

25 January 2021**Agenda Item: 7****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, PLACE AND COMMUNITIES****COVID-19 UPDATE REPORT****Purpose of the Report**

1. To update Members on the impact of the Coronavirus crisis on the work of Nottinghamshire County Council, and the Council's response and recovery planning.

Information

2. This report is an update on Nottinghamshire County Council's (NCC) response to the coronavirus emergency. Five programmes of work are managing the response to the emergency both corporately and with partners county-wide. These are: -
 - Support for Vulnerable Adults
 - Support for Vulnerable Children and Families including Schools
 - Community Support and Resilience
 - Support for Business and the Local Economy
 - Corporate Resilience

This report provides an update on activity within these programmes, excluding 'Support for Business and the Local Economy' which is covered under separate items on this agenda.

3. It should be noted that the Council is responding to the third national lockdown in a rapidly changing environment. The information contained in this report is correct at the time of writing but may have changed subsequently. Where this is the case, updated information will be shared with Members at the Committee meeting.

Support for Vulnerable Adults**Response to second wave**

4. The adult social care market continues to experience sustained pressure and fragility with significant business continuity pressures. This is in part due to underlying structural issues within adult social care but is exacerbated by workforce absence due to COVID-19 and general resilience in the workforce due to continued work in a difficult context for staff, resulting in fatigue. This is also escalating quality concerns and has led to immediate service closures over the Christmas period.
5. Care home outbreaks have significantly increased as levels of community transmission have increased. This continues to be a concern for the health and wellbeing of people residing in those homes who are more at risk of adverse consequences of COVID-19 than the general population.

6. The department has introduced a number of measures to support the social care market:
- the care home taskforce was set up with the Clinical Commissioning Group Quality Team to manage outbreaks
 - plans to introduce a response service to support care home staffing shortages and implementation of options for securing additional staffing capacity
 - the internal Quality and Market Management Team (QMMT) have introduced 7 day working to support providers during the second wave
 - redeployment of staff within the department has been completed to support the QMMT workforce.

COVID Vaccination

7. The Adult Social Care and Health Department has put into place appropriate capacity to support the NHS COVID Vaccination Programme. This includes practical support for planning, financial support through the Infection Control Fund and officer support to care homes for information and guidance. Care home staff are the first priority in the social care workforce and the Council has been working to support the NHS to ensure staff are vaccinated quickly and effectively.
8. Senior officers are part of the NHS programme structure to support successful local implementation of the national programme, providing both Public Health and Social Care guidance. There are plans to have delivered vaccinations for the priority one group (as directed nationally) by the end of January.

Care Home Guidance

9. Visiting to care homes remains a key concern for people and their families. As the guidance is revised and updated, the County Council is working with care homes to ensure the guidance is understood and that care homes have procedures in place to put it into practice. This includes supporting care homes to make good use of the Infection Control Fund to enable COVID secure visiting.
10. Best practice in supporting care homes continues to be shared on a regional footprint by both Public Health and Social Care, to ensure that care homes are given the best possible support in understanding their role in visiting, testing and now vaccination.
11. Healthwatch has been commissioned by the Council to undertake work with family and carers whose loved ones are residing in care homes. The intention is to learn from their experiences, so that care homes that are struggling to engage with family members can improve and develop their approach.
12. Social care providers are reporting pressure in understanding and implementing the multiple demands being placed on them. The Council is also currently seeing an increase in the number of care homes that are closing due to quality concerns as an indirect consequence of COVID-19. With this in mind, the department will continue to deploy increased staffing resources to the Quality and Market Management Team and will continue to monitor key risks and capacity on a daily basis.

