

**Meeting** EXECUTIVE  
**Portfolio Area** All  
**Date** 8 JULY 2020



## CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) INCIDENT UPDATE REPORT & RECOVERY PLAN

### KEY DECISION

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### 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To update the Executive on the Covid-19 crisis, the Council’s response and proposed Recovery Plans for the town and the Council.

### 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the current position and the Council’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic since the last report to the May 2020 Executive meeting be noted.
- 2.2 That the recovery phase approach, as set out in Section 4.13 of this report, and the town and council recovery plans attached at Appendices 4 and Appendix 5 to this report respectively, be approved.
- 2.3 That delegated authority be granted to the Strategic Director (TP), after consultation with the Leader, to make revisions to the Recovery Plan as required during the recovery phase.

### 3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 This report provides an update in relation to the Covid-19 crisis, outlining the Government’s response and the measures the government is now taking to ease the lockdown.
- 3.2 It also provides an update on the Council’s emergency response since the last Covid-19 report to the May Executive meeting and outlines the measures the Council is taking in response to the Government’s easing of the lockdown.

3.3 Finally, the report outlines Hertfordshire’s and Stevenage Borough Council’s recovery structures and plans to enable the town and Council to recover from the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic.

**3.4 The Government’s five tests for easing lockdown measures:**

- 3.4.1 On 16th April, the Government presented five tests for easing lockdown measures. These were:
1. Protect the NHS’s ability to cope. The government must be confident that the NHS is able to provide sufficient critical care and specialist treatment right across the UK.
  2. See a sustained and consistent fall in the daily death rates from Covid-19 so the government is confident that the country has moved beyond the peak.
  3. Reliable data from SAGE showing that the rate of infection is decreasing to manageable levels across the board.
  4. Be confident that the range of operational challenges, including testing capacity and PPE, are in hand, with supply able to meet future demand.
  5. Be confident that any adjustments to the current measures will not risk a second peak of infections that overwhelms the NHS.

**3.5 COVID-19 Alert Levels**

3.5.1 On 10th May, the Prime Minister announced five Covid Alert levels, as shown below, which are now being used to inform the easing of lockdown restrictions. The alert level status for England is based primarily on the R (reproduction rate) value and the number of coronavirus cases and in turn that alert level determines the level of social distancing measures in place. Throughout the period of lockdown the country has been at Level 4. As a result of the number of Covid-19 cases decreasing and the R rate remaining under 1, the Government reduced the alert level to Level 3 on 19<sup>h</sup> June which has led to further easing of lockdown measures being announced. .

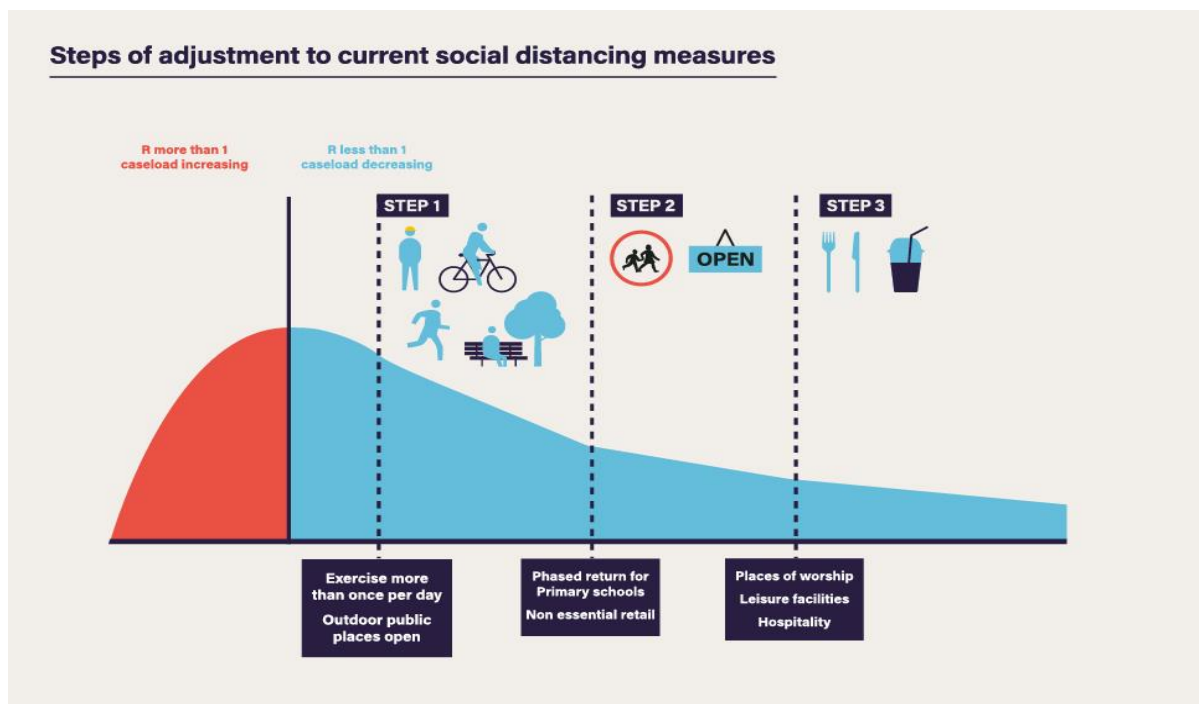
**Coronavirus alert levels in UK**

Stage of outbreak	Alert Level	Measures in place
Risk of healthcare services being overwhelmed	<b>5</b>	Lockdown begins
Transmission is high or rising exponentially	<b>4</b>	Social distancing continues
Virus is in general circulation	<b>3</b>	Gradual relaxation of restrictions
Number of cases and transmission is low	<b>2</b>	Minimal social distancing, enhanced tracing
Covid-19 no longer present in UK	<b>1</b>	Routine international monitoring

3.5.2 A Joint Biosecurity Centre is now up and running. The Centre will identify changes in infection rates across England using testing, environmental and workplace data and will monitor local spikes of Covid-19 and advise health officials and local authorities and this will help inform the alert level status.

### 3.6 The Government's 3 Step Recovery Plan

3.6.1 The Government's 50 page document called "Our Plan to Rebuild - The UK Government's Covid-19 Recovery Strategy" was published on 11<sup>th</sup> May and is split into three steps of lifting restrictions. The Plan is conditional and dependent on the alert level as shown in Paragraph 3.5.1. If the alert level rises then the action plan may need to be delayed or measures reintroduced locally, regionally or nationally.



### 3.7 Government announcements to ease the lockdown in England

3.7.1 As the number of cases and deaths in the country decreases and the reproduction rate remains below one, the Government has made a number of announcements to ease the lockdown as follows:

3.7.2 On 10th May the Prime Minister announced that from 13th May people are allowed to sit in their local park, drive to other destinations and play sports with members of their own household or one other person not from their household. Whilst doing this, people must continue to obey rules on social distancing.

3.7.3 Garden centres, golf courses, and tennis courts were allowed to reopen in England from Wednesday 13th May as long as they have adequate social distancing arrangements in place. Angling could also recommence.

3.7.4 From 1st June children in early years (age 0-5), reception, year 1 and year 6 can return to childcare or school in line with the arrangements made by their

school. In addition outdoor markets and car showrooms can reopen as soon as they are able to meet the Covid-19 secure guidelines to protect shoppers and workers.

- 3.7.5 Also from 1<sup>st</sup> June people can exercise alone, with members of their household, or with up to, but no more than 5 other people from outside their household while keeping 2 metres apart at all times. Competitive sport was also allowed to resume behind closed doors from 1<sup>st</sup> June.
- 3.7.6 The Prime Minister also announced that from 1st June, people can spend time outdoors, including private gardens and other outdoor spaces, in groups of up to six people from different households, following social distancing guidelines.
- 3.7.7 On 5th June, the Government updated its guidance for people who are shielding. People who are shielding can now leave their home if they wish, as long as they are able to maintain strict social distancing. They can spend time outdoors with members of their own household or if they live alone they can spend time outdoors with one person from another household. Ideally, this should be the same person each time.
- 3.7.8 On 22<sup>nd</sup> June, the government set out a series of steps for further relaxing shielding guidance:
- From 6<sup>th</sup> July those who are shielding may, if they wish, meet in a group of up to 6 people outdoors, including people from different households whilst maintaining strict social distancing. They will also not be required to observe social distancing with other members of their household. In line with the wider guidance for single adult households, they may also form a 'support bubble' with one other household.
  - From 1<sup>st</sup> August, the government will be advising that shielding will be paused. From this date, the government is advising that people who were shielding should adopt strict social distancing rather than full shielding measures.
- 3.7.9 From 8th June new arrivals to the UK are required to quarantine for two weeks with some exemptions as outlined in the government's guidance.
- 3.7.10 Dentists could reopen from 8th June 2020.
- 3.7.11 From 13<sup>th</sup> June single adult households have been able to form a "support bubble" with one other household.
- 3.7.12 From 15<sup>th</sup> June further easing of the lockdown continued with:
- All non-essential retail including shops could reopen. Businesses are only able to open once they have completed a risk assessment, in consultation with trade union representatives or workers, and are confident they are managing the risks. They must have taken the necessary steps to become Covid-19 secure in line with the current Health and Safety legislation

- All staff in hospitals in England are expected to wear surgical masks. . All hospital visitors and outpatients must wear face coverings at all times.
- Face coverings are mandatory on all public transport. Anyone without a face covering can expect to be fined or stopped from boarding buses, trains, tubes, trams, aeroplanes or ferries.
- Outdoor attractions where people can stay in their cars such as safari parks and drive-in cinemas are allowed to open. Zoos can also reopen, provided visitor numbers are managed and safeguards put in place.

3.7.13 On 23<sup>rd</sup> June, the Prime Minister announced a series of measures to take effect from 4<sup>th</sup> July which will further ease the lockdown in England:

- The 2 metre social distancing guidance will change in England. Where it is not possible to stay 2 metres apart, people should keep a distance of 'one metre plus' (this means staying one metre apart, while observing precautions to reduce the risk of transmission).
- Restaurants, pubs and cafes will be allowed to reopen providing they follow the government's safety guidelines.
- Holiday accommodation, including hotels, B&Bs, cottages, campsites and caravan parks can also reopen and people in England will be able to stay away from home overnight.
- Two households of any size will be able to meet indoors or outside. It will be possible to stay overnight. This does not have to be the same set of households each time. The two households must however maintain social distancing.
- Hairdressers will be able to reopen as long as they take precautions to prevent spreading the virus.
- Libraries, community centres, bingo halls, cinemas, museums and galleries will be able to open along with funfairs and theme parks, amusement arcades, outdoor skating rinks, social clubs and model villages.
- Places of worship will be able to open for prayers and services including weddings with up to 30 guests – subject to social distancing.

3.7.14 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.

## **3.8 Local Government Sector Response**

### **3.8.1 District Councils' Network**

3.8.1.1 The DCN has been running weekly calls for Leaders and Chief Executives chaired by Councillor John Fuller, to provide a direct voice into Government through the ministers and senior officials who have joined the group. A DCN Chief Executive Group is meeting most weeks to discuss priority issues. This is helping to inform the DCN's contributions to the MHCLG's Local Economic Recovery taskforce, and the DCN's influence on other Whitehall working groups from BEIS Business Grants group to DEFRA's waste working group to MHCLG's Finance working group.

3.8.1.2 The DCN has also been taking its message into parliament and held its first ever online All-Party Parliamentary Group meeting in May which was attended by over 150 people with positive feedback from parliamentarians. The DCN launched its five point manifesto for recovery at this meeting called "Power in Place". The five points in the manifesto are:

1. Clean, safe spaces and places
2. Stabilising employment, helping business pivot with jobs-positive help
3. Revitalising health in the community, keeping people out of the health and care system
4. Taking the opportunity to grow a new future
5. Leading our place at pace

The DCN's five point manifesto has been used to inform the Council's recovery plans.

3.8.1.3 The DCN is also working hard on building relationships with the Association of County Council Chief Executives and the County Council Network, which has led to joint waste work and sessions on Test and Trace.

### **3.8.2 Local Government Association (LGA)**

3.8.2.1 The LGA is working with the Government to ensure that all councils have the funding they need to do whatever it takes to keep supporting communities, local economies, the care sectors and health service during the Covid-19 crisis. The LGA's analysis of the latest returns provided by Councils to the MHCLG shows that:

- In addition to the grant funding announced so far, Councils could need as much as £6 billion more to cover the costs of coping with the coronavirus pandemic during this financial year. This figure will need to be kept under review. The MHCLG survey asked council's to assume things return to normal from the end of July. If Councils have used this assumption in their returns, then this figure could rise.
- Around 60% of the financial challenge related to lost tax income (council tax and business rates) and non-tax income (mostly sales, fees and charges). The rest would need to cover extra cost pressures as a result of the pandemic.

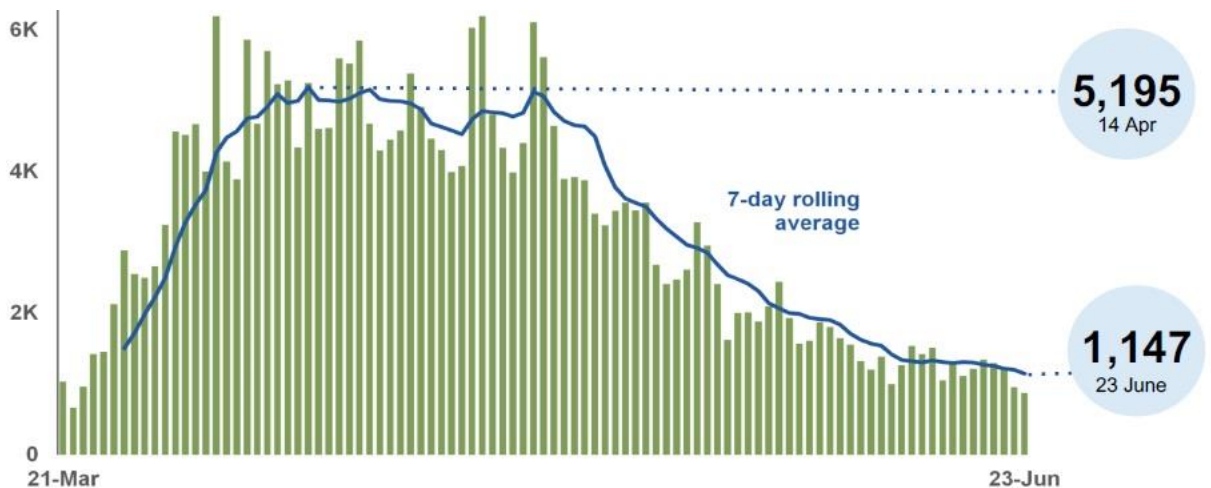
- Different councils will face a different mix of pressures, but overall the majority of the cost presumes (and the largest part of the spending of the £3.2 billion grant) is related to adult social care.

3.8.2.2 The LGA remains clear that all councils will need further funding and financial flexibilities in the weeks and months ahead to meet ongoing COVID-19 pressures and to keep services running normally and compensate for lost income.

