eligible businesses, to help meet their ongoing business costs.
- 3.11.9 Bounce Back Loans were also introduced to assist SME's to borrow between £2,000 and £50,000, with the government guaranteeing 100% of the loan with an interest free period for the first 12 months.

3.12 Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum

3.12.1 The Local Resilience Forum (LRF) is a multi-agency partnership, made up of representatives from local public services, including the emergency services, local authorities, the NHS, the Environment Agency and the Highways Agency as well as other partners in the military and voluntary sector.

3.12.2 A Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG) was formed in February and a Tactical Co-ordination Group (TCG) approximately one month later. These Groups have been providing a multi-agency response at both strategic and tactical level to the COVID-19 crisis, working together to manage and as much as possible minimise its effect on the population of Hertfordshire. Key partners on both the SCG and TCG are meeting three times a week, working together to tackle challenges in a way that is coordinated and mutually supportive.

3.12.3 The LRF Structure can be seen below:



3.12.4 The key priorities for these Groups have been the provision of sufficient hospital beds, social care beds and out of hospital support, mortuary spaces, death management process, PPE and recovery. Specific issues identified also include for example oxygen capacity at Watford General Hospital. Cells have been stood up to cover:

- Volunteers and Assistance to People (Operations Shield and Sustain)
- Communications
- Mortuary Capacity (Operation Hypnos)
- Protective Personal Equipment (PPE)
- Home Care Capacity
- Transport
- Accommodation,
- Environmental Health
- Estates
- Swabbing/Testing Cell

3.12.5 A Recovery Co-ordination Group has also been established along with Community Reassurance and Economic Resilience Cells.

3.12.6 In addition, a number of activities to ensure consistent data and support mental health and wellbeing have been established.

3.12.7 Hertfordshire Districts/Boroughs are represented on the Strategic Co-ordination Group by Nick Long, Deputy Chief Executive at Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and Neil Kieran, Emergency Planning and Principal Community Protection Officer at St Albans District Council represents Districts/Borough's on the Tactical Co-ordinating Group. Stevenage Borough Council receives regular updates and minutes of the meetings and feeds any issues or queries into both of these Groups or the Cells when required.

3.13 Operation Shield

3.13.1 Operation Shield is a Government initiative where around 1.5 million people across the UK have been identified as being at most risk from COVID-19 mainly because of an underlying health condition. These people have been strongly advised to stay at home at all times and avoid any face-to-face contact for a period of at least 12 weeks.

3.13.2 Operation Shield was devised with the aim of supporting these people to self-isolate at home through the provision of essential food and medical supplies. People that are part of Operation Shield would have received a letter from the NHS providing more information including how to register.

3.13.3 As at 28 April, there were 24,510 Hertfordshire residents on the MHCLG's main shield list. At the time of writing this report, Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) were awaiting an updated list from Central Government which includes the records of additional Hertfordshire residents identified from local GP records. The shielded figure is expected to increase to approximately 33,500.

3.13.4 As at 30 April 2020, over 11,000 food parcels and over 500 prescriptions had been delivered in Hertfordshire.

3.14 Operation Sustain

3.14.1 The aim of Operation Sustain, which is being led by HCC within Hertfordshire, was to seek to provide a co-ordinated means of gathering the details of those requiring support and those wishing to provide support.

3.14.2 Over 10,000 volunteers have been recruited to the three key voluntary sector organisations working collaboratively on this task: #TeamHerts, Watford3RT and Communities 1st. The number of volunteers deployed to date is over 3800. Volunteers will be receiving a letter soon via #TeamHerts thanking them for their continued support and patience whilst they await notification of a suitable volunteering role.

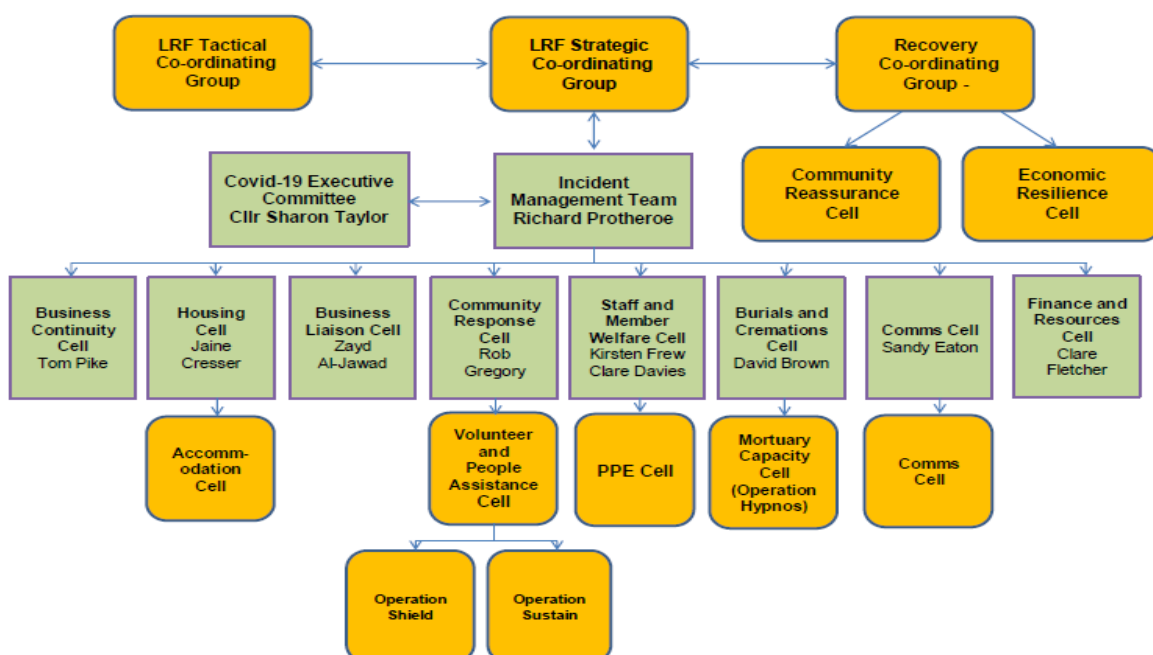
4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 Stevenage Borough Council's Emergency Response Arrangements