Support for Vulnerable Children and Families including Schools

Early Years, School and College Settings

13. Following the Prime Minister's announcement of a third national lockdown on 4 January 2021, many children and young people have stayed at home, accessing remote learning. Schools remain open for critical workers and vulnerable children and national guidance directs that nurseries and Early Years settings to remain open for all children. There has been a significant increase in the numbers of children attending education on site when compared to the first lockdown. As a result, particularly within the primary sector, it has been a challenge to ensure that numbers are minimised as much as possible, in line with Department for Education (DfE) guidance.
14. The quality and quantity of remote learning has significantly improved since the first lockdown. The expectation is that key stage 1 pupils will access three hours online education daily, increasing to four hours at key stage 2 and five hours for secondary aged children. This will include both recorded or live direct teaching and time for pupils to complete tasks and assignments independently. Since the last lockdown, there is now access to national online materials through the BBC and The Oak National Academy. There is now a statutory duty on schools to provide immediate access to remote education when necessary, which is enshrined in the Coronavirus Act 2020 (temporary continuity direction). The DfE continues to deliver IT devices to schools and headteachers have been advised by the DfE of the routes to order further devices and data packages.
15. During the autumn term, publicly funded schools in Nottinghamshire overcame significant challenges to remain open to most children and young people. Schools and wider education settings continued to experience noticeable increases in the number of positive COVID-19 cases in both children and adults throughout the second half of the term. On 15 December 2020 there were reports from 59 Nottinghamshire schools that they had at least one school bubble isolating due to COVID. Securing sufficient teaching staff became an increasing issue and in a small number of schools, whole year groups moved to remote learning. Despite this, when compared nationally, attendance at both primary and secondary remained positive. As of 18 December 2020, 87.9% of children on the roll in the county were attending school compared with a national average of 83.3%.
16. The Department for Education (DfE) published the [national COVID testing arrangements](#) for college, secondary, special and alternative provision staff and pupils on 18 December 2020. The tests, along with the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) were delivered during the week of the 4 January 2020 to allow for the mass testing of asymptomatic staff and pupils that are in these settings from January. The asymptomatic testing programme will use lateral flow test kits to be provided at no cost, with reimbursement of reasonable support costs by NHS Test and Trace.
17. Pupils and staff will also be able to have 'serial testing' (testing every day over a number of days) if they are an identified close contact of a positive case. This will enable staff and pupils who are identified as close contacts to stay in education, rather than having to self-isolate, as long as they test negative. If at any point they test positive, they will need to leave the school site, take a further PCR COVID test (standard swab test) to confirm the result, and follow the isolation guidelines.
18. The mass testing approach was piloted in some secondary schools during November and December and participating schools spoke positively of the initiative. Feedback suggested that, although there is time involved in conducting the testing, there is also time gained by both

staff and pupils not having to self-isolate. Whilst the specific details of this national schools testing programme are not yet clear, online training will be available to support the programme from now and throughout January, so that the programme can start as soon as possible.

19. On Wednesday 13 January 2021, the Secretary of State also announced the use of home testing kits within the primary sector. Primary school staff will be asked to take tests at home rather than on site as is currently the case in special, secondary schools and colleges following the approval for home-test kits to be used by teachers. The asymptomatic testing programme does not replace current testing policy for those with symptoms. All primary schools will start to receive testing kits for staff from the 18 January 2021.
20. Testing is not mandatory for individuals within education settings and staff and children will not need to produce a negative test result, or provide proof of having taken a test, to return to school. However, testing is strongly encouraged. Early feedback from Nottinghamshire's primary and secondary schools suggests strong engagement although data is not yet available.
21. There is likely to be a short-term shortage of primary staff if staff test positive as a result of the use of asymptomatic tests. Regular testing will help break the chain of transmission by identifying asymptomatic carriers. The government is continuing to develop plans for the testing of primary school pupils. However, it is considerably more challenging to test primary children and further announcements will be made in due course.
22. Education services have continued to ensure a sharp focus on the wellbeing of headteachers, teaching staff and children through the "Wellbeing for Education Return" project. In addition to the well-being support package, bespoke opportunities for headteachers to be able to meet with a focus on wellbeing have now been implemented led by the Education Psychology Service. These '*Headteacher Wellbeing Peer Support sessions*' are now being offered to headteachers of maintained schools daily. Each session is confidential and has a maximum number of four headteachers so that the peer support discussion can be kept personal and safe.
23. Statutory primary testing and national GCSE and A levels have effectively been cancelled as a result of the third nation lockdown although the Secretary of State for Education continues to be in dialogue with the examination board about the possibility of some kind of 'mini examinations'. As was the case last year, teacher assessment will be used at both primary and secondary.
24. The COVID Winter Grant Scheme awarded £2.3 million to Nottinghamshire. The scheme has been used:
 - to provide food parcels or supermarket vouchers for all children of school age who are eligible for free school meals during the Christmas holidays. This was extended to include 2-, 3- and 4-year olds from low income groups, eligible young people in further education colleges, care leavers and eligible young people aged 19-25 who have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP). These arrangements will be continued for February half term.
 - for Council Children's Services to provide supermarket vouchers for households with children who are struggling financially because of COVID-19 from January to the 31 March 2021.
 - to fund Nottingham Energy Partnership who will be providing support with energy and water bills to households with and without children who are struggling financially.