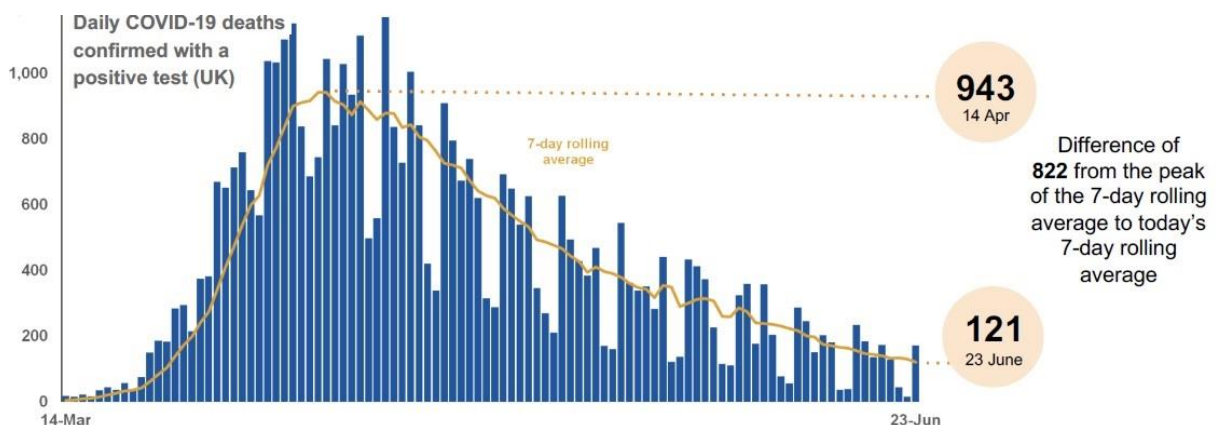
3.8.2.3 The full report is available via the link in the background documents.

### 3.9 National Picture

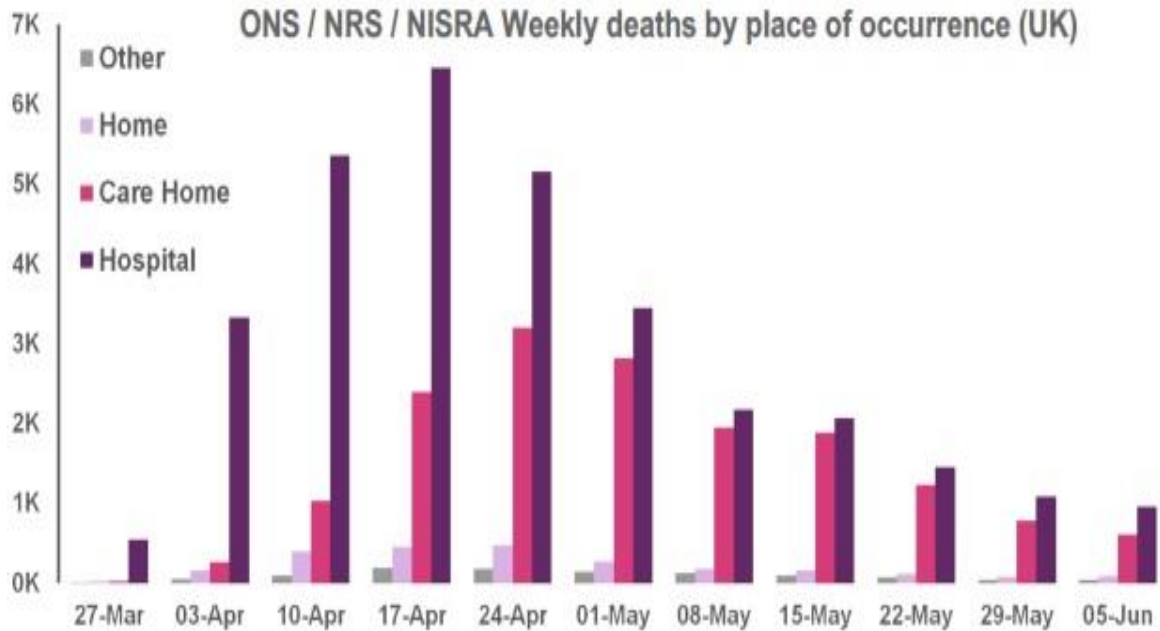
3.9.1 Below is the COBRA data graph on confirmed coronavirus cases from 21<sup>st</sup> March to Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2020. There has been a continued steady decline, with a flattening out at around 1,200 new confirmed cases a day.



3.9.2 Similarly there has been a continued reduction of confirmed Covid-19 related deaths over the last four weeks, with the rolling average coming down from a height of around 900 a day, to around 120 per day as at 23rd June.



3.9.3 The graph below reflects ONS data on Covid-19 related deaths by place of occurrence by week. This shows that both deaths occurring in hospital (purple bar) and in care homes (pink bar) have reduced in similar proportion over the four weeks up until 5th June.



3.9.4 The table below reflects data from Public Health England and academic partners released on 12<sup>th</sup> June which puts the **R number range for the UK at between 0.7-0.9, and England between 0.8-1.0**. They also provide a regional breakdown – with the East of England being estimated at between 0.7-0.9.

Region	R
England	0.8-1.0
East of England	0.7-0.9
London	0.8-1.0
Midlands	0.8-1.0
North East and Yorkshire	0.7-1.0
North West	0.8-1.0
South East	0.8-1.0
South West	0.8-1.1

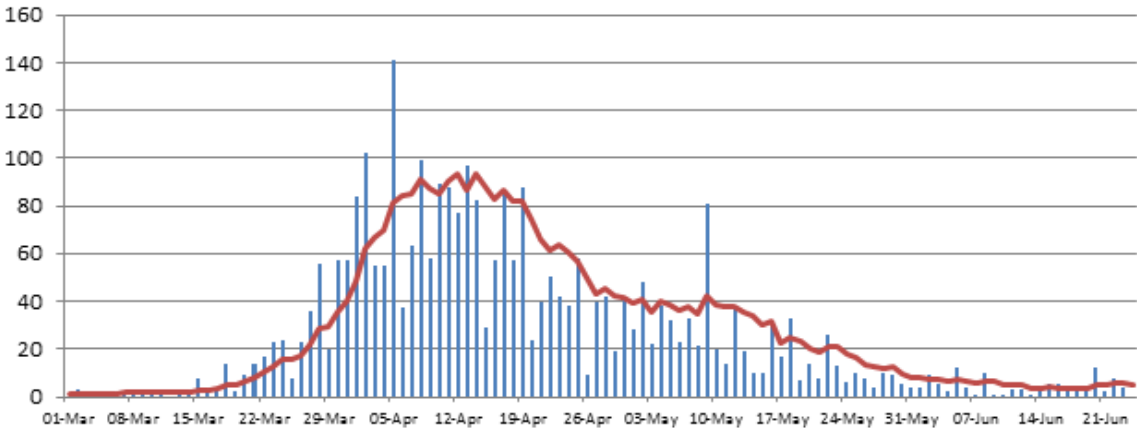


**3.10. Local Summary**

- 3.10.1 As at the time of writing this report there were generally low rates for Stevenage compared to the Hertfordshire average. As at 25<sup>th</sup> June, there had been no increase in confirmed cases in the town over the last fortnight.
- 3.10.2 There have been no new outbreaks in any of the town’s unaffected care homes since the last week of April. There have been cases in four out of thirteen care homes in the town.
- 3.10.3 New confirmed cases of coronavirus over the past three weeks have been lower in North East Hertfordshire, less than half (34) compared to South West Hertfordshire (78).
- 3.10.4 As at 12th June, Stevenage had the lowest number of all districts/boroughs, with 57 deaths from a total of 1,048 in all of Hertfordshire.
- 3.10.5 Just over half (53%) of the Stevenage Covid-19 related deaths have occurred in hospital with 42% occurring in care homes.
- 3.10.6 Of the 57 Covid-19 related deaths in Stevenage that had occurred by the end of May, there had been at least one death in every ward in the town, with most wards (10/12) having had 4 or less Covid-19 related deaths. Whilst eight deaths had occurred in Pin Green, a third of the 57 Covid-19 related deaths occurred in Woodfield and Old Town in April, linked to one particular outbreak in a single care home in Woodfield

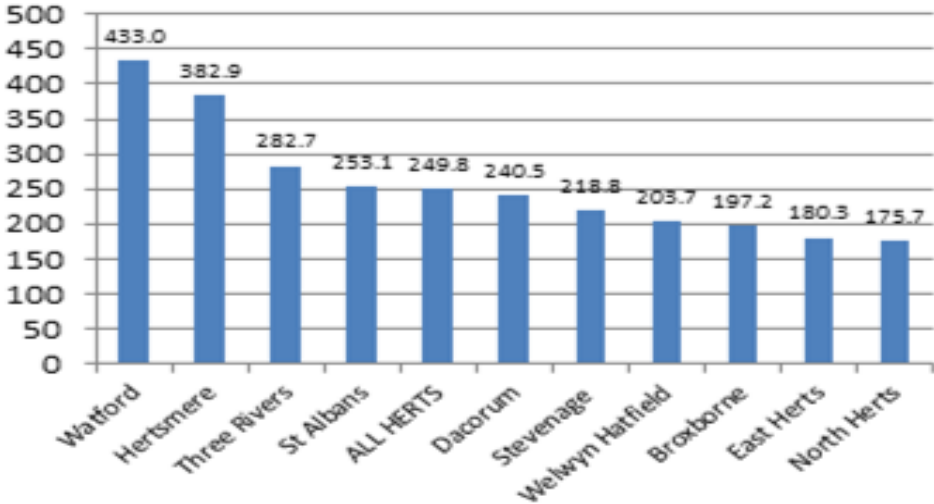
**3.11 Confirmed Covid-19 Cases in Hertfordshire**

- 3.11.1 In Hertfordshire, by 24th June there had been 2,993 confirmed cases of coronavirus.
- 3.11.2 The average new daily cases have dropped since the beginning of June to around less than 5 a day, from around 40 a day just over a month ago and a high of around 90 per day at the peak over the Easter weekend, with all evidence pointing towards an R value consistently below 1 for the past three months. The data presented is only the confirmed cases, and cases are estimated to be around five times those confirmed.
- 3.11.3 The graph below shows the daily confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Hertfordshire (blue bars) with the rolling seven-day average (red line) since the first confirmed case at the start of March until 24th June. For the 24 hour period from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> June there were no new confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Hertfordshire. This is the first time this has happened since 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020.



**3.12. Analysis by Lower Level Authority**

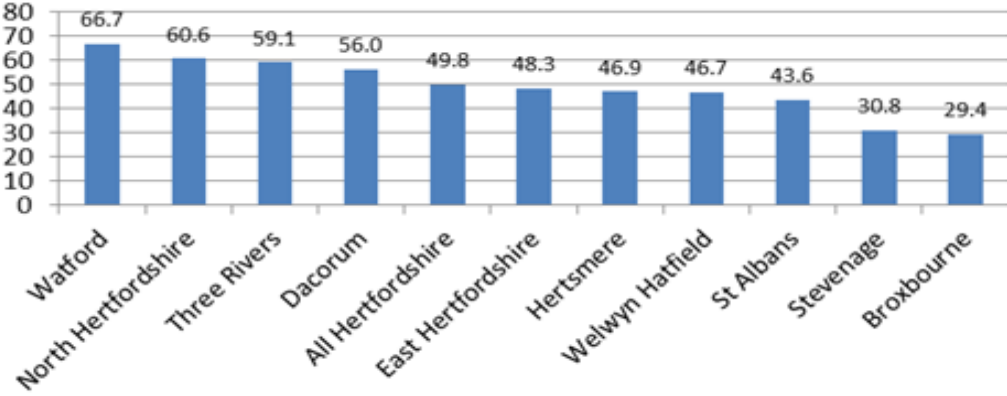
3.12.1 Below is the overall rate of confirmed cases since the start of the pandemic normalised by population (per 100,000) on 16th June



**3.13 Outbreaks in Care Homes in Hertfordshire**

3.13.2 The graph below starts from the first case in a care home in Three Rivers the week ending 9 March, up to 1st June. Whilst across England the average proportion of care homes affected is just over 40.8%, it is significantly higher across Hertfordshire at 47.1%. This ranges from two thirds of care homes in Watford (14/21) to less than a third of care homes in Broxbourne 29.4% (5/17) and Stevenage 30.8% (4/13) with no new outbreaks in any of the town’s unaffected care homes since the last week of April.

**Percentage of care homes that have reported an outbreak**



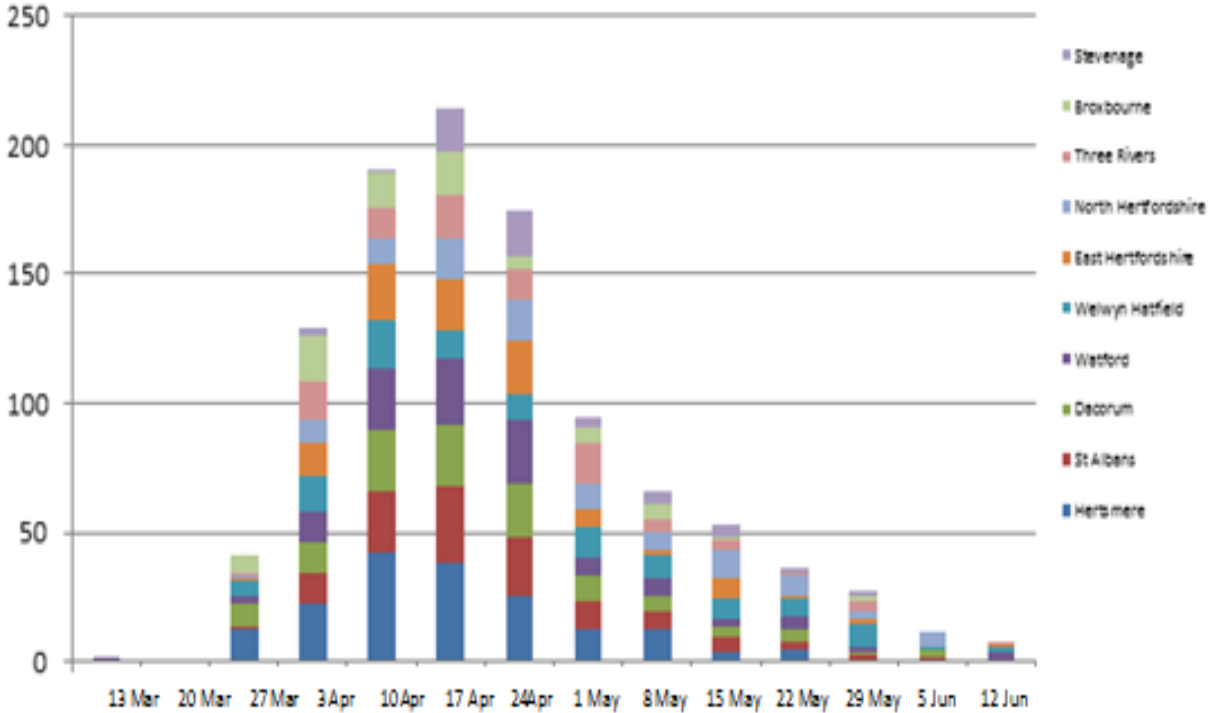
**3.14 Deaths in Hertfordshire**

3.14.1 The updated ONS data on test-confirmed Covid-19 related deaths in the county released on 16th June shows a total of 1048 deaths, up to 12th June.