4.1.1 In response to the Coronavirus outbreak and the enactment of the COVID-19 Action Plan, the Council instigated an Incident Management Team (IMT), which is co-ordinating the local emergency response within Stevenage. This includes the establishment of eight Response Cells each led by an Assistant Director or senior manager.

4.1.2 The Council's emergency management structure which can be seen below has been designed to complement the LRF structure. The Council's response cells are in green with the Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum cells in orange.

Stevenage Borough Council Response Cells (Green) (shown with LRF Response Cells to show links (Orange))



4.2 COVID-19 Emergency Committee

4.2.1 To complement the officer structures the Council also established a COVID-19 Emergency Member level group that consists of Executive Members plus Opposition Group Leaders. Through weekly meetings Members have been advised of national and local updates, progress against strategic actions, and updates from the Chief Executive/Strategic Directors and Response Cell leads.

4.3 Incident Management Team

4.3.1 The Council's Incident Management Team (IMT) is chaired by Strategic Director Richard Protheroe and comprises senior managers representing each of the eight Incident Response Cells as shown in the chart in paragraph 4.1.2. The Incident Manager is responsible for maintaining a strategic overview of the Council's response to the incident, receiving updates from the Response Cells and the allocation of actions to the cells. The IMT also gathers intelligence to help inform decisions that need to be taken. Updates from both the LRF Strategic and Tactical Co-ordination Groups are also considered at the IMT. Representatives from the Police and Citizens Advice Stevenage also attend IMT meetings which has proved to be extremely beneficial.

4.3.2 The IMT and each of the Cells have their own terms of reference, action, decision and risk logs to provide an audit trail of the Council's response, ensure that progress of actions is monitored, decisions recorded and risks are highlighted and mitigated. An outline of the work carried out by each of the eight Response Cells is provided in Section 4.4 below.

4.4 Business Continuity Cell and Staff and Member Welfare Cell

4.4.1 The Council has a well-established approach to business continuity and to the provision of support and guidance to employees. The Business Continuity and Staff and Member Welfare Cells have been meeting to review the Council's working arrangements and monitor staff absences to ensure that essential services continue to operate. The cells have reviewed the way in which services are delivered in accordance with social distancing guidance and to ensure the safety of staff, Members and customers and visitors to the town.

4.4.2 The Business Continuity Cell meets frequently, and at key points of the incident has met daily to ensure appropriate support, review and decision making is in place. It is Chaired by a Strategic Director and supported by Assistant Directors (or their delegates), covering all key areas of the organisation. The Cell is currently meeting three times a week. The focus of the Cell is on a review of the status of service delivery and actions needed to be taken to ensure essential service provision, ensuring plans are developed and executed to maintain service provision and change service provision where required, to ensure customers can access appropriate services, that the organisational infrastructure is in place to support service delivery, and that crucial new services such as Stevenage Helps are supported and enabled to deliver. The Cells have also supported a review of key service contracts,

continuing to review organisational capacity, ensuring home and remote working practices are in place, and also supported a review of FTFC priorities.

- 4.4.3 The Staff and Member Welfare Cell is chaired by the Senior HR Manager(s), with support from key parts of the organisation such as Health and Safety, Communications, Member Services and the wider HR Team. The Cell is supported via ongoing communications with different parts of the Council, management teams and employee and Member feedback. The group has provided advice and support to prepare working protocols in front line services, advice and supply of PPE, policies and procedures for home working, put in place additional support from mental health to bereavement support, measures to support shielded employees, as well as informal ways for colleagues to work together and remain in touch.
- 4.4.4 The Council has taken significant steps to enable essential services to continue to operate. This has included a rapid programme to enable over 500 colleagues (in both Stevenage and East Herts Councils) to work from home, establishment of different forms of video and audio solutions, put in place new ways of working across service management teams to provide resilience, redeployed a number of colleagues to crucial front line services including support to Stevenage Helps and migrated many customer services online and to be phone based, as well as safely suspending other services in line with lockdown requirements.
- 4.4.5 Currently the following essential frontline services are still operating along with back office and support services:
- Customer Service Centre phone lines and online presence
 - Refuse and recycling
 - Key areas of grounds maintenance such as parts of highways verges and green spaces
 - Supported Housing services (Independent Living Schemes)
 - Housing Supply and Housing Options including Homelessness
 - Provision of temporary accommodation
 - Management of Lettings and Tenancy
 - Benefit Service including provision over £20m reliefs and over £8m new grants
 - Council Tax Support
 - Business Rates Support
 - Rent Advice and Support
 - Community Safety, including crucial programmes such as SADA
 - CCTV and Out of Hours provision
 - All statutory Environmental Health Services
 - Licensing Services
 - Planning and Development
 - Regeneration and Housing Development
 - Emergency Repairs