25. The COVID Winter Grant Scheme has also awarded £340,000 to District Councils through the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) in order to provide support for households without children to access food and essentials until the 31 March 2021. This can be accessed through the Nottinghamshire Coronavirus Community Support Hub.
26. The Holiday Activities and Food programme is being developed to provide activities and food to children and young people who are eligible for free school meals during the Easter and Summer holidays.
27. Children's Centre sites which host childcare services have remained open every day throughout the pandemic. There have been challenges for some childcare organisations who have experienced a reduced income and are struggling to pay service charges. Business rate relief was provided for early years settings, but unfortunately this did not include organisations that share a site with council services.

Vulnerable Children, Young People and Families

28. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) continues to operate an "urgents only by phone" service, due to a need to ensure there is sufficient staffing capacity to manage the numbers of enquiries received. All non-urgent safeguarding concerns can continue to be referred to the MASH via the online referral form or through email. It is too early to see the impact of the current national lockdown on referrals to the MASH, although this is being monitored on a daily basis.
29. Following the announcement of the current national lockdown, weekly "check in" calls to all families receiving early help or social work support have been reinstated. In addition, early help case managers and social workers have been in contact with schools to ensure that vulnerable children are offered a school place during the lockdown. In line with government guidance, all families open to children's social care continue to receive some level of face to face contact following risk assessment, with appropriate social distancing measures in place and personal protective equipment (PPE) if necessary. Early indications are that there are higher numbers of staff either self-isolating or absent from work due to COVID-19 during this phase of the pandemic. This will continue to be monitored with contingency measures enacted as required.
30. Since the announcement of the third national lockdown, the following steps have been taken to support learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families:
- All families with a child or young person who has an EHCP have received a letter from the Integrated Children's Disability Service (ICDS) providing information about access to learning during the lockdown and who to go to for support.
 - Locality vulnerable learners' co-ordination groups have been established to ensure that vulnerable learners are able to access learning whether face-to-face or remotely. Appropriate services in Children and Families will meet weekly during the period of the lockdown, and fortnightly at the end of any lockdown to manage transitions back into learning.
 - The offer to families who are unable to utilise their short break allocation to purchase equipment in lieu of the allocated hours has been extended until the end of February 2021.
31. Teams continue to innovate and adapt working practices to meet local and national restrictions during the third national lockdown, to ensure that vulnerable children and families are

supported. Twice weekly service coordination meetings have continued to take place with colleagues from other children's services and educational settings. These meetings provide an opportunity to discuss those children, young people and families most at risk and establish a coordinated response.