3.14.2 Two thirds of the Covid-19 related deaths in Hertfordshire took place in hospital and just over a quarter in care homes

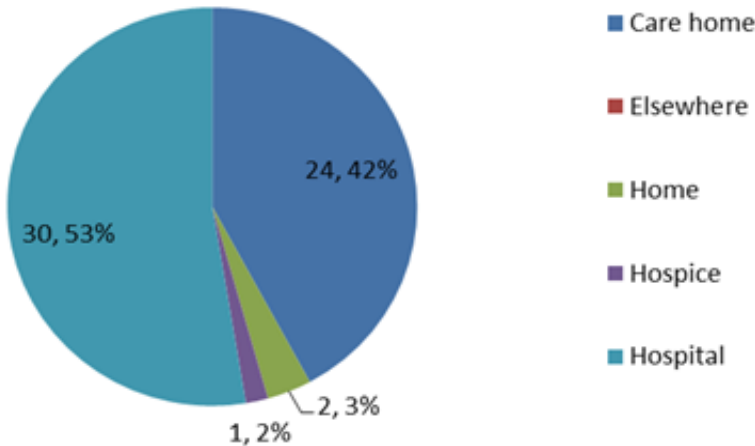
3.14.3 Of the 1048 Covid-19 related Hertfordshire deaths up until 12th June, 57 (5.5%) were Stevenage residents.

3.14.4 The graph below reflects deaths in Hertfordshire by week ordered by district/borough up to 12th June 2020



3.14.5 The data for Stevenage residents show that just over half (53%) of the Covid-19 related deaths have occurred in hospital with 42% occurring in care homes.

**Covid-19 related deaths of Stevenage residents**



3.14.6 The table below shows Covid-19 related deaths by Stevenage ward

House of Commons Library MSOA Names	SBC ward name	March	April	May	June	Total March to June
St Nicholas	St Nicolas	0	2	0	0	2
Woodfield & Old Town	Woodfield	0	19	3	0	22
	Old Town					
Martins Wood	Martins Wood	0	2	2	0	4
Chells North	Manor	0	1	1	0	2
Symonds Green	Symonds Green	0	2	1	0	3
Pin Green	Pin Green	1	5	2	0	8
Chells South	Chells	0	1	2	0	3
Bedwell	Bedwell	1	3	0	0	4
Poplars	Bandley Hill	0	1	1	0	2
Shephall	Shephall	0	1	1	0	2
Roebuck	Roebuck	0	2	2	0	4
Broadwater & Bragbury End	Longmeadow	0	1	0	0	1
Stevenage	<b>Stevenage</b>	2	40	15	0	57

### 3.15 Health Inequalities and coronavirus

3.15.1 Following on from the Public Health England Report into Covid-19 Inequalities published a fortnight ago, the Government published the redacted section analysing the reasons for the negative equality impact on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities. Below is an extract from the report:

*Beyond the data: Understanding the impact of Covid-19 on BAME groups  
Racism, discrimination, stigma, fear and trust: Stakeholders pointed to racism and discrimination experienced by communities and more specifically by BAME key workers as a root cause affecting health, and exposure risk and disease progression risk.*

*Racial discrimination affects people's life chances and the stress associated with being discriminated against based on race/ethnicity affects mental and physical health. Issues of stigma with Covid-19 were identified as negatively impacting health seeking behaviours. Fear of diagnosis and death from*

*Covid-19 was identified as negatively impacting how BAME groups took up opportunities to get tested and their likelihood of presenting early for treatment and care.*

*For many BAME groups lack of trust of NHS services and health care treatment resulted in their reluctance to seek care on a timely basis, and late presentation with disease. Despite these challenges, stakeholders reinforced the importance and need for communities to work with government and anchor institutions to create solutions. Faith communities played a vital role in engaging with communities and were a trusted source of information, leadership and engagement with many BAME groups and needed to be better engaged in future efforts to build community resilience and prepare communities for the immediate and long-term challenges of Covid-19.*

*National and local government officials (including public health teams) have a unique opportunity to provide advocacy for vulnerable groups. Work to tackle racism and discrimination within the health and care system must continue at pace with a clear commitment for increasing diverse leadership at all levels in health and care system, reflecting the communities being served.*

3.15.2 The following recommendations have been identified by the Government following a range of requests for action from stakeholders and point to the areas where commitment, focus, and delivery at scale could make a significant difference in improving the lives and experiences of BAME communities. This is crucially important as the UK emerges from the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic and looks toward rebuilding communities, restarting services and local economies, and creating resilient, engaged and cohesive communities capable of withstanding and thriving despite the upcoming challenges.

1. Mandate comprehensive and quality ethnicity data collection and recording as part of routine NHS and social care data collection systems, including the mandatory collection of ethnicity data at death certification, and ensure that data are readily available to local health and care partners to inform actions to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on BAME communities.
2. Support community participatory research, in which researchers and community stakeholders engage as equal partners in all steps of the research process, to understand the social, cultural, structural, economic, religious, and commercial determinants of Covid-19 in BAME communities, and to develop readily implementable and scalable programmes to reduce risk and improve health outcomes.
3. Improve access, experiences and outcomes of NHS, local government and integrated care systems commissioned services by BAME communities including: regular equity audits; use of health impact assessments; integration of equality into quality systems; good representation of black and minority ethnic communities among staff at all levels; sustained workforce development and employment practices; trust-building dialogue with service users.
4. Accelerate the development of culturally competent occupational risk assessment tools that can be employed in a variety of occupational

settings and used to reduce the risk of employee's exposure to and acquisition of Covid-19, especially for key workers working with a large cross section of the general public or in contact with those infected with Covid-19.

5. Fund, develop and implement culturally competent Covid-19 education and prevention campaigns, working in partnership with local BAME and faith communities to reinforce individual and household risk reduction strategies; rebuild trust with and uptake of routine clinical services; reinforce messages on early identification, testing and diagnosis; and prepare communities to take full advantage of interventions including contact tracing, antibody testing and ultimately vaccine availability.
6. Accelerate efforts to target culturally competent health promotion and disease prevention programmes for non-communicable diseases promoting healthy weight, physical activity, smoking cessation, mental wellbeing and effective management of chronic conditions including diabetes, hypertension and asthma.
7. Ensure that Covid-19 recovery strategies actively reduce inequalities caused by the wider determinants of health to create long term sustainable change. Fully funded, sustained and meaningful approaches to tackling ethnic inequalities must be prioritised.

3.15.3 A copy of the full report can be found via the link in the background documents.

### **3.16 East and North Herts Health Trust**

3.16.1 East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust is continuing to work on measures to maintain social distancing within the Lister Hospital and from 15<sup>th</sup> June visitors will see extra floor markings and other measures designed to manage the flow of people around hospital premises.

### **3.17 Government help for Individuals and Households**

3.17.1 The May Executive report provided information on the temporary measures the Government had put in place for those who were financially affected by Covid-19.

3.17.2 Since then the Government has extended its mortgage payment holiday scheme (which had been due to end in June) for homeowners in financial difficulty during the pandemic for another three months. The application period for a payment holiday has been extended to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020. This also includes landlords whose tenants are experiencing financial difficulties to ensure that tenants do not face the threat of eviction.

### **3.18 Government help for Businesses**

3.18.1 The May Executive report outlined the Government's package of temporary and targeted measures to support businesses through the disruption caused by Covid-19.

- 3.18.2 Since then, the Chancellor has announced changes to the Government's Job Retention Scheme. From Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> July, businesses using the scheme will be able to bring furloughed employees back part-time. The Government will continue to pay 80% of furloughed staff salaries during June and July. From August to October, while employees on furlough will continue to get 80% of their salary, the amount the state pays will be reduced each month with employers expected to contribute towards furloughed employees' employment costs. The scheme will come to an end on 31st October 2020.
- 3.18.3 On 13th May 2020 self-employed individuals or members of partnerships whose business has been adversely affected by coronavirus were able to apply for a Self-Employment Income Support Scheme grant worth 80% of their average monthly trading profits. The payment, which is to be paid in a single instalment covering three months, is capped at £7,500.
- 3.18.4 On 24th May the Government announced a £50 million fund (Reopening High Streets Safely Fund) for Councils across England to prepare for the safe reopening of high streets and other retail spaces. The fund is to be used to support practical measures to businesses to reopen safely when they are allowed. The allocation for Stevenage was approximately £77K.
- 3.18.5 The Government also announced its Discretionary Grant Fund, to ensure small businesses have access to grant funding, to mitigate against the impact of Covid-19 on their business. As part of the £1.5 Million allocation for Stevenage, the Council will be providing grants of up to £10,000 to eligible businesses.
- 3.19 **Assistance for Business by Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership**

Hertfordshire LEP has launched a £3.28 million package of measures to support local businesses affected by Covid-19 and help mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic within the county. This includes:

- **Hertfordshire Business Expansion Grant Scheme:** The scheme is open to all SMEs that are eligible to receive funding from the European Regional Development Fund. It provides grants for capital expenditure ranging from £10K – £100K and will require a minimum £1 for £1 match and the creation of at least one new job.
- **Crowdfund Hertfordshire: Small Business Innovation Fund:** This scheme will support small and micro businesses within the tourism, leisure, hospitality, retail, arts and cultural sectors. Hertfordshire LEP has set aside £200K to support the scheme, which will be administered by Visit Herts and offers grant funding up to a maximum of £5,000 on a £1 for £1 match basis.
- **Volunteer Business Support Scheme:** This Hertfordshire Growth Hub branded service will be established and managed by the University of Hertfordshire and will provide additional advice and support from business mentors to firms adversely affected by Covid-19. Up to 50 volunteers will

each offer their expertise to up to four businesses, providing support to around 200 businesses in total over a six month period.

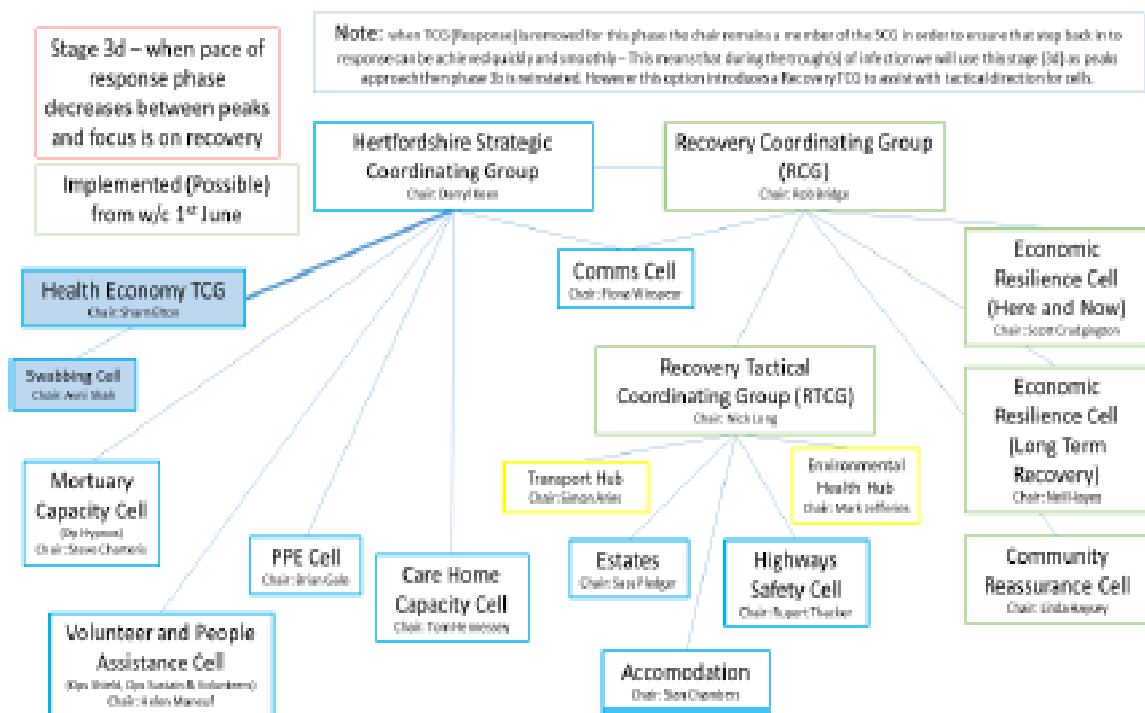
### 3.20 Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum arrangements

3.20.1 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.

3.20.2 As the County moves from responding to the immediate impact of Covid-19 to planning the county's recovery from that impact, the Strategic Coordination Group will continue to meet weekly to keep abreast of the local picture and prepare to respond to any urgent calls for action.

3.20.3 The Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum has reviewed its Strategic Coordination Group strategy to account for moving into recovery with the ability to move rapidly back to response as the need arises. The structure is reflected below:

#### Command structure



### 3.21 Recovery Co-ordinating Group (RCG)

3.21.1 A Hertfordshire Recovery Co-ordinating Group (RCG) has been meeting weekly since the end of April. It is the intention of this group to:

- Deliver a safe and coordinated recovery for the whole County, linking, where appropriate, to regional or national aspects.
- Maintain an agreed situational awareness of the incident



- To plan for a second peak of infections, which may be worse than the first peak
- To consider and plan for a new normality, post incident

The RCG reports to the Strategic Co-ordinating Group and works in partnership with Hertfordshire local authorities and other organisations, to coordinate the strategic activities needed to promote a return to normality to the enable the restoration of disrupted services at the earliest opportunity. This includes engaging the business community to support economic resilience and community leaders to provide public leadership and reassurance.

### 3.22 **Recovery Tactical Co-ordination Group (RTCG)**

3.22.1 A Hertfordshire Recovery Covid-19 Tactical Co-ordination Group has also been set up. The purpose of this Group is to work in partnership, reporting into the Recovery Coordinating Group to assist with the coordination of the recovery process from the Covid-19 pandemic and to promote a return to normality. The RTCG is responsible for interpreting strategic direction as regards to recovery provided by the RCG/recovery strategy and helps coordinate recovery activities. The cells that are currently reporting to the RTCG are:

- Accommodation Cell – dealing with those who have housing issues
- Highways Safety Cell – enabling social distancing in town centres
- Environmental Health Cell – dealing with environmental health issues
- Transport Cell – ensuring transport is in place for those who may rely on it
- Estates Cell – enabling suitable buildings for Covid-19 related requirements
- Communications Cell – managing the communications for the above-mentioned cells

### 3.23 **Economic Resilience Group (ERG)**

3.23.1 Hertfordshire County Council and the LEP have also set up the Hertfordshire Economic Resilience Cell to assess the needs of and to aid and coordinate the recovery of the Hertfordshire economy during and after the pandemic. This cell has two groups so that it can focus on both:

- the ‘here and now’ by collating business intelligence and analysis and feeding this back to the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy each week
- wider strategic issues focusing on Hertfordshire’s longer-term economic recovery.

3.23.2 Both of these groups are multi-agency and include business support, membership organisations, local government as well as higher education and social enterprise sectors.

The Group’s key themes are:

- Targeted support and training for those out of work to help them return to employment
- Discretionary Relief – grants for businesses affected by COVID-19
- Business priority

- Objective Assessment Criteria for help to businesses
- Economic losses/insurance issues
- Investigate potential income generating opportunities for the local economy

### 3.24 **Community Reassurance Cell (CRC)**

- 3.24.1 This Cell is chaired by the Leader of East Herts Council, alongside Leaders and representatives from Hertfordshire County Council, St Albans District Council, Stevenage Borough Council and Welwyn Hatfield Council.
- 3.24.2 This Cell reports to the RCG and provides leadership and reassurance for a community led recovery with Hertfordshire residents through engagement of key groups, plus factual and evidence-based shared information to ensure that all Hertfordshire residents receive relevant information in a timely fashion.
- 3.24.3 The Group's key themes are:
- Engaging positively with the community and feeding intelligence back into the organisation
  - Engendering trust by delivering promised actions
  - Practical and emotional support for the bereaved
  - Improving support and empathy: providing empathic innovative support to residents with sensitivity to colour and faith
  - Working closely with Education to provide additional support for children in schools due to lost term time

### 3.25 **Political Involvement**

- 3.25.1 There is political ownership through the Herts Leaders Group and individual authorities will have their own arrangements in place for ensuring member engagement.
- 3.25.2 The Community Reassurance Cell is a member led cell with cross party representation from district and county elected members.