4.4.6 Due to the need to comply with Government restrictions, the following services were put on hold or reduced until further notice:

- All SBC events
- Community Transport
- Community Centres and Community Arts Centre
- Play Centres
- Stevenage Museum
- Mutual Exchanges
- Regeneration Visitor Centre
- The Gordon Craig Theatre
- Stevenage Leisure Limited (Leisure Centre, Swimming Centre, Golf Facilities)
- Fairlands Valley Outdoor Activity Centre
- Changes to Direct Services such as temporary cessation of skips, bulky waste, non-essential works
- Changes to Car Park provision
- Closing Car Parks in Parks (excluding disabled spaces)
- Reduction in Indoor Market to only open Food Stalls

4.4.7 Highway verge maintenance and grass cutting near link roads and green areas within estates recommenced on 27 April to help maintain a practicable level of maintenance. General maintenance also started on closed play areas during the week commencing 27 April. At the time of writing this report it was also envisaged that bulky waste collection services would start again during the week commencing 11 May 2020.

4.4.8 Key FTFC delivery programmes are also continuing. The regeneration schemes at Queensway and Town Square continue to be progressed with contractors working in accordance with government guidance. The Housing Development programme continues on existing sites, with ground works commencing at North Road from early May. The Kenilworth contract has yet to commence on site. A number of critical ICT projects are also continuing to progress as planned.

4.4.9 Non-frontline staff are working from home where they can and the Cells have put in place arrangements to make this possible and ensure that staff working from home have the equipment and procedures to work effectively and that they are being kept informed and engaged including wellbeing and resilience online training sessions and virtual coffee meet ups.

4.4.10 The Cells are now commencing work to consider how services may be adapted for when the current national restrictions change.

4.5 Community Response Cell

4.5.1 This Response Cell is working closely with the Police, Stevenage Citizens Advice, British Red Cross, Foodbanks and other voluntary services in Stevenage.

4.5.2 The Council is working in partnership with a range of local charities to help people to donate goods or volunteer time. On 20 March the Council launched

an appeal called Stevenage Helps to capture volunteering and donation contributions from local residents who want to help others facing hardship due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

- 4.5.3 Stevenage Helps is an alliance between the Council and a large number of voluntary and community organisations, including Stevenage Citizens Advice, local foodbanks, HertsHelps along with a huge number of offers of support from local businesses, volunteers and support organisations.
- 4.5.4 Officers have also worked with Stevenage Community Trust to launch an online giving platform to support vulnerable people and groups and have been supporting Stevenage FC Helpline, North Herts CVS Helpline and Food Shed. This had raised over £27,000 by 28 April.
- 4.5.5 On 6 April the Council launched its Stevenage Helps Community Response Team and a helpline which is open 6 days a week to provide support to vulnerable residents to provide help with food supplies, accessing essential services and also assistance in other ways, such as posting mail and telephone support. Donations of food have been received from Costco, Wilkinson and Church Farm Ardeley. Stevenage Football Club's Coronavirus Community Careline has assisted with prescription medicine deliveries.
- 4.5.6 Up until 28 April the helpline had supported 367 requests for support and the response team had delivered 329 emergency food parcels and supported 55 medical prescription deliveries.
- 4.5.7 The Council has also supported Herts Help by contacting 538 people on the Shielded List who did not respond to the government's letter, to ascertain whether they required food parcels or any other assistance. Out of this exercise 55 residents were immediately referred for support.
- 4.5.8 Officers are working with community associations as a result of community centres closing on 23 March to assess how the Council can support them through this difficult period. The Assistant Director (Communities and Neighbourhoods) has also met with the Managing Director from Stevenage Leisure Limited to discuss the company's situation and how the Council can support them. The Council has also flagged the financial difficulties being experienced by leisure trusts due to COVID-19 to the MHCLG and the DCN.
- 4.5.9 To ensure the health and safety of Council customers and staff, the Community Transport service was suspended on 16 March 2020 due to the vulnerability of clients using this service. Following further guidance nationally the Council closed Stevenage Museum and suspended its Play Service on 17 March 2020.
- 4.5.10 The Council is working on a joint bid by local frontline charities for funding as a result of the Government's proposed funding package for charities being announced on 8 April 2020.
- 4.5.11 The Council has seen a 90% increase in SADA referrals and has been raising the profile of SADA and the No More Service via social media, the Council's website and on SG1radio. A further three properties for SADA

referrals have been acquired. There have also been increasing calls around neighbour disputes and anti-social behaviour and officers have been working with the police in relation to a number of ASB neighbour disputes. The demand for the No More Service has increased by over 250%, due to the urgent accommodation arrangements established for those homeless and rough sleeping. One case of COVID-19 related hate crime has been recorded. There has also been a significant increase in fly tipping of garden waste in part due to the closure of the household waste recycling centres.