Community Support and Resilience

Community Support Hub

32. As reported to Policy Committee on 13 May 2020, the Nottinghamshire Coronavirus Community Support Hub went live on 23 March and is accessible over the phone, via the Council website or the My Notts app. The Hub provides a real-time online database, accessible to all partners, which enables residents in need of support to input their postcode and requirements and be 'served up' with a list of local groups and organisations able to meet those needs.
33. The number of hits to the Hub website reduced gradually over the summer from a peak of around 1,000 a day down to as low as about 40 a day by mid-September. More recently, this figure has been rising. In the week commencing 4 January 2021 there were over two hundred hits a day to the Hub website. Meanwhile, the content on the national lockdown is being viewed about 4,500 times a week - making it the fourth most visited page on the Council's website. COVID-19 related information is the second most visited content on the MyNotts application.
34. As at 13 January 2021, 1,379 requests for support had been received since launching the second phase of the Hub, with the numbers of requests having reduced significantly over the summer and starting to increase again from early November. There are currently 284 voluntary groups, 127 individual volunteers, 87 charity organisations, 20 online community groups and 241 businesses offering support which represents a reduction in previous numbers mainly driven by a reduction in the number of individual volunteers.
35. The Customer Services Centre have been a key component of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) response and had significant volumes of activity between April and October, handling 23,219 incoming call relating to COVID-19 with 6,663 of these relating directly to the Community Hub. Since November, the volumes have reduced and currently the work to support CEVs is at low and manageable levels.

Third National Lockdown

36. The Hub continues to provide support to those in need and although the numbers of people seeking support has reduced, there has been a small increase since the third national lockdown was initiated on 4 January 2021.
37. Because of the sharp increase in the number of infections and the re-introduction of the lockdown the Council has initiated a review, with Local Resilience Forum (LRF) partner organisations, of the various groups of people requiring support to re-affirm that we have identified and put support in place for all identified need.

Winter Planning

38. Another focus of planning has been on the various scenarios that may be faced over the winter months.

39. To support winter planning, the Council has worked with colleagues from a number of areas to develop a mapping tool that contains the details of flood risk areas, gritting routes and the geographical location of the clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) people that the Council has supported over the last year. This is available to LRF partners to allow partners to analyse and quantify the impact of a situation and respond accordingly. The Hub now has additional functionality that captures and provides an analysis of the current situation for the network of food banks and other food-related organisations across the County.

Backpack testing

40. Work has been undertaken with Public Health to establish and operationalise a backpack testing capacity that will enable people with symptoms who are unable to travel to receive a test kit. This work is being supported by residents of Nottinghamshire who have volunteered through the Hub and who will be trained by colleagues working for the Red Cross.

Nottinghamshire Community Fund

41. Nottinghamshire Community Fund was launched on 31 March 2020. The fund, managed by the Council's Communities Team, is available to local charities and community organisations that are delivering essential services to vulnerable residents impacted by COVID-19, including access to food, medicines and support with well-being. By 22 October 2020, 260 awards had been made with a total value of £695,201.

42. The fund re-opened in November, with an opening balance of £305,000 and this had reduced to £257,000 when it was closed on 31 December 2020.

43. In response to the third lockdown being introduced, the fund was re-opened in January and will remain open until the end of March.

Local Authority Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies

44. On 10 July the County Council was allocated £858,285 by the Government, in order to support people struggling to afford food and other essentials due to COVID-19. As at 12 January 2021, 57 awards to voluntary/community organisations and district/borough council partners have been made, with a value of £524k. Further work to assess funding applications and distribute funding continues.

Corporate Resilience

Workforce

45. The Corporate Leadership Team continues to engage with the workforce on a range of issues through planned, virtual question and answer sessions. This builds on the information provided in the employee survey in June 2020 and continues to inform the Workforce Resilience and Recovery Strategy and Action Plan approved by Personnel Committee in November 2020.

46. The Workforce Resilience and Recovery Group, led by the Service Director Customers, Governance and Employees continues to meet regularly and has prioritised a number of workstreams focussing on overarching internal communication and engagement, employee health and well-being, reward and recognition and smarter working. These strands of work will enable the council to be prepared for whatever the future of work becomes.