### 3.26 **Community Impact Assessment**

- 3.26.1 The Community Reassurance Cell, on behalf of the RCG, is carrying out a Community Impact Assessment to identify any impacts on the economy, individuals/families, community and health.
- 3.26.2 Impacts identified will be addressed and will form the basis of action plans for the ERG, CRC and the Communications Cell.
- 3.26.3 The Community Impact Assessment will be reissued to refresh the data at a future point in time. Timing will be dependent on the occurrence and timing of a second or third infection peak. The Action Plans will be revised in light of any new data received.
- 3.26.4 Following the Community Impact Assessment, the ERG/CRC will form its own action plan which will be agreed by the RCG. If task and finish groups are set up, work in progress reporting will be to the parent ERG/CRC who will feed into the RCG.

3.26.5 The results of the Community Impact Assessment will also be used to inform the Stevenage Borough Council's recovery planning.

### **3.27 Growth and Recovery Prospectus**

3.27.1 The Hertfordshire Growth Board is developing a Growth and Recovery Prospectus for submission to the MHCLG.

### **3.28 Stay Safe Hertfordshire Campaign**

3.28.1 Hertfordshire County Council, district and borough councils and other organisations across the county are launching a new Stay Safe Hertfordshire campaign, to support the safe re-opening of town centres. As part of the campaign, the County Council has developed a toolkit for businesses, providing advice and resources which is designed to help them reopen their premises safely.

### **3.29 Covid-19 Testing in Hertfordshire**

3.29.1 On 13<sup>th</sup> June, a new, seven day a week testing site opened in Welwyn Garden City, adding to the mobile 'pop-up' sites being run by the military across Hertfordshire.

### **3.30 Re-opening of schools**

3.30.1 School communities have been working with the County Council to facilitate a safe and welcoming return to school for Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 pupils. At 12<sup>th</sup> June at least 75% of all Hertfordshire primary schools were open for one or more of the priority year groups identified by the government, as well as for children of key workers and vulnerable children, while also supporting distance learning for their other pupils. This compares favourably to the national picture of 51% of schools opened to these groups. Where schools were open in Hertfordshire, 35% of Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 pupils on average attended school.

### **3.31 Residential and Nursing Homes**

3.31.1 At the time of writing this report, there has been no increase in the number of deaths in care homes over the preceding week. However, the Adult Care Services team at HCC is starting to see an increase in infections in people in receipt of care at home. To tackle this issue, the team is continuing to support home care agencies with training in infection control. Staff are also being offered support to help them to follow PPE guidance and safe practices. The cost of this support is being funded by the County Council, as part of its commitment to using 25% of the Infection Control Fund to bolster home care agencies' ability to respond to the challenges posed by the pandemic. Hertfordshire is the only council in the country that has made such a commitment.

### **3.32 Operation Shield**

- 3.32.1 Operation Shield is a Government initiative where around 2.2 million people across the UK have been identified as being at most risk from Covid-19 mainly because of an underlying health condition.
- 3.32.2 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.
- 3.32.3 Following further updates from Government, as of 7th June there were known to be 41,853 names on the extremely vulnerable list for the county and therefore within the scope of Operation Shield.
- 3.32.4 As at 10th June 2020, over 100,000 deliveries of food parcels and household essentials for residents most in need have been achieved since this work began. This includes over 9,000 parcels delivered to Foodbanks, districts and boroughs and other agencies. As of 10<sup>th</sup> June, 1,741 prescription deliveries had also been made.
- 3.32.5 The work by District and Borough Councils continues to contact those residents that are identified as needing shielding but have not responded to any communications from either Government or local agencies. Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service are undertaking follow up visits with those individuals on the non-responder list that could not be reached by districts. The visits are incorporating fitting smoke alarms and providing advice where necessary.
- 3.32.6 The process to reduce the level of demand for the food service provided by Herts Helps continues as the team works to exit from direct provision of food during July. Residents will be carefully supported during this process to ensure safe transfer to other ways of accessing food. The information leaflets included in the food boxes have been revised to reflect the need for residents to seek alternative arrangements where possible and will in future highlight the new webpage detailing the supermarket services offered in Hertfordshire. Demand for deliveries to districts and Foodbanks are reducing and these will cease in the next few weeks.
- 3.32.7 A customer satisfaction survey has been launched for Herts Help to capture service users' feedback of the support they have received. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive; as of 9<sup>th</sup> June, 210 responses had been received, 94% of responders rated the service as excellent.
- 3.32.8 As part of the process to close Operation Shield, any remaining duties after July will pass onto Operation Sustain. This operation will continue to support residents by mobilising the voluntary sector and the newly registered volunteers drawing its work to a close by Christmas. From January 2021 onwards the existing 'business as usual structures' for Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) engagement and activity will then resume, working to build on the legacy created by this period and take forward opportunities to work together in partnership.

### **3.33 Operation Sustain**

- 3.33.1 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.
- 3.33.2 Over 10,000 volunteers remain registered to the three organisations working collaboratively on this: #TeamHerts, Watford3RT and Communities 1<sup>st</sup>. To date 4289 volunteers have been deployed. The recovery and rebuild legacy continues to be developed by #TeamHerts and the Hertfordshire based CVS organisations.
- 3.33.3 Around 60% of the volunteers available have not yet been required. All requests for volunteers have been met and there is no waiting list of people who require them. Support continues to the volunteers who have not yet been deployed to maintain their readiness and enthusiasm. The Councils for Voluntary Services including #TeamHerts, Communities 1<sup>st</sup> and Watford3RT have communicated regularly and provided training, completed security checks and references and supported local pop-up groups of volunteers. Whilst not formally deployed, the volunteers have been receiving helpful advice about how they can help their neighbours, local communities and local organisations.
- 3.33.4 A survey has been developed for volunteers to understand their motivations and levels of interest in continuing to volunteer and support their community post-pandemic and this information will be used to inform a County volunteering legacy across Hertfordshire. Hertfordshire County Council are developing a model of stand-by episodic volunteering to respond to the changing situation, alongside traditional regular giving of time. Through the TeamHerts Volunteering service wider non-Covid related volunteering opportunities are being offered, although as the peak passes and some volunteers return to work, County have seen 6% of registered volunteers indicating they are no longer available.

## **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 to ensure continuation of essential services and provide support to the community during the pandemic.
- 4.1.2 Eight response cells were established each led by an Assistant Director or senior manager. The focus of these cells is now starting to divert to preparations for the easing of lockdown and to safely provide services for the Community and support staff.
- 4.1.3 Officers are establishing a recovery structure and forming recovery plans to enable the town and council to recover from the effects of the pandemic. These are described later in section 4.13.

- 4.1.4 The incident management response for the county is continuing to be led by the Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum. The Council is actively engaged in helping to shape the countywide plans associated to the easing of the lockdown and the recovery phase and is collaboratively working with the Groups highlighted in section 3.20 of this report.
- 4.1.5 Sections 4.2 to 4.9 below provide an update from the Incident Management Team and the eight Stevenage Borough Council incident response cells of activity undertaken since the last Covid-19 report to Executive in May:

## **4.2 Incident Management Team (IMT)**

- 4.2.1 Now that the main focus of the Covid-19 response is on easing of the lockdown and recovery, the Council's Incident Management Team (IMT) which is chaired by Strategic Director Richard Protheroe is now meeting monthly. The IMT comprises senior managers representing each of the Stevenage Incident Response Cells. 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. Representatives from the Police and Citizens Advice Stevenage also attend IMT meetings which has proved to be extremely beneficial.

## **4.3 Business Continuity Cell and Staff and Member Welfare Cell**

- 4.3.1 These two cells have continued to meet three times a week. Over the past three months, 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,
  - new ways of working being introduced across service management teams to provide resilience,
  - redeployed a number of staff to help strengthen crucial front line services including housing and waste services, and to support the Stevenage Helps initiative,
  - additional capacity to support the cemeteries service, and
  - ensuring other customer access routes including online and phone based, as well as safely suspending other services in line with lockdown requirements.
- 4.3.2 Following the easing of the lockdown measures, these cells are now focusing on reinstatement of services in accordance with government guidance and implementing arrangements to ensure Council buildings and ways of working are 'Covid-19 Secure'.
- 4.3.3 Stevenage Direct Services are now carrying out highway verge maintenance and grass cutting near link roads and green areas within estates in accordance with national guidelines to maintain a practicable level of maintenance and carrying out general maintenance on closed play areas.

- 4.3.4 Stevenage Leisure Limited has reopened Stevenage Golf Course and fishing on Fairlands Valley Lake has recommenced; the kiosk there has also reopened with social distancing guidelines in place.
- 4.3.5 During April there was a marked increase in fly tipping in the town. The Environmental Services team responded to 89 fly tipping reports. The team also responded to a 23% increase in refuse and a 53% increase in recycling waste in April compared to February. Hertfordshire County Council reopened its Waste Recycling Centres on 11th May and the Council has reinstated skip hire and bulky waste collections. The Repairs Service has also recommenced routine works following a period of emergency/essential works only, using appropriate social distancing arrangements.
- 4.3.6 All car parks in the town are now open again. The car park payment machines will remain cashless and there is an increased hygiene regime which includes regular cleaning of chip coins and payment machines. The Council is continuing to provide parking for key emergency service users such as NHS colleagues.
- 4.3.7 The Council is continuing to drive forward its key Cooperative Corporate Plan Future Town, Future Council programmes. This includes progressing the regeneration schemes at Queensway and in the Town Square. The Housing Development programme is also advancing as works are continuing on numerous residential development sites.
- 4.3.8 The Customer Service Centre is now open for urgent face to face meetings via appointment if the Customer Service Advisor feels it will help. During the lockdown, face to face appointments were carried out for extremely urgent cases such as domestic violence and on the day homelessness cases. Work-arounds to face to face appointments have worked well and appointments have therefore been able to be kept to a minimum.
- 4.3.9 Council Member meetings are now being held as virtual meetings and are being live streamed via YouTube.
- 4.3.10 The Council is preparing to ensure its operations are Covid-19 secure. Officers continue to make extensive use of homeworking and will do so in the months ahead. A range of support is being provided to staff through this challenging period, including access to mental health support, providing management advice and many ways to keep staff engaged across the services provided in the community.

#### **4.4 Community Response Cell**

- 4.4.1 This Response Cell continues to work closely with the Police, Stevenage Citizens Advice, British Red Cross, Foodbanks and other voluntary services in Stevenage.
- 4.4.2 On 6th 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.

- 4.4.3 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. Stevenage Football Club's Coronavirus Community Careline has assisted with prescription medicine deliveries.
- 4.4.4 The Stevenage Helps Community Response Team have now received over 600 requests for support and the response team has delivered over 500 food parcels and referred people to other support agencies, such as Citizens Advice, Food Banks, Herts Help, supermarket helplines and Stevenage Football Club Coronavirus Community Careline who have assisted with a prescription delivery service.
- 4.4.5 Postcards promoting Stevenage Helps have been delivered to 2000 residents who receive assisted bin and medical collections as well as targeted families through the Council's Play Team.
- 4.4.6 The plan is to continue with Stevenage Helps for some time, assessing the situation regularly based on referral information. The Council is working with its partners to support customers if they need further, more specific support including debt management and benefit advice.
- 4.4.7 Hertfordshire County Council is likely to reduce the donations of food parcels they are supplying to the Council over the coming weeks. Approximately £3,000 has however been secured through donations, Local Community Budgets and a grant from Tesco which, along with current stock, will provide adequate resources for the foreseeable future.
- 4.4.8 The Council has supported Herts Help by contacting 538 people on the Shielded List who did not respond to the Government's shielding letter, to ascertain whether they required food parcels or any other assistance. As a result of this, 55 residents were immediately referred for support.
- 4.4.9 Council Officers also worked with Stevenage Community Trust to launch an online giving platform to support vulnerable people and groups. The Trust has so far raised over £46,000 and this has enabled residents in financial distress because of the virus to receive support.
- 4.4.10 Officers have also been 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 and will be working with them to assist them to reopen.
- 4.4.11 The Assistant Director (Communities and Neighbourhoods) has 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.

4.4.12 The Council has worked on a joint bid by local frontline charities for funding as a result of the Government's proposed funding package for charities.

4.4.13 There has been a significant increase in SADA and No More Service referrals and the Council has been raising the profile of both these services via social media, the Council's website and on SG1 radio. There have also been increasing calls around neighbour disputes and anti-social behaviour and Officers from the Council's Community Safety team 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%.

4.4.14 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.

4.4.15 A joint Stevenage Borough Council/Citizens Advice Stevenage bid to the MHCLG for Domestic Abuse Covid-19 funding has led to £70,433 of funding being received. This funding has helped to pay towards accommodation for victims of domestic abuse. The Council now has 12 Safe Spaces/Move On Accommodation units, which are at the time of writing this report full.

4.4.16 Since April, the Council has secured approximately £170K for SADA. This includes payment for services from North Hertfordshire, East Herts and Welwyn and Hatfield Councils, £23K from the Big Lottery and £5,600 from Letchworth Heritage. There are also currently bids with the PCC and the result of these bids should be known in July.

4.4.17 Unfortunately Stevenage Day could not take place this year. A virtual social media Stevenage Day was held instead where memories and highlights from previous Stevenage Days were captured and shared with the community.

## **4.5 Housing Response Cell**

4.5.1 The Specialist Support Services team have contacted all tenants over the age of 70, including Careline customers. The team are making sure that they have the support they need and make referrals as required.

4.5.2 The Resident and Estates Services team are continuing to inspect flat blocks and make emergency visits to tenants. In addition, with the support of colleagues from other teams, they are contacting all vulnerable tenants age 69 and below and resident leaseholders to provide support, information and guidance; making referrals where necessary. The team have also visited our high rise blocks to deliver guidance on social distancing whilst in communal areas.

4.5.3 In response to the Government's instruction to accommodate rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping, Housing Officers arranged additional accommodation at the Holiday Inn Express, the Gate Hotel and Novotel in

Stevenage as well as a hotel in Stansted. 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.

- 4.5.4 The Housing Options Team is continuing to work with these people in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 in order to help applicants source alternative move on accommodation after this period. The Council has reserved six properties that can be used to accommodate anyone in hotel accommodation who tests positive and therefore needs to self-isolate. The Local Resilience Forum Accommodation Cell is meeting every Thursday to plan post-lockdown arrangements for rough sleepers.
- 4.5.5 The twelve weeks the Government expected local authorities to accommodate rough sleepers has now passed. Executive at its meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2020, approved the extension of hotel provision for a further six weeks. This provision will be for Stevenage residents only (previously included residents from East and North Herts too). The Housing Options Team will be ending the contract with the hotel in Stansted and moving clients back to Stevenage where the Council will continue to support them in partnership with the Police and the No More Service.
- 4.5.6 Whilst continuing to support their landlords and tenants, the Housing Supply team are also working to secure new assured shorthold tenancies in the private rented sector where possible to relieve the demand on temporary accommodation. Thirteen households have been placed into this sector during this period which really highlights the Council's great relationship with private sector landlords and their trust in the Council to support these customers.
- 4.5.7 The Compliance Team and Liberty Gas are continuing to carry out gas servicing and maintenance visits to ensure health and safety compliance. Engineers wear PPE and follow strict social distancing measures whilst working in tenants' homes. The team are accommodating tenants who are 'shielding' or self-isolating by delaying appointments and offering to deliver carbon monoxide detectors. Key workers are being prioritised and have the option of a Saturday appointment. The Council remains 100% compliant in relation to gas servicing.
- 4.5.8 The Income Services team are working hard to balance supporting those who had financial difficulties prior to the pandemic and those who now find themselves struggling. They are negotiating realistic payment plans for most and putting accounts on hold where necessary. The Council has seen a significant increase in rent arrears which now total more than £1M. 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.
- 4.5.9 Investment works are continuing where possible, with an initial focus on completing external and communal works. We are also putting in place plans that will enable us to undertake internal works in line with Government

guidance and industry best practice. There has been a communications strategy running alongside this, including Member and press updates.