4.5.12 The Council has maintained the Neighbourhood Warden presence, including over the Easter Bank Holiday weekend, working with the Police on group dispersals particularly in parks and the town centre.

4.5.13 It was agreed that Councillors could carry forward their remaining 2019/20 Local Community Budgets (LCB) for climate change activities or COVID-19 relief efforts. The LCB scheme for 2020/21 was relaunched on 27 April 2020.

4.5.14 An Emergency Domestic Abuse Partnership has also been established, with partners from across the County Council, the police, NHS, the voluntary and community sector, and District and Borough Councils to monitor and respond to domestic abuse during the coronavirus pandemic.

4.6 Housing Response Cell

4.6.1 The Independent Living service is continuing to operate under challenging circumstances and is taking all the precautions it can to ensure the safety of both staff and vulnerable residents. The Independent Living Team is contacting residents in its Schemes to ensure they have access to the support and assistance they need.

4.6.3 Officers are also contacting residents who are over 70 in council homes to ensure support is in place for them as well. Calls are also now being made to all tenants aged 69 and under to provide welfare checks and make appropriate referrals.

4.6.4 As at 29 April 2020 there were 6 residents with suspected COVID-19 and most were thankfully showing good signs of recovery. There was also one confirmed case which was receiving palliative care at home. Residents over the age of 65 with symptoms can now get a swab test through the national swabbing scheme.

4.6.5 In response to the Government's instruction to accommodate rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping, the Council arranged additional accommodation at the Holiday Inn Express, the Gate and Novotel in Stevenage as well as a Hotel in Stansted.

4.6.6 To support this provision the Council has arranged floating support from the Council's No More Service, Rough Sleeper Outreach workers, cold and hot food provision, security and access to the Haven's concierge services. The Police have also been carrying out regular patrols of the hotels. The Housing Options team are continuing to work with these people in line with the

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 in order to help applicants to source alternate move on accommodation after this period. Six designated COVID-19 properties have been reserved which can be used to accommodate anyone in hotel accommodation who tests positive and therefore needs to self-isolate.

4.6.7 The table below is a summary of the placements in B&B at 29th April 2020:

Location	At risk of Rough sleeping	Actual Rough Sleepers	Normal Cases
Holiday Inn Express	18	9	0
Novotel	2	0	21
Gate	1	0	10
DeSalis (Stansted)	8	5	1

4.6.8 In addition the Council has 103 households in temporary accommodation. 24 of those placed in B&B have been evicted for a variety of reasons, including Anti-Social Behaviour, non-engagement, breach of fire safety regulations and return to drug den.

4.6.9 MHCLG guidance relating to housing allocations has been provided which supports the approach the Council has taken.

4.6.10 Changes have been made to housing lettings and terminations procedures in response to the Government lockdown. Lettings into private accommodation are resuming on a limited scale and officers have used “virtual” viewings to safely carry out lettings in the private rented sector. Removals are being carried out in line with the latest Government guidance.

4.6.11 The Council is advising residents that it expects them to continue to make payments towards their rent and any arrears they may have, but we have pledged that the Council will not be evicting anyone who is struggling financially due to the impact of COVID-19. The Council has seen a significant increase in arrears so far. Arrears as at 26 April 2020 are over £970K, this compares with arrears at the end of the financial year 2019/2020 which were in the region of £500K. There has been a considerable increase in the take up of Universal Credit and officers have been working with Citizens Advice Stevenage to help respond to the increase in these enquiries.

4.6.12 Officers have been liaising with the Council’s major refurbishment contractors to agree how programmes will be taken forward in light of government restrictions. All Major Repair Contract (MRC) public events have been postponed and leaseholders are being contacted directly to address any concerns that can be dealt with over the phone. The Council plans to continue with consultation on a one to one basis with its leaseholders to ensure they are fully informed.

4.6.13 Social distancing arrangements have been introduced to ensure that officers can still carry out gas servicing and repairs and these arrangements are being reviewed daily. The Government still requires local authorities to be 100% compliant in relation to gas servicing and the Council is still maintaining 100% compliance.

4.6.14 Due to the vulnerability of clients requiring aids and adaptations, only essential works are being carried out at this time

4.7 Business Liaison Cell

4.7.1 This Cell has been working closely with Hertfordshire LEP, Chamber of Commerce, Wenta and the Hertfordshire Growth Board to provide assistance and advice to local businesses.

4.7.2 The Council has played an active role in promoting and signposting businesses to the Government's package of support measures such as the Job Retention Scheme, business grants and Government backed loans. The Council's website has lots of information and links for businesses and these have also been publicised on social media.

4.7.3 Weekly updates and bulletins on business support are being emailed to all businesses on the Council's business mailing list. Government guidance on social distancing for employers during COVID-19 has also been shared with the Council's business contacts. Officers have sent businesses/suppliers information regarding the Department of Health and Social Care's call for assistance from businesses to increase COVID-19 testing capacity.

4.7.4 To support NHS staff delivering essential services in Stevenage, the Council is currently providing free parking in the Council owned spaces around Lister Hospital. Free parking is now available for NHS and Blue Light services, care and social workers and other volunteers supporting the COVID-19 response in Swingate South car park. Car park pay machines are currently only accepting debit or credit card payments and the number of available car parks in the Town Centre and Old Town have been reduced.