47. Work is underway to rollout the vaccination programme and Council employees have been invited to volunteer to support this process in a variety of roles. The Council is also now facilitating our priority workers to receive the vaccine as the programme is rolled out. All members of the workforce are strongly encouraged to take up the offer to be vaccinated when they are contacted to do so as the best means of mitigating the ongoing risk presented.
48. Regular discussions continue with the recognised trade unions and the self-managed groups to provide a forum to raise issues and share information relating to the pandemic. Recent discussions have focussed on the need to regularly review and refresh risk assessments; maintaining COVID-secure workplaces and the revised information for the clinically extremely vulnerable. All the Frequently Asked Questions for managers and employees were reviewed and refreshed at the beginning of December and continue to be considered as the advice from the Government changes.
49. The work undertaken early in the pandemic on emergency redeployment is also being refreshed to ensure all roles are filled as effectively as possible. There are issues arising from the capacity in schools with many working parents having to home school once again. We continue to support these colleagues undertaking their work roles and educating their children and the Council's flexible working approach is a key enabler in this respect.

Council Premises

50. The Property and Premises Recovery Group continues to meet weekly. The group includes officers from across the Council looking to guide and support the safe use of Council premises during restrictions, both the central office estate and the operational portfolio. This group is overseeing the response to the third national lockdown to ensure buildings are operating in line with restrictions or close where necessary.
51. Council offices have remained open for staff who cannot work from home. During the third national lockdown, managers are working with staff to ensure that wherever possible those that can work from home do so.

Disruption to Services

52. In order to adhere to government guidance on social distancing and release Council resources to support COVID-19 priorities, many public-facing service areas have faced disruption or closure. The current status of these services during the third national lockdown, is outlined in the table below.

Service	Status
Youth Services	<p>Open access Youth Work provision is not operating during the third national lockdown. As our Youth Work offer is regulated, and classed as an essential service to support young people and to provide a safety net for those most in need, the service continues to deliver youth work to young people most in need through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online Youth Work and virtual youth offer • Outreach and Youth Work Intervention within local communities • 1:1 youth work intervention • Youth work from our Young People's Centres to support groups of young people. This will be for a bubble of up to 15 young people plus staff, and will be for specific groups of young people who have been invited and booked into the youth work session.

Library Services	From 4 January 2021 libraries have been closed in line with national regulations. Click and collect, home delivery and mobile library services are continuing. Access to computers for essential purposes is being provided by appointment at seven sites.
Outdoor Education Services	<p>Outdoor education residential centres are currently closed for overnight stays and day visits for schools. The Department for Education will be reviewing this guidance for school visits at the end of February 2021 for an anticipated Easter opening.</p> <p>Virtual School Adventures are being offered to schools. These contain short videos - featuring the team- of Robin Hood, Viking and WWII Themed days which are shared with a school, then followed up with live question and answer sessions with the school pupils via Microsoft Teams. With the current lockdown in place, the Virtual Outdoor Learning Teaching Support (VOLTs) will be offered to schools for activities that will support teaching children of critical workers.</p>
School Swimming	<p>At present the service is unable to operate as both leisure centres and schools are temporarily closed during the third national lockdown. Once this lockdown period ends, the service will resume following the procedures and protocols put in place in the autumn term and in line with Government guidance.</p> <p>Contact is being maintained with schools and partners and the Council continues to develop and provide schools with a range of in-school packages.</p>
Day Services	During the third national lockdown Day Services continue to offer a transitional service which is a blend of building based services, outreach services and virtual support. This service is providing vital respite for carers and opportunities for adults to engage in activity outside the home.
Country Parks and green spaces	Country Parks and their car parks remain open, with limited facilities, for local exercise purposes only. In line with Government Guidance, to help prevent the spread of coronavirus cases, Nottinghamshire residents are being encouraged not to travel outside of their immediate local area, i.e. their town, village or part of the city in which they live, to visit any green space sites or public attractions, including Country Parks
Children's Centres	<p>All 17 main Children's Centre sites remain open Monday to Friday and satellite sites open to host targeted face to face appointments and support groups. Only prearranged appointments and group sessions are provided on site with activities also being undertaken outdoors and in family homes where it is safe to do so.</p> <p>All buildings are now COVID secure and this has enabled external partners to also provide clinics and targeted services on site including midwifery clinics, health screens and assessments and social care contact work.</p>
Recycling Centres	All 12 of our recycling centres for household waste currently remain open. However, during the third national lockdown residents are encouraged to only visit if it is essential.
Registration Services	Main Registration Offices remain open to the public for essential functions. In-person registration of birth and notice of marriage appointments are available on a limited basis under COVID-safe conditions. The registrations of still births and deaths continues to be permitted by