#### **4.6 Business Liaison Cell**

- 4.6.1 This Cell has continued to work closely with Hertfordshire LEP, Chamber of Commerce and the Hertfordshire Growth Board to provide assistance and advice to local business.
- 4.6.2 Council Officers have continued to engage with local businesses and self-employed residents to promote and signpost them to the Government's package of measures for businesses. Weekly updates and bulletins on business support are being emailed to all businesses on the Council's business mailing list. We have also placed information and links for businesses on our website and have been publicising these through our social media channels.
- 4.6.3 The Council has shared Government guidance on social distancing for employers during Covid-19 with its business contacts. The Council has also been contacted by businesses who have ambitions to innovate and diversify their businesses, as a result of Covid-19, and have provided support to these companies, as well as signposting them to stakeholder partners for specialist support.
- 4.6.4 Officers have been contacting eligible businesses for the Small Business Grant and Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants to ensure they claim the funding. The Council has now delivered £11 million of Government grants to 470 businesses and provided support to enable them to carry on trading where possible.
- 4.6.7 The Council has promoted the Government's Discretionary Grant Fund, to ensure small businesses have access to grant funding to mitigate against the impact of Covid-19 on their business. As part of the £1.5 Million allocation to Stevenage Borough Council, the Council will be providing grants of up to £10,000 to eligible businesses.
- 4.6.8 On 24th May the Government announced a £50 million fund (Reopening High Streets Safely Fund) for Councils across England to prepare for the safe reopening of high streets and other retail spaces. The fund is to be used to support practical measures to businesses to reopen safely when they are allowed. The allocation for Stevenage was approximately £77K.
- 4.6.9 Environmental Health officers at Stevenage Borough Council are working in partnership with Hertfordshire's Better Business for All partnership to assist businesses in opening safely. Guides, checklists and frequently asked questions are available within a toolkit to support businesses to complete their risk assessment and put new processes and procedures in place to welcome customers when re-opening and trading safely. The Council's Commercial and Licensing Manager has been working with Town Centre Management and Engineers on preparations and launching a Covid-19 assurance scheme for

businesses to assist them in implementing social distancing, cleaning and hygiene measures as they reopen.

4.6.10 Local business leaders from across Hertfordshire's key sectors have also put their views to government ministers on how they are implementing a safe return to work for their employees and helping to build the County's economic recovery. The majority of businesses that took part were from small or medium-sized enterprises from life sciences, construction and the film and television industry.

4.6.11 The Department of Transport has issued new statutory guidance saying that local authorities should act quickly to re-allocate space on our high streets to people walking and cycling. Hertfordshire County Council has focused on providing space for pedestrians, so that people can queue outside shops and pass each other at a safe distance. So far, measures have been put in place in the following locations: Bishop's Stortford, Borehamwood, Harpenden, Hertford, Hitchin, Knebworth, Radlett, Royston, St Albans, Ware, Watford and Welwyn. Further locations including Stevenage Old Town are in the second tranche of works, and Council officers are actively engaging with Hertfordshire County Council to maximise the improvements for the High Street.

4.6.12 The Council has marked up the town centre and put signage in place to guide people to assist with social distancing in its public spaces and town centre. Temporary signage has been erected reminding the public to social distance. The indoor market reopened on 17 June 2020.

## **4.7 Finance and Resources Cell**

4.7.1 This Cell has continued to assist residents and businesses in the town to access the grants and financial assistance which is being provided by the government in response to Covid-19. The Revenues and Benefits team have been dealing with a large number of enquiries relating to these grants and financial assistance.

4.7.2 During April to June, an estimated 2400 customers contacted the Council to make new Council Tax payment arrangements and 18% made no payment at all during April and an estimated £1.2Million is outstanding for April to June. In addition there were 290 businesses that had not paid any business rates as at the time of writing the report.

4.7.3 The Council has given 486 local companies business rate relief totalling £21.5 Million and distributed £11 Million in cash grants to 96% of eligible local businesses.

4.7.4 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.

4.7.5 Officers have been assessing the financial impact of Covid-19 on the Council's finances. Information in relation to the impact on the Council's finances are

highlighted in the Financial Implications section of this report (paragraphs 5.1.1 to 5.1.7).

#### **4.8 Burials and Cemeteries Cell**

- 4.8.1. Cemeteries in the town continue to operate in line with Government guidance. Burials are continuing with recommended attendance of not more than 10 immediate family members or close friends. Venues are carrying out risk assessments to accommodate more mourners wherever possible.
- 4.8.2 Officers have worked with local funeral directors to ensure that there is a common understanding and agreement with the new arrangements. This information has 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 pandemic and the support that is available.
- 4.8.3 This Cell has now been suspended as the UK is over the peak and seeing a decline nationally and locally regarding both infections and deaths. This can be reinstated as required to ensure the focus on capacity and communications are in place if a second wave was to occur. We have not seen any increase to the normal amount of deaths through the cemeteries in Stevenage, noting that any increase was picked up by the Crematorium. It is the same situation across Hertfordshire with levels operating as expected even for those districts that initially saw an increase.
- 4.8.4 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 in Hertfordshire. This has been achieved by significantly expanding the provision of all three acute hospital sites (Watford, Hemel Hempstead and Lister) and supplementing this with two discreet community funeral director led mortuary storage provisions in Stevenage and Watford.

#### **4.9 Communications Cell**

- 4.9.1 The dedicated Coronavirus section 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 is regularly updated to reflect the latest governance advice and guidance.
- 4.9.2 A special Coronavirus edition of Chronicle was sent to over 36,000 households and is available online. The publication was well received by resident, staff and councillors. A further Recovery focused edition is now in development.
- 4.9.3 The Communications Team have continued to use 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 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.

4.9.4 The Communications Team are now preparing messages in relation to the easing of lockdown and the return of retail, promoting regeneration and other recovery activities.

4.9.5 On Thursday evenings, the council lit the clock tower blue and also projected the NHS logos in blue on the Arts and Leisure Centre to recognise the hard work of carers and keyworkers.

#### **4.10 Test and Trace**

4.10.1 The NHS test and trace service is designed to help to control the rate of reproduction, reduce the spread of the infection and save lives. The service:

- Ensures that anyone who develops symptoms of coronavirus can quickly be tested to find out if they have the virus, and also includes targeted asymptomatic testing of NHS and social care staff and care home residents.
- Helps trace close recent contacts of anyone who tests positive for coronavirus and, if necessary, notifies them that they must self-isolate at home to help stop the spread of the virus.

4.10.2 The role for district councils in relation to test and trace is expected to extend to investigation of complex institutional outbreaks including implementation of enforcement powers. The Hertfordshire Outbreak Plan will confirm roles and is scheduled to go live by the end of June.

4.10.3 The Minister of State for the Department of Health and Social Care confirmed on 10<sup>th</sup> June that £300 Million of funding to support test and trace services will be allocated to Councils across England. The funding will help local communities to develop and implement plans to reduce the spread of coronavirus in their area and has been allocated to councils based on need. This includes additional funding for communities with lower incomes and higher demand for local healthcare settings. The grant will be payable in one instalment in June 2020. Hertfordshire will receive £4.5 Million.

4.10.4 Data on the spread of the virus will be shared with Councils through the Joint Biosecurity Centre to inform local outbreak planning, so teams understand how the virus is moving.

4.10.5 A new National Local Government Advisory Board has been established to work with NHS Test and Trace. This will include sharing best practice between communities across the country.

4.10.6 Work to share lessons learned is being led by a group of 11 councils from across the UK, representing rural and urban areas, who have volunteered to help localise planning.

## **4.11 Local Outbreak Plans for Covid-19**

4.11.1 The Government has asked every Local Resilience Forum to develop a Covid-19 Local Outbreak Plan for their area which is expected to be finalised by the end of June 2020. This work is being led by the Director of Public Health for Hertfordshire in liaison with other agencies, including district and borough councils. There are three principal parts to this:

- A Member-Led Engagement Board which will focus on public engagement and assurance. David Williams, Leader of the County Council, has written to District Leaders and the Police and Crime Commissioner to convene that Board.
- An Officer-led Covid-19 Health Protection Board (Outbreak Control Board), convened by the Director of Public Health which will consist of a range of local partners including Strategic Co-ordinating Group Chair, Police, NHS, CCGs, District and Borough Councils and Public Health England.
- The development of a plan led by a small project development team, supporting the Boards.

4.11.2 While the duty is placed at Upper Tier, it is explicitly recognised that Public Health at County and Environmental Health in districts and boroughs have essential and complementary roles. Capacity will be needed across organisations and this will be funded by the £4.5Million allocation for test and trace/outbreak planning for Hertfordshire.

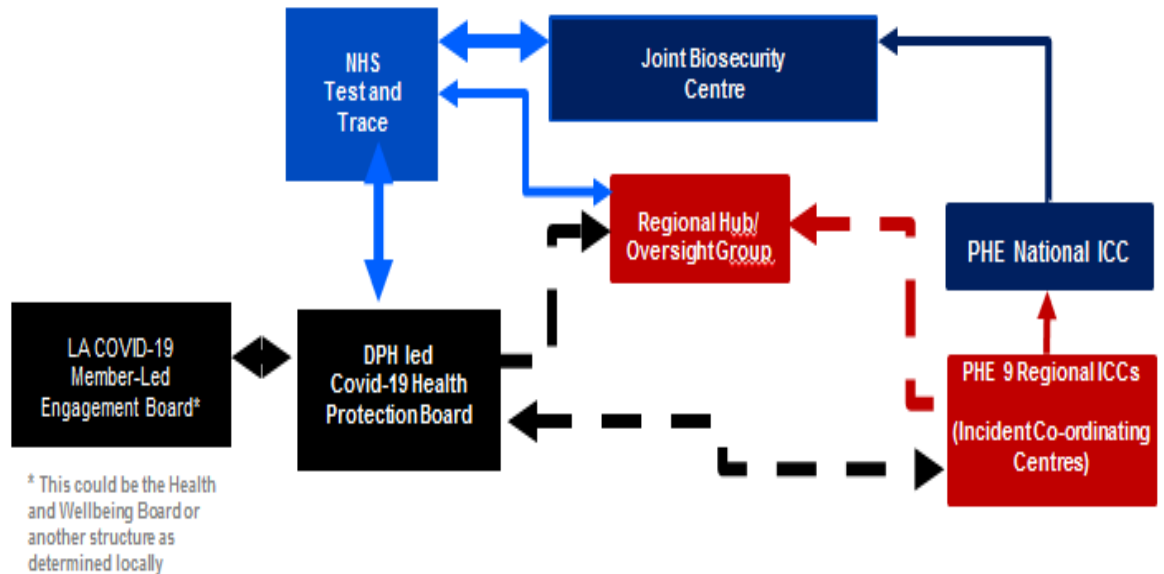
4.11.3 The aims of the Local Outbreak Plan are to protect the health and the population of Hertfordshire by:

- Prevention of the spread of Covid-19 and associated disease
- Early identification and proactive management of local outbreaks
- Co-ordination of capabilities across agencies and stakeholders
- Assuring the public and stakeholders that this is being effectively delivered

4.11.4 The Government has set seven key themes:

- Care Homes and Schools
- High Risk Places, Locations and Communities
- Local Testing Capacity
- Contact Tracing in Complex Settings
- Data Integration
- Vulnerable People
- Local Boards

4.11.5 The National Government specification for NHS Test and Trace and Local Outbreak response is shown below.



4.11.6 The NHS Test, Track and Trace and Local Outbreak Plans are different but have overlapping responses as can be seen from the table below and are reliant on each other.

NHS Test, Track and Trace	Local Outbreak Plans
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Programme run from National down to local</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Programme run by local areas with regional and national data</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tracks individuals and their contacts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Addresses outbreaks in communities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads contact tracing for those testing positive via call centres</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>contact tracing only for complex cases handed down from national/regional</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only works on individuals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Works on situations, premises, localities and populations</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>System recently implemented and is still in early stages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eight years experience of managing outbreaks large and small. Protocols in place</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commissions national testing capability to test individuals at scale</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deploys local testing capability to test and manage outbreaks</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outbreak plans need test and trace to work fully and share data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Test and Trace should alert local areas when they identify potential or actual outbreaks from their contact tracing</li> </ul>



## **4.12 Local Growth programmes**

4.12.1 The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government sent a letter to all Mayors and LEP Chairs advising that the Government is committed to working with each LEP to review their local growth fund programme to get a shared understanding of how delivery will be managed, and what support Council's may need from Government.

4.12.2 The Government is also exploring how acceleration of Departmental funds could be used to support the delivery of capital projects in order to stimulate the economy over the next 18 months. Local Authorities are being invited to come forward with ideas for accelerating existing Government funded capital projects, to generate new activity within 18 months, to help create jobs and raise overall demand in the economy.

4.12.3 In addition the government is willing to consider exceptional, additional shovel-ready capital projects which can be delivered within 18 months. Any new proposals must meet value for money standards agreed through local assurance frameworks and longer-running projects, these must deliver on two overarching objectives – driving up economic growth and jobs and supporting green recovery.

## **4.13 Stevenage Borough Council Recovery Plans**

4.13.1 The Covid-19 crisis has had a significant impact across the town and the focus to date has been on the immediate coordinated response to support residents and local businesses during the lockdown period. Although this work will continue for some time, the Council's focus has turned to how it will aid recovery of the town and the Council taking into account the next two phases (whilst recognising that these may not be linear):

- Living with the virus in the population as lockdown is eased and where social distancing is maintained.
- Establishing a new normal for community and businesses.

4.13.2 Recovery will be a complex and long running process that will involve many agencies and participants from across the borough, it will be costly in terms of resources, and it will undoubtedly be subject to scrutiny from the community, the media and politicians alike. It is therefore, essential for the process to be based on well thought out and tested structures and procedures for it to work in an efficient and orderly manner.