4.7.5 The Council has provided Wenta at the Business Technology Centre with financial support payment options for tenants for April, May and June. A Commercial Policy for all Council managed commercial properties has been developed which includes a "ladder" of payment/re-payment options.

4.7.6 A County Wide Economic Resilience Cell has been established and officers are receiving updates and feeding into their discussions. Officers are also liaising with the Stevenage Old Town Business and Community Partnership and the Town Centre Partnership to direct businesses to grants, support and guidance.

4.8 Finance and Resources Cell

4.8.1 As at 1 May 2020, the Council has given 429 local companies business rate relief totalling over £20.5 Million and distributed £9.1 Million in cash grants to

81% of eligible local businesses. Further information is available in the COVID-19 Financial Dashboard at Appendix Two.

- 4.8.2 The Revenues and Benefits team have been dealing with a large number of enquiries relating to the changes to business rates and cash grants for those business with no insurance and Hardship Fund and Welfare Support for residents. The Hardship Scheme Software is estimated to go live on 1 May 2020 and the government allocated £779K for the scheme to SBC of which up to £150 must be allocated to working age claimants.
- 4.8.3 In terms of suppliers and businesses, the Council has made arrangements to ensure quicker payment of invoices than normal to assist businesses by ensuring prompt payment for supplies and services.
- 4.8.4 A Commercial Rent Policy has been developed to deal with commercial tenants who may be unable to pay their rent. While the rent is still due, tenants are encouraged to contact the Council if they are experiencing financial difficulties to set up arrangements within the parameters set out in the policy.
- 4.8.5 This Cell has been assessing the financial impact of COVID-19 on the Council's finances and further information is contained in the COVID-19 Financial Dashboard at Appendix Two.

4.9 Burials and Cemeteries Cell

- 4.9.1 Cemeteries in the town are operating in line with Government guidance. Burials are continuing with attendance limited to 10 immediate family members or close friends. The cemetery remains open for those wishing to pay respects to loved ones. This approach to cemetery arrangements has been adopted by all the Hertfordshire authorities, who are meeting on a regular basis. This approach has also been widely publicised.
- 4.9.2 Burial capacity in Stevenage to deal with a possible increase in demand has been reviewed. Six additional grounds maintenance operatives have been allocated to the cemetery service to increase capacity from 10 burials per week to 40 per week if needed. Mitigation has been put in place to ensure the service can continue to operate in the absence of key members of staff.
- 4.9.3 Officers have been working with local funeral directors to ensure that there is a common understanding and agreement with the new arrangements. This information has also been communicated to local faith groups. Guidance for the bereaved has been updated on the Council's website, which includes comprehensive FAQs relating to funeral arrangements during the current pandemic and the support that is available.
- 4.9.4 The Council is represented on the Local Resilience Forum's Mortuary Capacity Cell (Operation Hypnos) which initially was set up to ensure there is sufficient mortuary capacity within Hertfordshire and subsequently broadened its remit to ensure capacity, effective process and dignity in the management of the deceased from death to funeral. The provision of additional mortuary storage capacity has risen from 256 to 1207 spaces. This has been achieved

by significantly expanding the provisions of all three acute hospital sites (Watford, Hemel Hempstead and Lister) and supplementing this with three discreet community funeral director led mortuary storage provisions in Stevenage and Watford. As at 30 April, there is approximately 30% occupancy.

4.10 Communications Cell

4.10.1 A dedicated Coronavirus section has been set up on the Council’s website, which includes Frequently Asked Questions, Government advice, information about changes we have made to Council services, support available for businesses and advice to landlords and tenants. It has been important to let the people of Stevenage know Essential Services are still operating alongside a range of welfare support during these uncertain times.

4.10.2 A special Coronavirus edition of Chronicle was distributed to all households in Stevenage (36,000 copies) and is available online. The publication was well received by residents, staff and councillors.

4.10.3 The Council has been using social media to promote Stevenage Helps and HertsHelp, ‘Clap for Carers’, government campaigns and guidelines on: COVID-19 advice and assistance, social distancing and handwashing/hygiene guidance, COVID-19 testing sites, SADA and No More community safety programmes, financial assistance available to businesses, job retention scheme, hardship fund and Universal Credit changes as well as many others.

4.10.4 The Council has been lighting the clock tower and more recently the Arts & Leisure Centre blue on Thursday evenings to celebrate the hard work of carers and keyworkers.

4.11 Key Decisions

4.11.1 A number of key decisions have been taken in order to comply with new legislation and as part of the Council’s emergency response to the national COVID-19 emergency. Due to a need to take these decisions urgently, officers could not comply with the requirement to give 28 days’ notice of the key decision to be taken; publish the decision within 2 days of it being taken and provide the 5 day call-in period before implementation. Nor was it possible to comply with the urgency provisions in the Council’s Constitution.

4.11.2 Below are the Key Decisions which have been taken as part of the emergency response which the Executive is being asked to endorse. The Key Decision Forms which provides more detail are available on the Council’s website via the following link: [Link to Key Decision Forms](#).