	telephone using easements under the Coronavirus Act 2020. Marriage and civil partnership ceremonies are only permitted under exceptional circumstance such as in cases of imminent terminal illness.
Music Teaching	Services continue to operate in agreement with individual schools.
Inspire learning study programmes	Young people continue to be supported to complete vocational courses remotely, with onsite provision for vulnerable young people.
Inspire learning adult education programme	A range of online programmes are currently being provided. Face to face teaching is suspended during the third national lockdown.
Archives	Online enquiry, research and reprographic services remain available. Visit to archives are currently suspended during the third national lock down.

Other Options Considered

53. The nature of the Coronavirus emergency is such that the Council has reviewed its priorities and use of resources to address the most critical needs of Nottinghamshire's residents. The Council must also comply with relevant Government guidance and meet its statutory duties as required during the emergency.

Reason for Recommendations

54. To update members on the Council's ongoing response to the Coronavirus emergency.

Statutory and Policy Implications

55. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

56. All Local Authorities are required by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government to report their forecast financial impact of the COVID-19 emergency on a monthly basis. The most recent DELTA 8 submission from Nottinghamshire County Council identified a total estimated spending pressure of £78m (gross of additional specific grants) in the current financial year. The next submission, DELTA 9, is due at the end of January 2021.

57. The additional pressures on the 2020/21 budget are offset by the main COVID-19 grant allocations received from Central Government, and a range of additional specific grants and allocations to offset lost income. Details of the impact on the 2021/22 budget will be included in reports to Finance and Major Contracts Management Committee and Full Council in February 2021.

58. All of the additional costs, lost income and grant funding, together with ongoing pressures and savings options, have been incorporated into an updated Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which was presented to Finance and Major Contracts Management Committee on 30 November 2020 as part of a Budget Update Report.

59. Monthly reports setting out the latest forecast position, including the impact of COVID 19 on income and additional costs, are reported to Finance and Major Contract Management Committee on a monthly basis.

Safeguarding of Children and Adults at Risk Implications

60. The safeguarding of vulnerable children and adults is at the centre of decision making around operating models and reopening of services in Children's and Adults services and services continue to operate with the same standards of care.

Implications for Service Users

61. While there continues to be some disruptions to services through the Council's response to COVID-19, the aim has been to maintain the welfare and safety of all services users at all times.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) That Members approve and endorse the continuing efforts of services to ensure effective service provision during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2) That Members consider whether they require any further actions in relation to the issues contained within the report.
- 3) That Members agree to receive further updates at subsequent meetings.

Derek Higton
Service Director, Place and Communities

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Derek Higton, Service Director, Place and Communities, T: 0115 9773498

Constitutional Comments (AK 13/1/2020)

62. This report falls within the remit of the COVID 19 Resilience, Recovery and Renewal Committee by virtue of its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (KRP 17/12/2020)

63. As noted in the report the full financial implications of COVID 19 are reported to Finance and Major Contracts Management Committee on a monthly basis.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All