4.13.3 Recovery from a major incident is defined as the process of rebuilding, restoring and rehabilitating the community following an emergency, but it is more than simply the replacement of what has been affected or destroyed and the rehabilitation of those affected. It is a complex social and developmental process rather than just a remedial process. The broad, interlinked categories of impact that individuals, communities and businesses will need to recover from include:

- Humanitarian (including health and housing)
- Economic and business recovery

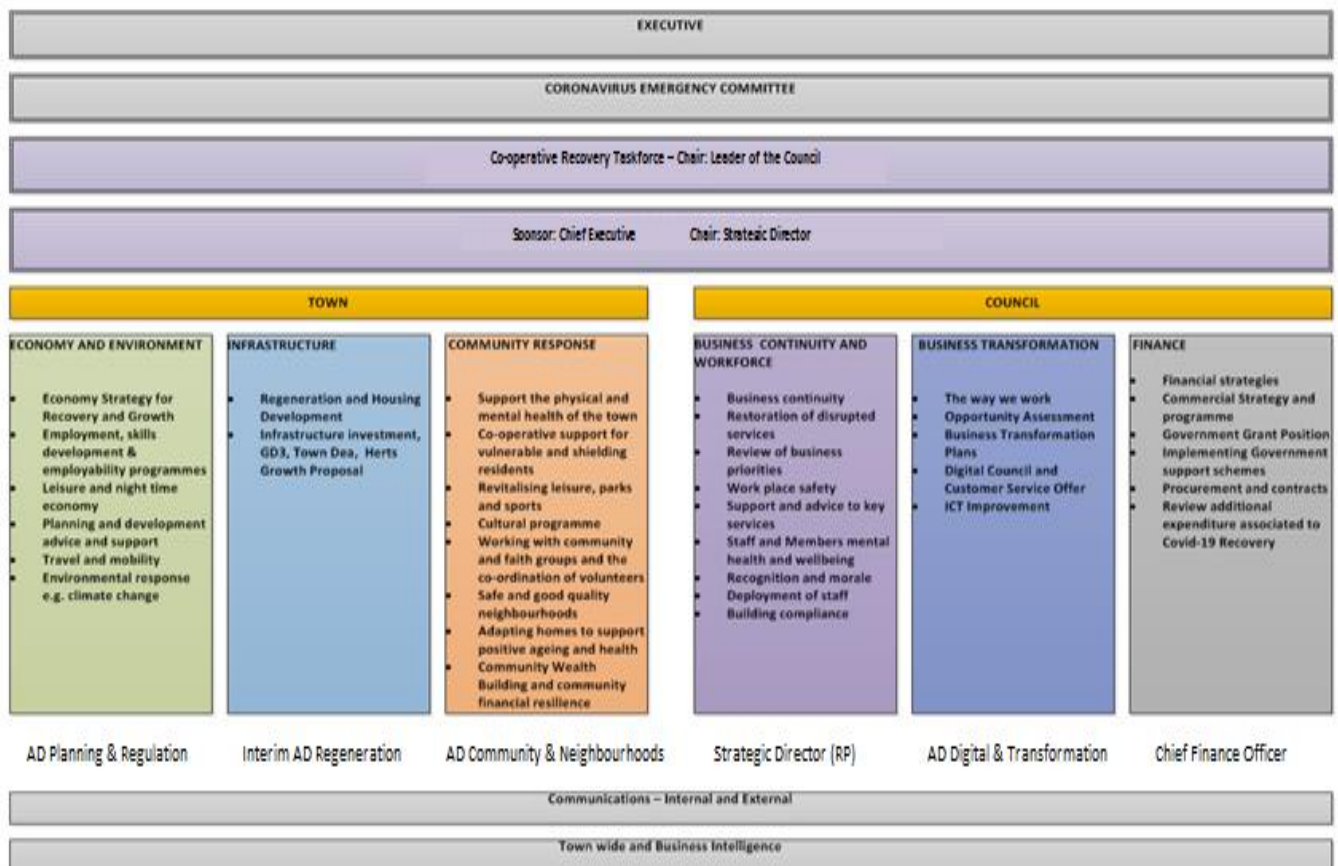
- Environment and infrastructure.

#### 4.14 Recovery Governance and oversight of town's recovery

4.14.1 The impact of Covid-19 requires a comprehensive response beyond the remit of the Council alone. In the context of a partnership approach to the town's recovery, the Council has a key role to convene stakeholders and articulate a shared vision for the town.

4.14.2 Work over the last five years on the Co-operative Future Town and Future Council (FTFC) vision has enhanced the Council's network of partners. The FTFC vision provides a strong platform to build the town's recovery.

4.14.3 The diagram below outlines the governance and delivery structures that will facilitate the recovery within Stevenage.



4.14.4 During the emergency, the recovery co-ordinating and management structures shall compliment the Council's incident management structures and the Herts multi-agency response and recovery structures of the Herts Local Resilience Forum.

## 4.15 Stevenage Co-operative Recovery Taskforce

4.15.1 The following strategic aim has been developed to guide the Stevenage Co-operative Recovery Taskforce (SCRT):

*To co-operatively restore the social, economic, environmental well-being of residents of Stevenage, and ensure that the whole borough recovers from the Covid-19 outbreak stronger, more resilient and with a renewed community purpose.*

4.15.2 The town's and Council's recovery will be taken forward through adopting a co-operative partnership approach, through working with other public sector partners, with local business and commerce representative groups, faith groups, community and voluntary organisations and with academic institutions. Ultimately, the future prosperity and wellbeing of the town in the aftermath of Covid-19 will depend on the Council and its strategic partners continuing to take actions to keep people safe and working towards the Future Town, Future Council vision for the future.

4.15.3 The Council will engage with key partners through the 'Stevenage Together' forum for an initial recovery summit meeting later in July.

4.15.4 The taskforce will be chaired by the Leader of the Council. The SCRT will operate on a subsidiarity basis with regard to the partner agencies represented on the taskforce. The multi-agency approach is intended to add value and support, not undermine, the sovereignty of the individual agencies. The taskforce will not replace internal governance procedures of each partner and, as such, the group would only have the power to make recommendations. Consequently, any impacts on the Council would be subject to normal internal policy development and decision making through the Executive or Council.

4.15.5 However, it will be important that the partners in the SCRT collaborate to ensure coordination of effort, shared learning and exchange of best practice, management of interdependencies and overlaps, and maintaining the ability to present a coherent and monitored picture of progress and barriers to recovery across the whole of the borough.

4.15.6 The SCRT will develop recovery plans for the town working with residents, businesses and crucial public service partners and will likely focus on areas such as:

- Economic support and recovery
- Infrastructure projects including regeneration and new council homes
- Community wealth building, support for jobs and skills
- Climate change
- Safe spaces, safe places
- Supporting vulnerable people – including rough sleepers and those suffering from domestic abuse
- Revitalising health and increasing community cohesion and resilience

- Engagement and communication – to undertake appropriate engagement with residents, communities and businesses to inform thinking on the recovery response.

4.15.7 Draft terms of reference have been developed for the SCRT. Membership of the taskforce is still to be determined but will be selected to be representative of the breadth of interest and expertise across all sectors. The SCRT will remain in operation as long as there is a need for a recovery response to Covid-19.

#### **4.16 Recovery Co-ordination Board**

4.16.1 A Recovery Co-ordination Board (RCB) will support the Council and Executive with day to day management of recovery activities.

4.16.2 The following objectives have been developed to guide the work of the board:

- Provide strategic officer leadership to determine Stevenage’s recovery response
- Play a significant role in ensuring the co-ordinated delivery of the recovery response, both internally within the Council and externally through the Stevenage Recovery Taskforce and other relevant organisations across the town
- Oversee the development and delivery of Future Town and Future Council recovery priorities
- Ensure the Council’s financial resilience – both revenue and capital
- Shape the Council’s future transformation plans – including the sustainability of new ways of working developed during the response to Covid-19; how the Council may adapt to future Government measures and what this means for future service delivery and how the Council operates;
- Influence, inform and where relevant reflect Hertfordshire Recovery Coordinating Group, East of England, National and DCN recovery proposals within the Stevenage recovery plans; and
- Gather evidence and best practice to inform the response activities.

4.16.3 The work of the RCB will be sponsored by the Chief Executive and the board will be chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive. The membership of the board will also include the Recovery Workstream Lead Officers.

4.16.4 The draft terms of reference for the RCB can be seen at Appendix 3.

#### **4.17 Recovery Workstreams**

4.17.1 The SCRT and RCB will be supported initially by six Recovery Workstream Cells:

<b>Town Recovery Workstreams</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Economy and Environment</b></li> <li>• <b>Infrastructure</b></li> <li>• <b>Community Response</b></li> </ul>
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**Council Recovery  
Workstreams**

- **Business Continuity and Workforce**
- **Business Transformation**
- **Financial Security**

4.17.2 Workstream lead officers will coordinate, collate and collaborate regarding the purpose, role, aim and objectives of the Workstream Cells. Workstream leads will be required to submit regular status reports including decisions taken prior to RCB meetings.

4.17.3 The cells will be supported as necessary by appropriate teams, including Communications, Legal, Risk and Resilience, Finance and Constitutional Services (and others as required) and lead Members where appropriate.

4.17.4 Where possible the Council will look to utilise existing partnership and delivery groups to deliver the identified workstream deliverables and outcomes. There may be a need to establish task and finish groups under each Workstream Cell. These will need co-ordination to avoid scope creep and duplication.

#### **4.18 Recovery Plans**

4.18.1 The aim of the emerging Town and Council Recovery Plans (as seen in Appendix 4 and Appendix 5) is to provide a formal and integrated structure for recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic within Stevenage.

4.18.2 The objectives of the recovery plans are to:

- meet the statutory requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 placed upon the Council and all category 1 and 2 partners;
- implement and manage an effective multi-agency recovery process;
- ensure a co-ordinated recovery process;
- identify representation, partners and stakeholders to assist in the delivery of the recovery process;
- ensure effective partnership working between the relevant organisations and agencies;
- address the short, medium and long term requirements of those affected.

4.18.3 During the initial stages of recovery, the Council's Strategic Leadership Team has acted as a shadow Recovery Co-ordination Board and has developed the recovery structures and the appended recovery plans.

4.18.4 The backbone of the recovery plan is the Council's existing Future Town, Future Council programme which is already being taken forward in partnership with other partner organisations. Some of the actions that the Council will take in conjunction with its strategic partners will be short term to support social distancing. Others such as regenerating the town centre and building new council homes will be longer term programmes. Together these actions will form part of the town's recovery.

4.18.5 Each theme within the recovery plan includes key actions which the Council and its partners will take to make progress. In shaping the recovery plans the Strategic Leadership Team has taken into account the fact that Covid-19 has

been suppressed but it has not disappeared and remains a major threat to individuals and the local economy.

4.18.6 The recovery plans are intended to be living documents, which will continue to evolve. Therefore the actions captured in the plan are not exhaustive and will change dependent upon the challenges and opportunities that arise.

4.18.7 It is recommended that the Executive approve the draft town and Council recovery plans and acknowledge these will be further developed during the recovery phase.

#### **4.19 Town Recovery**

4.19.1 The recovery plan for the town is currently set around four over-arching themes:

1. Supporting businesses and the local economy
2. Supporting local people and maintaining strong communities
3. Supporting the mental and physical health of the town
4. Travel and mobility

#### **4.20 Theme 1: Supporting businesses, the local economy and infrastructure development**

##### **4.20.1 Supporting Objectives**

- **A thriving and sustainable town; supporting a diverse economy that creates jobs and opportunities**
- **Engaging the business community to support economic resilience**
- **Promoting and delivering residential and commercial development**
- **Reskilling and upskilling Stevenage residents to be able to compete in the changed local economy**
- **A liveable and low carbon town; a destination of choice to live, visit and work**

4.20.2 Nationally, the Government announcements at the March Budget and subsequently, have resulted in a total support package of around £50 billion, more than 2% of GDP. This is a larger package than the Government deployed in the 2008/09 financial crisis. Despite this level of support, the Office for Budget Responsibility predicts an unprecedented national economic contraction of up to 35% during the current financial quarter, leaving an additional 2 million people unemployed. The National Institute of Economic and Social Research has estimated the total economic effects could be as high as £800 billion nationally over the next ten years.

4.20.3 National economic policy interventions will clearly continue to evolve in the coming weeks and months. Further action at a national level will certainly be needed, supported by fiscal boosts and possibly further monetary actions

4.20.4 Evidence suggests that those in deprived areas and in low skilled, low wage or unstable work have been disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. Barriers to employability, low social inclusion and the quality of jobs have been identified as issues that need to be tackled to deliver an inclusive

economy. Covid-19 and the resulting recession will adversely impact these, already deep seated challenges.

- 4.20.5 The response to these issues will need to alter over time, from the recent focus on providing grants and business rates relief, to the current phase of supporting businesses to re-open in a safe way and be Covid-19 Secure, and then over the medium term, to consider how the local economy can adapt and create an inclusive economy where the benefits are to be shared by all.
- 4.20.6 Moving forward the Council's objective will be to support the local economy whilst trying to protect residents and visitors from Covid-19 and to avoid a second peak nationally or locally. Within Stevenage the focus will be on the development of a dynamic and responsive Stevenage Economic Recovery Plan.
- 4.20.7 A new Stevenage Industrial/Economic Development Recovery Strategy will be developed that sets out the priorities and steps to be taken during the recovery phase. Existing relationships with businesses and organisations such as the Herts Local Enterprise Partnership, Chamber of Commerce, Wenta and North Herts College will be critical in helping the Council to understand the issues in supporting businesses through the phases of recovery.
- 4.20.8 The Council and its partners will look to stimulate economic recovery through maximising growth. Delivering against the Council's FTFC Regeneration and Housing Development programme objectives will help aid the town's longer term recovery. Both programmes will not only be necessary to provide the homes and jobs that are needed but also the recovery of the construction sector which will provide important employment and training opportunities.
- 4.20.9 The planned regeneration of Stevenage Town Centre is one of the biggest development opportunities in the East of England. The Council will continue to work with its construction and delivery partners to deliver a range of regeneration schemes including the likes of the SG1 £350m regeneration scheme, the North Queensway £50m mixed use development and the construction of a new bus interchange etc.
- 4.20.10 Stevenage is well positioned to attract further infrastructure investment over and above the Growth Deal funding already secured. The Council will continue to contribute to the development of a Hertfordshire Growth Prospectus and a countywide Economic Recovery Strategy that will potentially help unlock additional Government resources to stimulate growth across the county and within Stevenage.
- 4.20.11 Work is continuing to progress, through the recently created Stevenage Development Board, on developing a Town Investment Plan for Stevenage – as part of the Government's Towns Fund Programme. Through this programme the Council, working alongside local partners, has an opportunity to secure up to £25m to support growth in the town.
- 4.20.12 Following the ending of the Government's Job Retention Scheme in November there is a risk that many Stevenage residents will become unemployed and those who work in retail and hospitality are at particular risk. Moving forward there will need to be an agile and flexible skills offer to retrain those local residents, working with employers where there are job

opportunities. Reskilling Stevenage residents to be able to compete in the changing economy will be a fundamental element of the recovery work. The Stevenage Works Board will continue to create employability and training programmes that will enable local residents to access and receive the right training to secure future job opportunities within the town and across Hertfordshire. This will include the creation of a new CITB Hub and a new Skills Strategy.

4.20.13 Through the FTFC Housing Development Programme the Council will progress the development of 240 new affordable homes and seek planning permission for an additional 300 homes during 2020/21. The Council will also set up a new Wholly Owned Housing Company to further deliver housing growth within the town.

4.21.14 The Covid-19 lockdown period has undoubtedly led to an unprecedented reduction in CO2 emissions and a huge improvement in air quality. The challenge for the recovery phase is how to urgently restart the local economy to protect the income and livelihoods of people whilst striving to capitalise on some of the positive environmental benefits enjoyed during the Covid-19 lockdown period and enable positive behavioural change that endures for the long term. The Council will take learning from this period about what elements can be sustained and could be incorporated in a new Climate Change Strategy and action plan. Implementation of the Council's Biodiversity Strategy will continue during the recovery period.