	Decision	Implementation date
1	Closure of community centres & Community Arts Centre	23 March 2020
2	Closure of play centres and holiday play schemes	17 March 2020

3	Damp and condensation service reduced to dealing with only essential/critical damp and condensation cases.	25 March 2020
4	Local Community Budgets extended from the original date of 22 March to 27 March due to the cancellation of local elections and the lifting of Purdah.	22 March 2020
5	Establish a SBC Community Response Team to support COVID-19 relief efforts to support residents in Stevenage who are not in the shielded category but are vulnerable and self-isolating at home.	6 April 2020
6	<p>Changes to car parking arrangements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suspension of parking charges for all from the Pay and Display Bays on Coreys Mill Lane by the Lister Hospital for an initial 3 months. Priority to be given to NHS Staff. • NHS staff can request a three month season ticket for April to June 2020 for the town centre car parks. • Provide a town centre car park free for blue light services, social and care workers and those volunteers supporting the COVID-19 response from 9 April to 1 September 2020. • Suspend public highway parking enforcement, save for Highway Safety up to 1 September 2020. 	23 and 26 March and 9 April 2020
7	Access process for gas servicing appointments reduced by removing all delays between appointments to allow appointment to be suspended by 10 days for isolation and 14 days at the tenant's request. Access process changed with the final decision to force entry being made by the Housing Panel whilst courts are closed.	25 March 2020
8	Reduction of aids and adaptations service to deal with new referrals only. These will not be progressed unless assessed as being absolutely necessary/critical	25 March 2020
9	Closure of Bring Sites	7 April 2020
10	Closure of play areas, outdoor gyms and car parks in parks (except for vehicles displaying disabled badges)	24 March and 8 April and 24 March 2020
11	Suspension of highway verge maintenance including flower bed maintenance with the exception of visibility spays	26 March 2020
12	Closure of pavilions	25 March 2020
13	Suspension of non-urgent repairs	24 March 2020
14	Suspension of Bulky Waste Collections & Skip Service	24 March 2020
15	Closure of old town toilets and town centre garden toilets. The disabled toilets in the town centre and taxi rank toilets remain open to provide facilities for bus and taxi drivers.	26 March 2020
16	Closure of communal facilities, such as club houses and toilets at allotments	30 March 2020
17	Caretaking services to be changed to meet with social distancing requirements and staff availability. Essential caretaking services to continue as normal including health and safety checks and high priority reactive tasks such as collecting fly tipping or removal of drug paraphernalia. General cleaning of communal areas will continue as	24 March 2020

	allowed by staff availability.	
18	Temporary closure of indoor market excluding food stalls following Government direction.	25 March 2020
19	MRC Programme: To suspend all work where social distancing requirements cannot be maintained Decent Homes and Externals Programme: Delay this programme until such time as Officers are able to mobilise the contract and social distancing requirements are lifted Lift Renewal Programme: Suspend the programme Communal Heating Programme (Sheltered Schemes): Suspend all works where social distancing measures cannot be maintained	25 March 2020
20	Granting of a rent free period and keeping units void for prospective tenants who have accepted offers and are unable to move until the lockdown measures are lifted or an earlier date if the applicant is able to move in during the lockdown period.	7 April 2020
21	Provision of temporary accommodation, food, security and support for rough sleepers in accordance with the Government direction to accommodate additional applicants who the Council would otherwise not have had a duty to accommodate outside of COVID-19 direction.	TBA
22	Temporary closure of walk-in services at CSC and Main Reception of Daneshill House to customers, except for those who are vulnerable and in urgent need.	24 March 2020
23	Revised arrangements in relation to cemetery staffing arrangements to increase burial capacity and changes to burial arrangements to ensure that a dignified and efficient bereavement service continues to be provided in line with government guidance.	26 March 2020
24	New Commercial Rent Policy produced which gives a ladder of options for tenants to pay their rent.	27 April 2020

4.12 Virtual Meeting Arrangements

4.12.1 The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 (“the Regulations”) came into force on 4 April 2020 and apply to local authority and police and crime panel meetings that are required to be held, or held before 7 May 2021. Officers from the IT team and Constitutional Services have reviewed the technical options to hold meetings remotely as required and have concluded that Zoom is the most suitable application. All Members have been contacted for details of the device they wish to use to access the Zoom app and support is being provided by IT, together with daily ‘test’ meetings that all Councillors may access. A protocol has been written for the management and conduct for virtual meetings.

4.13 Recovery Approach and Model

4.13.1 As part of the Council's Incident Management arrangements, Officers have started preparation of recovery plans for the Council and the Town.

4.13.2 As previously set out in this report, the countywide response to the COVID-19 pandemic is being led by the Local Resilience Forum (via the Strategic Coordination Group) as a major incident. The overall incident management arrangements for the county incorporate a focus on forming a recovery plan as part of the remit of the incident management structure. The arrangements that are put in place within Stevenage will align with this structure.

4.13.3 At this point in time it is not possible for officers to provide a definitive position for when the impacts of the pandemic will have been reduced or significantly mitigated. The UK Government have put in place an extensive range of social distancing and other interventions. A lockdown has been in place since 23 March, to be reviewed at three weekly intervals. At this stage no drug treatments or vaccines have been developed to a point of approval or roll out, although a broad range of trials and schemes are underway. The UK government's current position suggests that there could be phases to the release of lockdown, and that social distancing measures may remain in place for some time in order to protect the capacity of the NHS to support those who contract the virus and need hospital support. A range of further measures have been announced to increase testing and contact tracing as part of the plan for the next phase.

4.13.4 This remains a fluid position which means the Stevenage recovery plan will need to remain flexible to adapt to changing circumstances over the coming weeks and months. At this point the potential implications of second or further peaks of infection are not known, and to prevent the spread of COVID-19 a number of measures could remain in place or be re-implemented in the future. The recovery process will commence ahead of all social isolation measures being removed.

4.13.5 Current expectations are for recovery plans to work at three levels:

- An overarching County level strategy: This would incorporate work of the LRF Recovery Cell and Hertfordshire LEP, to provide support for areas such as place-making schemes, economic recovery and growth (e.g. a focus on specific sectors), and connectivity (digital and transport)
- Internally focused strategies and plans for each District or Borough Council
- Externally focused strategies and plans for each District or Borough area

4.13.6 To aid preparations for the recovery process, Officers have conducted a review of the Future Town Future Council Cooperative Corporate Plan programme for the year ahead, to help identify which planned projects can be delivered or where necessary adapted noting that FTFC will be a key element of the Council's recovery programmes. Officers have engaged with Executive Members and the Opposition Group Leaders via the informal briefings to help shape the direction of this programme for the year ahead, to identify priorities and test the progress and deliverability of key projects. This process has set

out a range of programmes that the Council will continue to prioritise, including the continuation of Town Centre Regeneration projects and the SG1 scheme and the Stevenage Development Board which is working up the bid for the Towns Fund and unallocated Growth Deal monies, the delivery of high quality affordable housing projects, the work underway to create a new and effective online customer service offer to adapt to the current environment, investment to enhance the current housing stock and improve the offer to residents and tenants, and the continued delivery of the Cooperative Neighbourhood Management. Officers will also continue to prepare strategies and action plans for key objectives such as Community Wealth Building, Climate Change and the next phase of the Future Town Future Transport programme. These projects, strategies will be brought together as part of the emerging recovery plan for Stevenage.

4.13.7 Officers have commenced work through the Business Continuity and Staff and Member Welfare Cells to prepare for the next phase of incident management, including review of the current working arrangements and preparation for any changes that may emerge at the end of lockdown, our building operational management and protocols, support to provide digital and other forms of customer support, and a further review of essential service provision.

4.13.8 For any recovery plan to be delivered, appropriate financial resources will need to be in place and for the financial position of the Council to be sustainable. Stevenage Borough Council has received over £900K of government funding as part of the financial support to local authorities, playing a vital front line role through this crisis. However as with many other Councils, the financial impacts are far greater than the funding that has been received to date. The LGA estimates the impact to be over £12bn for the sector noting that £3.2bn has been allocated to date. All Councils are facing significant financial pressures and are engaging with MHCLG to lobby and seek appropriate support to enable us to continue to provide vital front line services as well as support communities through the recovery process.

4.13.9 As highlighted above the recovery planning for Stevenage would have external and internal focuses. The former will be developed in conjunction with the Stevenage Together partnership noting the success of the previous Stevenage Economic Taskforce (created in response to the global financial crisis in 2008/2009 onwards) and its achievements in creating employment, skills and other opportunities. The outline structures of the SBC and Town wide recovery plans are set out below:

4.14 Town Recovery Plan:

Supporting Businesses and the local Economy / Entrepreneurship

- Economic Recovery Action Plan and Economic Development
- Regeneration programme to include allocated LEP funding and Town Deal bid, and potential for further bids to bodies such as Homes England, and the delivery of new Council and affordable housing schemes
- Employment, skills development & employability including projects such as Stevenage Works
- Planning & Development Support

- Leisure and the Night Time Economy

Supporting Local People and Maintaining Strong Communities

- Community Wealth Building
- Cooperative opportunities
- Social Cohesion
- Addressing Poverty
- Community and Voluntary Sector support
- Community Safety
- Shielding / Stevenage Helps Community Hub offer and ongoing relationship with organisations such as Stevenage Foodbank
- Environmental response
- Culture / Sport response
- Housing response

Supporting the Mental and Physical Health of the Town

- Links with and support for the Lister
- Joined up work with health partners - CCG, NHS, Public Health

Travel and Mobility

- Plans to enable safe movement within the central parts of the town
- Progressing schemes within the Future Town Future Transport strategy

Effective Communications and Reassurance

- Developing a clear communications strategy to share information, guidance and support with residents and businesses

4.15 Internal SBC Recovery Plan:

Staff / Member Welfare

- Overall Wellbeing
- Developing plans to engage and support teams through the next phase of disruption

Operational / Business Unit Considerations

- Status of 'Business As Usual' operational performance
- Assessment and plan to return non-essential services into operation
- Preparing for pent up or deferred demand planning & operations
- Creating a building and operational plan for the next phase
- Developing a digital and customer support plan
- Spotting operational opportunities

Development & Delivery of FTFC Corporate Priorities

- Review of priorities for 2020/2021 and implementation of projects

Transformation Impacts and Next Steps

- Re-assessment of prioritisation of projects to support MTFS requirements
- Drive development of online service offer
- Completion of Opportunity Assessment to identify efficiency opportunities
- Re-profiling of delivery and benefits plans
- Resource appropriately

Financial Outlook and Re-profiling

- Impacts of ongoing COVID-19 related recovery work
- Adequacy of additional Government funding
- MTFS Review and potential for possible revised budget for 20/21
- Preparation for Spending Review 20 lobbying

Lessons Learned

- Ways of working (positives and negatives) to inform changes to operating model and how we work
- Technology plan
- Communications & Engagement (all stakeholders groups)
- Staff / Member wellbeing
- Democratic & Decision making
- Partnerships

Communications

- Developing and putting in place clear communications with SBC teams, Members, customers, residents and businesses regarding the recovery plans

4.16 These structures will remain flexible to take account of new areas of focus that arise during the recovery planning period.