#### **4.20.14 Key Actions**

**The Council will:**

- **Develop and submit a Town Investment Plan**
- **Secure planning permission for the SG1 Regeneration Scheme and commence the first phase during 2020/21**
- **Complete the North Queensway Development Scheme with Reef,**
- **Complete the Town Square and North Block regeneration projects**
- **Progress development plans for other Opportunity Areas e.g. Marshgate**
- **Deliver new affordable and social homes through the Council's Housing Development Programme**
- **Set up a new Wholly Owned Housing Company to deliver additional homes for the town**
- **Develop a new Stevenage Industrial/Economic Development Strategy and action plan for the Old Town High Street**
- **Engage with business, representative groups and relevant public authorities and monitor relevant economic data and emerging national and local analysis, to understand the challenges facing businesses and the wider economic impact of Covid-19.**
- **Work in partnership to develop appropriate solutions to the challenges identified, including working with partners on issues including skills and pathways to work.**
- **Deliver the Stevenage Works and CITB initiatives.**
- **Develop a new Climate Change Strategy and action plan**
- **Implement its Biodiversity Strategy**



## 4.21 Theme 2: Supporting local people and maintaining strong communities

### 4.21.1 Supporting Objectives

- **A progressive and equitable town: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities**
- **Building community resilience and relationships, including the delivery of a joint, holistic response to poverty, homelessness, shielding, domestic abuse and other social factors**
- **Increased independence in our communities and enabling residents and community groups to do more for themselves**
- **Continue to co-operatively support the local Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector during the crisis and recovery phase**
- **Safe and good quality neighbourhoods;**
- **Adapting the public realm and market spaces to support visitors, retailers and traders**
- **Build upon our strong track record of social value through prioritising training and education opportunities for Stevenage residents**
- **Implement area based working to bring Council and community services close to the people they serve**

4.21.2 A core focus of the recovery plan will be how the Council and its partners will support the most vulnerable in the community through the Covid-19 outbreak and through the resulting recession.

4.21.3 Emerging analysis of the health and economic impact of Covid-19 suggests that socio-economic, health and other inequalities are being exacerbated. The pandemic has left many households being reliant on welfare benefits and also upon the likes of local food banks.

4.21.4 Those at greater risk include both residents on the NHS shielded list and those with wider risk factors – in terms of poverty and poor economic outcomes, those with social risk factors, those with a wider set of medical issues, and those with a combination of these factors. This includes factors such as social isolation, domestic abuse, benefit claimants, those in insecure, low paid work, those aged over 70, and those with life threatening conditions.

4.21.5 Although there will continue to be structural drivers of inequality that need to be addressed at a national level, the Council will be focused on developing local resilience to future economic shocks. This will require a strategic and collaborative approach involving key partners across all sectors. There is likely to be a long term need to develop and maintain holistic support for vulnerable residents who face particular disadvantage. Moving forward this will need to be a key focus area for the SCRT as a multi-agency approach will be needed to ensure timely advice and support is offered to vulnerable households. Further detailed planning work will need to be undertaken to ensure the Council moves effectively from the response phase into recovery.

4.21.6 Throughout the pandemic there have been emerging trends in equality impacts for minority and vulnerable groups. These trends have led to disproportionate and often disadvantageous outcomes for some groups of people, directly related to their health but also related to broader social determinants of equality such as access to information and economic stability.

- 4.21.7 The Council will establish a new task and finish Equalities Commission so that all concerned can better understand the equality impacts arising from Covid-19 and how adverse impacts can be minimised. Additionally the Commission will help ensure that equality impacts are used to inform the town's recovery planning; the work will be connected to the economic workstream of the recovery given the importance of the economic dimensions of inequality across the town.
- 4.21.8 The Council's attempts to reach those who might require support are already comprehensive through the establishment of the Stevenage Helps Initiative, No More Service and Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse Service. Moving forward the Council will need to give consideration on which elements of Stevenage Helps service will continue to be needed and what additional advice and support will need to be put in place to support vulnerable residents during the recovery phase.
- 4.21.9 As previously set out in this report, the Council has responded well to increased demand for emergency accommodation following a directive from the Government that all rough sleepers should be accommodated during the Covid-19 outbreak period. The provision of emergency accommodation is not a satisfactory solution in its own right as many rough sleepers have complex support needs that need to be addressed.
- 4.21.10 Working with partners such as Hertfordshire County Council and the Stevenage Haven the Council will put in place the right pathways so vulnerable individuals are provided with suitable accommodation and receive the right short term wrap around support such as drugs and alcohol treatment, medication, physical and mental health support etc. Such an approach will look at access to training and skills opportunities and measures that will help move people closer to the labour market and into employment. As part of the Council's response it will also look at using existing and new affordable homes to move clients effectively on which will allow hostels and specialist accommodation to be freed up to create capacity to support other vulnerable clients.
- 4.21.11 The Council is also appraising the option of introducing a Housing First Model and developing a business case for a new homeless hostel and the outcome of this review is being reported to July Executive.
- 4.21.12 Through the Council's Local Community Budget Scheme, Members will look to support community projects and outcomes across the town that will support and create opportunities for residents through the recovery phase. It will work with community associations to ensure they remain viable and are able to open community centres when it is safe to do so. The Council will also explore the potential of setting up an Inward Investment Partnership to attract funding and grants that support the delivery of key community outcomes.
- 4.21.13 The Council will work co-operatively with key partners across all sectors through existing and new networks including the SoSafe - Community Safety Partnership, Healthy Stevenage Partnership and Social Inclusion Partnership to help residents to receive the right advice and support and ensure Stevenage continues to remain a safe place to live.
- 4.21.14 The role of neighbours and local community support has become vital both in terms of providing support to the vulnerable and as a way to engage

residents in their community and make them feel safe and connected. The number of volunteers across Hertfordshire and Stevenage to support the most vulnerable has been a highlight of the response phase. The Council will look to harness this social capital through its community enabling role, the FTFC Co-operative Neighbourhoods Programme and its Engagement Framework and Programme. Officers will work with residents to understand the level of support needed from the Council without imposing unnecessary process and allowing communities to define their own local priorities and responses to local challenges.

- 4.21.15 The Council will implement a new Area Based Working model during 2020/21; including the establishment of 6 Cooperative Neighbourhood areas. Neighbourhood teams will form the basis of the Council's strategic approach to delivering localised, responsive, coordinated and collaborative services; working with partners; and engaging with the different communities of Stevenage.
- 4.21.16 The Council will continue to work with and support the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector. During the response phase, the support has included funding, advice and practical information for organisations and groups, communications and meetings. Going forward the Council will support the local VCSE sector to adapt and develop in order to be resilient and emerge effectively from the current crisis. This will include the rejuvenation of the Social Inclusion Partnership.
- 4.21.17 As the town emerges from the Covid-19 crisis, it is more important than ever that the Council builds upon its strong track record of social value. The Council is committed to move forward its community wealth building programme, having continued to invest in some of the essential infrastructure. Prioritising Stevenage residents for job, training and education opportunities through the Council and partners' supply chains will be more important than ever, as will be supporting our voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector and local business base.
- 4.21.18 As part of the Council's community wealth building approach, work will continue with other anchor institutions and businesses in the town to share best practice and promote local employment and spend. Building on the good will and contributions that many have made during this period, the Council will continue this work at pace. This will include the launch of an Economy Charter. Underpinned by an action plan, the Charter will enable communities and stakeholders to pledge their support. As part of its community wealth building commitments the Council will: look to support the creation of social economy incubators that will create new training opportunities and level entry jobs for vulnerable adults; pilot a Community Balance Sheet in partnership with its Co-operative Neighbourhoods Programme; and introduce a new 'buy local' procurement strategy. A series of business cases will be required to demonstrate how projects will be delivered, to identify the estimated costs and the anticipated benefits to the community and local businesses.
- 4.21.19 Leisure, art, culture, and heritage are central to the Council's vision for the future. These sectors create jobs and are fundamental to the wellbeing of residents, to the town's attractiveness to invest or visit. The sector has been

significantly impacted by Covid-19 with the closure of businesses, charities and organisations during the lockdown and the cancellation of events.

4.21.20 These sectors will be integral to the recovery of the town, not only for its economic impact but as the opportunity to enjoy the cultural and community life of Stevenage.

4.21.21 The Council will review its Stevenage Re-imagined Strategy action plan in response to the pandemic. Officers and Members will also continue to engage with partners to understand the challenges they are facing and seek solutions together, including working with national sports, arts and culture organisations as required. It is likely that it will be some time before major events can restart, but, by working with partners across the sector to adapt to the social distancing requirements, the Council's aim is to ensure leisure, arts and culture to be available to all, safely, as soon as possible. At the appropriate time the Council will plan to deliver council run events, including events to celebrate the hard work of the town during the Covid-19 crisis. To immediately support this work the Council has extended the contract of the current Cultural Development Officer.

4.21.22 The Culture Committee of the Stevenage Development Board will be developing a series of options that will be considered as part of the Town Deal proposition to the Government.

#### **4.21.23 Key Actions**

##### **The Council will:**

- **Set up a task and finish Equalities Commission to assess the equality impacts of Covid-19 and to ensure that this influences the town's recovery plans**
- **Provide support to vulnerable residents through Stevenage Helps and its Housing, Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse and No More Services**
- **Implement the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy and Action Plan including the appraisal of a 'Housing First' Model and develop a business case for a new homelessness hostel within Stevenage**
- **Develop a Housing Older Persons Strategy in conjunction with Hertfordshire County Council**
- **Work with partners to ensure appropriate housing and support pathways are put in place for rough sleepers**
- **Maintain and improve the quality of its housing stock through its Major Works Programme e.g. Major Repairs Flat Block Contract, Decent Homes, Sprinkler and lift refurbishment etc**
- **Support local community groups and projects through Member's Local Community Budget Scheme, community development services and the use of Council premises**
- **Explore the option of setting up an Inward Investment Partnership to help attract inward investment for Stevenage based Community, Voluntary and Social Enterprise organisations and the Council**
- **Award a new Advice Services Contract to ensure residents can access good quality and timely advice during the recovery phase**
- **Continue to support key partnerships including SoSafe, Healthy Stevenage and the Social Inclusion Partnership to deliver positive socio economic, environmental and health related outcomes.**

- **Work in partnership with the Police and other agencies to deliver the Community Safety Strategy and action plan**
- **Implement a new Area Based Working Model during 2020/21 that will deliver more localised and responsive services**
- **Develop and implement a Community Wealth Building Strategy and programme to help address the financial inequalities that exist across the town; including the launch of a new Inclusive Economy Charter, 'Buy Local' Procurement Strategy and the development of new employability gateways and social economy incubators**
- **Support the delivery of the town's Cultural 'Stevenage Re-imagined' Strategy including the delivery of new arts heritage installations, creative use scheme pilots and facilitate arts and wellbeing activities**
- **Look to incorporate culture led regeneration projects as part of the Town Deal Proposition to Government**
- **Deliver a programme of events to support town-wide recovery.**

## **4.22 Theme 3: Supporting the mental and physical health of the town**

### **4.22.1 Supporting Objectives**

- **Revitalising health in the community and reduce health inequalities within the town**
- **Help protect Stevenage communities and visitors against the health and wider consequences of Covid-19 as far as possible**
- **Close working with health partners to align recovery plans**
- **Support NHS Partners to cope with the Covid-19 Pandemic**

4.22.2 The economic impacts of Covid-19 will affect the poorest families hardest, and the clear link between poverty and health conditions means the virus will also medically affect the poorest disproportionately. Also those who rely on care and those with serious medical conditions have been particularly affected.

4.22.3 Health and Local Authority leaders will need to work together to identify ways in which to improve population health, reduce health inequalities, and overcome system challenges through collaborative working. The Council will encourage key health partners including Hertfordshire County Council and the local Clinical Commission Group to seize the opportunities of change already being made through the response phase such as integrated discharge planning work, new and improved digital services for patients, an improved integrated care model, social care provider health checks

4.22.4 The Healthy Stevenage Partnership (HSP) will play an active role in aligning the efforts of partners to address shared priorities for health and wellbeing. It will ensure that the partnership maximise resources, skills, knowledge and evidence. It will deliver or commission local projects based on evidence such as the Youth Hub and the Diabetes Prevention Initiative to help improve the health and wellbeing of local residents. The HSP will review the priorities within the Healthy Stevenage Strategy in light of the pandemic and will deliver the associated priority actions.

#### 4.22.5 Key Actions

##### The Council will

- Review and update the Healthy Stevenage Strategy and action plan to take into account Covid-19 recovery
- Launch the Diabetes Prevention and Youth Hub initiatives
- Support Hertfordshire Track and Trace arrangements and Local Outbreak Plans
- Maintain ICB Meetings and resume the Locality Board to ensure strong links with health partners
- Support the development and delivery of the Herts Integrated Care Model
- Help implement health interventions emerging as part of the recovery efforts

4.22.6 The Council will be looking to recruit a new Programme Manager to support programme and project delivery under this theme.

#### 4.23 Theme 4: Travel and mobility

##### 4.23.1 Supporting Objectives

- **A safe and connected town; and connectivity to drive growth**

4.23.2 The Council has a critical role in helping to enable safe movement during the recovery phase. The Council is working with the Police, local businesses and other partners to implement physical social distancing measures and signage within the town centre. The Council will use its licensing powers to support businesses, especially those in the hospitality sector to use outside space where practical, whilst also ensuring that disabled people can move around the town safely.

4.23.3 The Covid-19 recovery period will present a major opportunity to support continuing modal shift within the town to cycling and walking (active travel) and public transport. The Council has already put in place a range of measures to promote and support sustainable, active travel including walking and cycling. The Council through its Future Town, Future Transport Strategy will continue to promote the benefits and opportunities of sustainable travel throughout the recovery period. This includes looking for Stevenage to be designated as a Sustainable Transport Town. Officers are also appraising options for the introduction of a new cycle hire scheme.

4.23.4 The Council will also be developing a new version of its Workforce Travel Plan to support its own staff to choose and use sustainable forms of transport.

4.23.5 Whilst the Council will continue to encourage individuals to use sustainable forms of transport, the Council will ensure visitors and those who work in the town have access to Council operated car parks, particularly whilst the social distancing rules still comply.

#### 4.23.6 Key Actions

**The Council will:**

- **Re-instate its car parks**
- **Implement social distancing measures to enable the safe movement of visitors to the town centre**
- **Deliver the Future Town, Future Transport Strategy and action plan**
- **Secure improvements to the town's cycle network from New Neighbourhoods and HCC**
- **Bid for resources from HCC and the Government to fund a new Cycle Hire Scheme in the town**
- **Introduce bus priority measures and continue to deliver the Council's Electric Car Scheme**
- **Secure the designation of Stevenage as a Sustainable Transport Town**
- **Develop a new Parking Strategy and update Parking SPDs**

#### 4.24 Council Recovery Plan

4.24.1 The recovery plan for the Council is focused around the following five themes:

1. Ensuring staff and Member welfare
2. Operational services
3. Development and delivery of Future Town, Future Council corporate priorities
4. Transformation and lessons learnt
5. Financial security of the Council

4.24.2 For each theme a range of priorities programme, projects and deliverables have been captured.

#### 4.25 Theme 1: Ensuring staff and Members welfare

##### 4.25.1 Supporting Objectives

- **Proactively protect and improve the welfare and health of staff and Members**
- **Achieve Secure Covid-19 status**

4.25.2 Covid-19 has forced the Council to change how it operates and how it delivered services to residents. Whilst some of this change has been hard, the organisation now has the capability to work and deliver differently – to become a more modern and flexible organisation with the potential to change its culture and improve staff wellbeing. Covid-19 is likely to lead to a paradigm shift in how office based teams operate. It is vital that the Council grasps these opportunities in the best interests of staff and members and unlocks the potential efficiencies they can create.

- 4.25.3 Following the Prime Minister's lockdown announcements on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 all staff except those in essential services have been asked and supported to work from home
- 4.25.4 Services will continue to take account of the guidance received from the Government. Service assessments have identified the services which would result in severe failure or interruption if unable to be undertaken. This could include breach of statutory duties, laws and regulations, risk to safety, welfare and life; wellbeing of the local population; and key support services that are essential to the delivery of frontline critical services to residents, businesses and the community. Ongoing assessments will be used to inform which services need to retain a minimal on-site presence in the delivery or support of critical services during the recovery phase.
- 4.25.5 Changes have been implemented and will continue to be made to the internal layout of the Council's offices alongside a number of other safety measures that support social distancing as more staff return to the office when it is appropriate to do so
- 4.25.6 The Council will continue to make available to staff the Employee Assistance Programme 24/7 together with our Occupational Health Service. Local interventions such as virtual coffee breaks, video meetings and intranet blog posts will continue to support staff whilst working remotely. The Council will also continue to instigate virtual training on Mindfulness and Resilience.
- 4.25.7 Officers will continue to provide support and provide ICT tools and systems to enable Members to fulfil their roles as community leaders throughout the recovery period and beyond.
- 4.25.8 The Council will develop a new Workforce strategy and supporting work programme to ensure that its workforce and workplace are developed and engaged to deliver our services now and in the future. The strategy will focus on ways of working, workforce communication, workforce inclusion and workforce development.

#### **4.25.9 Key Actions**

**The Council will**

- **Deliver its Employer of Choice FTFC Programme**
- **Develop a new Workforce Strategy and Action Plan as part of the Council's recovery response**
- **Work towards securing Wellbeing charter accreditation**
- **Continue to offer mental health and resilience support to staff**



## 4.26 Theme 2: Operational Services

### 4.26.1 Supporting Objectives

- **The continuity of essential services**
- **Promote a return to normality and the restoration of disrupted services at the earliest opportunity**
- **Ensure that all business continuity plans are operational and are ready to support the wider response and recovery plans of the Council**

4.26.2 A robust business continuity response will still be needed through the recovery phase to ensure the Council continues to provide essential key frontline services and also to respond to any future Government measures. To ensure this to happen the Strategic Director (RP) will continue to co-ordinate the Council's incident management efforts and will act as a Workstream Officer with responsibility for the Staff and Member Welfare, Operational Services and FTFC corporate priorities themes.

4.26.3 All services will continue to maintain their business continuity plans and will undertake risk/issue impact assessments during the recovery phase. These will include clear expectations about which services can be maintained, which need to change, and which services cannot be delivered. This process will allow services that operate to request additional support; whether staffing, Personal Protective Equipment, ICT or guidance on decision making that are then referred to Human Resources, ICT and other support services for assessment, prioritisation and action.

4.26.4 Weekly Business Continuity meetings will be held to review the plans and co-ordinate effort across services and to ensure a quick response to any future Government requirements, restrictions or a second peak in Covid-19 infections. Under this theme officers will also review and assess the impact of the pandemic and recovery on building compliance, key contracts, service plans and FTFC priority programmes.

### 4.26.5 Key Actions

**The Council will:**

- **Develop a performance suite to reflect revised programmes of activity and the recovery**
- **Review and update its business continuity plans to ensure risks are mitigated**
- **Develop an operational plan for Phase 2 of Covid-19, building management, assessment and plans to restore or revise services; including preparing for pent up or deferred demand planning & operations**
- **Suite for 2020/2021 to reflect revised programme of activity**

## **4.27 Theme 3: Development and delivery of Future Town, Future Council corporate priorities**

### **4.27.1 Supporting Objectives**

- **Prioritise and deliver an agreed set of Future Town, Future Council priority programmes and projects during 2020/21**
- **Development of a new corporate plan in response to the challenges Stevenage and the Council faces**

4.27.2 Reviewing the Council's overarching corporate plan will be a crucial part of the forward planning work. The corporate plan, Stevenage Local Plan and Healthy Stevenage and Future Town, Future Transport Strategy and other key policy and strategy documents will play a key role in shaping the future of Stevenage over the coming years as the Council responds to the challenges of recovering from the impacts of the pandemic.

4.27.3 This work will be undertaken in a way which involves stakeholders, including residents, businesses and the voluntary and community and social enterprise sector.

4.27.4 The Executive and the Future Town, Future Council Board will continue to oversee and monitor the delivery of the Council's key strategic programmes

### **4.27.4 Key Actions**

**The Council will:**

- **Deliver the Future Town, Future Council priority programmes and projects for 2020/21**
- **Deliver a new Corporate Plan 2021-2026 that sets out the medium to longer term vision for the town and council.**

## **4.28 Theme 4: Transformation and Lessons Learnt**

### **4.28.1 Supporting Objectives**

- **Deliver a business case for a financially sustainable Council model, which delivers excellent, modern and efficient services for residents drawing on lessons from the Covid-19 emergency and SBC's response to it.**
- **Continuing to modernise working practices through adopting new ways of working and introduction of new business tools**
- **Deliver priority digital projects to enable an enhanced online offer and self-service, and to meet MTFS savings requirements**
- **Deliver the ICT Strategy including the deployment and adoption of Microsoft Office 365 to help modernise working practices and deliver service efficiencies**
- **Enable agile and effective decision making and bringing the learning into the development of our accountability framework**
- **Review and align partnerships to help deliver the Council's recovery plan**

- 4.28.2 In response to the Covid-19 outbreak the Council has significantly altered the way it operates and how it delivers services to its customers. Through fast tracking ICT system improvements, the majority of the Council's workforce now has the capability to work and deliver services differently.
- 4.28.3 There is the opportunity to build upon these positive service delivery changes in order to further modernise and change the culture of the organisation. This includes staff retaining the ability to work in a way that benefits customers and which better suits their personal circumstances and for managers to increase productivity through developing an empowered workforce which is trusted to deliver rather than just on whether someone is present in the office or not.
- 4.28.4 As well as benefits to staff and customers, increased flexibility and home working has the potential to create efficiencies and generate opportunities in terms of utilising space within the future Public Sector Hub, which will include co-location with other partners from the public and community sectors and the potential creation of space for a new museum and businesses.
- 4.28.5 There is the opportunity also to undertake further technological and service changes that will enable residents to transact and interact with the Council in different ways. Through the Future Town, Future Council programme and the Covid-19 lockdown period the Council has demonstrated the ability to deliver change at pace and it is important that the Council looks to continue this momentum. Through necessity, the Council has adapted services through the use of new and existing technology and supporting customers to use online service channels and therefore move away from face to face services. Whilst it is important to guard against digital exclusion, there is an opportunity to embed the learning from the Council's Covid-19 response to transform how services could be delivered in the future.
- 4.28.6 Building on the changes already made, the Council will look to refocus and accelerate its transformation programme in order to improve user experiences and create service efficiencies. In doing so, the Council will look to further exploit new and existing technology to deliver more accessible services and involve service users as it does so.
- 4.28.7 Adopting a new approach to customer service will help ensure that the Council can target its resources to support vulnerable people and communities through the recovery period and deliver services through its new Area Based Working Model.

#### 4.28.8 Key Actions

**The Council will:**

- **Deliver the FTFC ‘Connected to our Customer Programme projects to boost customer self-service and identify and implement accelerator process projects that unlock efficiencies.**
- **Complete an Opportunity Assessment that will take an organisation wide review of service delivery and help inform the business case for a new transformation plan.**
- **Deliver and build upon the current ICT Strategy that will help enable organisational and service transformation – unlocking efficiency savings and providing a better experience for staff and customers through technological and digital innovation.**
- **Develop new ways of working plan that will increase workforce productivity, improve service user experience and allow staff to work more flexibly.**
- **Review the decisions that have been taken as part of the crisis response to stop, start or amend service delivery – and the experience of working in different ways – to consider lessons learnt during the lockdown period and apply them to service areas over the longer term.**
- **Review the Council’s Constitution and Officer Scheme of Delegation to ensure effective and timely decisions are taken.**
- **Implement virtual and paperless committees.**

#### 4.29 Theme 5: Financial Security

##### 4.29.1 Supporting Objectives

- **Ensure the financial security of the Council**
- **Work with key partners to continue to lobby Government not only for support to address the financial challenges faced by the Council but also to recognise that we can play an effective leadership role in the economic recovery of Stevenage and Hertfordshire**
- **Development of a Commercialisation Strategy and associated business cases**

4.29.2 The pandemic has had a significant impact on the Council’s budget during the 2020/21 financial year and over the medium term. The impact of increased costs and reduced income has been felt across the Local Government Sector and although the Government has provided £928K to the Council, it is far from enough to offset the funding gap that has arisen.

4.29.3 Also looking beyond the immediate impacts of Covid-19, the financial environment for Local Government remains challenging for the foreseeable future. Although there is a significant degree of uncertainty at this stage the Council does expect that Covid-19 and the resulting recession will have a further impact on collection rates for council tax, business rates, commercial income and rents from council-housing. These factors will contribute to the level of financial impact over the medium-term.

- 4.29.4 The underlying assumptions which formed the basis of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy have had to be amended to reflect the impact of Covid-19. The Executive considered the Council's General Fund financial position and the impact of Covid-19 on the level of projected balances on 10<sup>th</sup> June. Executive approval has been given for a range of mitigating actions that may need to be implemented to avoid the risk of bringing forward a S114 Notice. This included the development over the summer of a priority list of services as a further precautionary measure, if losses and the impact of Covid-19 is financially greater than modelled.
- 4.29.5 The Council, in conjunction with the District Council Network and the Local Government Association, will continue to lobby the Government so the Council is fully compensated for the financial impacts of Covid-19.

#### 4.29.6 Key Actions

**The Council will:**

- **Monitor Covid-19/recession related income loss and expenditure and regularly update the Strategic Leadership Team and Executive.**
- **Lobby the Government to ensure the Council is further compensated for the financial impacts of Covid-19 and to influence future Government Spending Reviews.**
- **Undertake regular MTFS reviews to understand the short to medium implications for savings requirements and the use of reserves.**
- **Implement the mitigation actions agreed by the Executive on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2020; including the prioritisation of services as a precautionary measure.**
- **Develop a new Commercialisation and Insourcing Strategy to identify new commercial opportunities and to increase existing income streams.**
- **Identify welfare and economic impacts**
- **Review the Council's capital programme and complete the area based locality reviews to ensure capital schemes and the Council's asset portfolio are affordable in the new financial landscape**

#### 4.30 Monitoring the progress of recovery – key data and indicators

- 4.30.1 The use of appropriate data will be critical in identifying the key issues resulting from Covid-19, developing the right policy response and measuring the success of recovery.
- 4.30.2 In order to monitor progress the Council will develop with its partners a dashboard of measures to identify the impact of Covid-19 on the economy, people and communities. Through the SCRT and RCB outcome indicators will be created to show the knock on impact of Covid-19 and the Stevenage recovery effort. These will be monitored frequently and will be reported alongside a quarterly recovery progress update to the Executive.

#### **4.31 Communication and engagement with residents, businesses and community groups**

4.31.1 As the Council and its partners move towards recovery, it will be important to consult and engage with a broad range of partners, residents and businesses to ensure that the Council's plans are comprehensive and that the town feels connected to the recovery.

4.31.2 The Council will produce a recovery communications plan and will use a variety of communications, marketing and media channels to consult and engage with stakeholders, including for example:

- Social media surveys with residents
- Use of infographics to visual show the impacts of our programmes
- Resident consultations
- The Chronicle publication
- Ward Members to gather local views
- Clinics held through Zoom or Skype where questions can also be submitted in advance
- The create of local Focus groups to discuss local initiatives
- Video updates, messages or by Members with partner organisations to showcase recovery changes in Stevenage
- Online engagement tools.

### **5 IMPLICATIONS**

#### **5.1 Financial Implications**

5.1.1 Officers have been assessing the financial impact of Covid-19 on the Council's finances. The impact of the pandemic on Local Authorities across the Country is difficult to gauge due to different demographics, resources and demands. There has been lobbying on behalf of Councils from the Local Government Association, the District Council Network, Society of District and Council Treasurers and the County Councils Network to ensure adequate funding is given to Councils to cover their losses, which were estimated at £10 Billion across the sector by the LGA.

5.1.2 The impact of Covid-19 across all the Council's income streams has been significant as buildings have been required to close to meet government requirements, tenants' income streams have stopped and some therefore are struggling to pay rents. Accordingly some businesses no longer require or cannot pay for services provided by the Council.

5.1.3 The actual impact will not be known for a number of months, because it is not currently clear whether deferred rent or other charges will become uncollectable. However, the impact on income streams such as parking has been immediate with a 95% reduction recorded as residents self-isolated. The Council also took the decision to offer free parking for NHS and key workers to support those working on the front line of the pandemic.

- 5.1.4 Further information is available in the Covid-19 Financial Dashboard at Appendix Six.
- 5.1.5 The Chief Finance Officer has sent detailed returns to the Government setting out the cost to the Council in response to Covid-19 and the loss of income and additional expenditure the Council has experienced. This means the Council would have a potential gap in funding of £4.8 million for 2020/21. So far the Government has provided £928,000 of additional funding. The Government is now considering whether any further funding will be allocated. The Chief Finance Officer has carried out an urgent review of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and report to the 10<sup>th</sup> June Executive on the General Fund's financial position and the impact of Covid-19 on the level of projected balances.
- 5.1.6 If the additional funding the Government provides is insufficient, the Council will need to take steps to ensure it can meet the costs itself. The Council is doing everything it can to protect vital services and jobs and continue delivery of its ambitious plans for the town.
- 5.1.7 Resourcing of the Recovery Plans in 2020/21 (including the costs associated in recruiting a new Programme Manager to deliver the community recovery response (Theme 3)) will be reported through the quarterly General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Revenue Monitoring Reports. Resourcing requirements in 2021/22 will be picked up through the budget setting process for the next financial year.

## **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 required 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 key decisions in response to Covid-19, 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. This will include the establishment of an Equalities Commission to identify actions that can be taken forward to address inequalities and health concerns faced by BAME 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 and recovery approach in line with future Government Covid-19 measures.
- 5.4.3 A review of the Council's General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Strategy has helped to identify the financial risks faced by the Council and the outcome of this review was reported to the Executive on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2020.
- 5.4.4 The Council is taking measures to ensure that its services are Covid-19 Secure to ensure the health and safety of its staff and customers.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- District Council's Five Point Manifesto for Recovery [Link to manifesto](#)
- LGA Report on financial analysis [Link to report](#)
- Review of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Impact of Covid-19 on the Council's General Fund Revenue Budget [Link to Executive Report](#)
- Understanding the Impact on BAME Communities [Link to report](#)

## **APPENDICES**

- Appendix One: Chronological List of Covid-19 Guidance and Information
- Appendix Two: Terms of Reference for the Stevenage Co-operative Recovery Taskforce



- Appendix Three: Terms of Reference for the Recovery Co-ordination Board
- Appendix Four: Town Recovery Plan
- Appendix Five: Council Recovery Plan
- Appendix Six: Covid-19 Financial Dashboard