4.17 The phasing and timing of recovery activities will have to take account of how the virus is controlled over the coming weekend and months. If, for example, there is a double peak which results in stronger lockdown measures being reintroduced our activities are likely to be affected.

4.18 The Community Reassurance Cell is planning to undertake a Community Impact Assessment. This may be helpful with regards to informing actions at local level.

4.19 Further to this it will be important within our plans to recognise and be clear about what we and our partners can control, regulate or lobby on.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

5.1.2 A return has been submitted to the MHCLG which sets out potential Stevenage Borough Council losses of £193K for March 2020, £815K for April

2020 and £11.6M for a full year. The Government allocated an additional £1.6B in March and a further £1.6B in April to support local government finances. SBC's share of this allocation has been £917K. The Council has been engaging with MHCLG to highlight the significant financial implications of COVID-19 on the Council's finances and officers are reviewing the Medium Term Financial Plan. The information submitted to MHCLG on the 15 April estimated that the adverse impact on the Council's finances just for March and April 2020 was £1M, more than the grant received. The Council will continue to lobby the government through the various channels available.

5.1.3 The Council has also submitted information regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the capital programme and to ask for a number of initiatives such as retaining right to buy pooling receipts longer and lower borrowing rates via PWLB.

5.1.4 Some financial impacts of the pandemic are not yet clear in terms of Business Rates and Council Tax and these are being monitored on a weekly basis but data is only currently available for April that may not be indicative for the year and cash flow may worsen if the pandemic impact lasts for a longer period of time. Members should also be aware there is potentially a cash flow issue for the Council as the organisation only retains a maximum of 12% of Council tax and 8% of business rates.

5.1.5 Further information is available in the COVID-19 Financial Dashboard at Appendix Two.

5.1.6 It is recommended to the Executive that officers be requested to undertake a review of the GF and HRA Medium Term Financial Strategies in light of the financial pressures arising from the COVID-19 Emergency with a view to reporting back to the Executive at its meeting in June 2020.

5.2 Legal Implications

5.2.1 The Coronavirus Act 2020 was given Royal Assent on 25 March 2020 and will be in force for 2 years unless extended by Regulations. The Act and Regulations made under it contain a wide range of provisions relevant to the Council including the postponement of elections; enabling virtual meetings and prohibiting the recovery of possession of both commercial and residential premises.

5.2.2 In addition the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 require most business premises to close and enable the Council's officers to enforce these provisions by the service of prohibition and fixed penalty notices.

5.3 Equalities and Diversity Implications

5.3.1 In carrying out or changing its functions the Council must comply with the Equality Act 2010 and in particular section 149 which is the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Council has a statutory obligation to comply with the requirements of the Act, demonstrating that as part of the decision-making process, due regard has been given to the needs described in the legislation.

- 5.3.2 In taking the key decisions set out in paragraphs 4.11.1 and 4.11.2 officers have had regard to equality implications, and these considerations have been recorded within the individual decision notices. All decisions have taken into account government advice and legislation, which is aimed at protecting the wider population and in particular the most vulnerable people in society. However, it is acknowledged that in some cases, ceasing or reducing services has unfortunately had an adverse impact on particular protected groups and additional support has been put into place where possible to mitigate this.
- 5.3.3 The focus of the Council's response to Covid-19 has been on continuing to provide essential services to the public and on developing its Community and Housing Response, by supporting a range of vulnerable client groups and by responding effectively to changing and emerging needs (e.g. by increasing services provided through SADA and the No More Project and the homelessness and independent living teams).
- 5.3.4 In developing its recovery plans, the Council will continue to focus on supporting the vulnerable, ensuring services remain accessible and on assisting those on low incomes, taking into account emerging research which indicates disproportionate effects of the virus and of the lockdown on certain protected characteristic groups.

5.4 Risk Implications

- 5.4.1 The Council has an embedded approach to risk management that mitigates any adverse effect on delivery of the Council's objectives and internal control processes and also provides good governance assurance. A COVID-19 risk has been added to the Council's Strategic Risk Register and will be reported to the Audit Committee.
- 5.4.2 The Council will adjust its emergency planning approach in line with future Government COVID-19 measures.
- 5.4.3 A review of the Council's GF and HRA MTFs will help to identify the financial risks faced by the Council and will be reported to the Executive in June 2020.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- The Government's COVID-19 Action Plan – [COVID-19 Action Plan link](#)
- Coronavirus Act 2020 – [Coronavirus Act Link](#)
- Key Decision Forms – [Link to Key Decision Forms](#)

APPENDICES

- Appendix One: Chronological List of COVID-19 Guidance and Information
- Appendix Two: COVID-19 Financial Dashboard