

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

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
3. This report provides an update on activity within these programmes, excluding 'Support for Business and the Local Economy' which is covered under a [report to the Economic Development and Asset Management Committee](#) in June 2021. A report on the Growth Hub and support to business is also due to go to the Economic Development and Asset Management Committee in September.
4. The information contained in this report is correct at the time of writing but may have changed subsequently, due to the changing nature of the emergency and government guidance. Where this is the case, updated information will be shared with Members at the Committee meeting.

Support for Vulnerable Adults

Current COVID-19 situation

5. Through July, Nottinghamshire saw a sharp increase in the number of COVID-19 cases. The high rates of transmission still appear to be driven by 12-17 year olds and 18-22 year olds in all districts; and working age groups up to the age of 40 years. This has led to an increase in the number of people in hospital with complications of COVID-19. During early August, case numbers in the youngest age group started to decline. As well as the direct impact of COVID-19 on people themselves, these admissions also threaten the NHS ability to manage routine and emergency procedures. Whilst this impact is not as significant as earlier in the year, the impact remains a considerable concern.

6. The total number of vaccinations (to 31 July 2021) in the county is just over 1.09 million and work continues to support the NHS with the vaccination programme.

Ongoing impact of COVID-19 on care and support services

7. The high case rate of COVID-19 is causing significant disruption for care and support services, both Council provided and commissioned services. The level of staff absence due to isolation is threatening service continuity and many services are using escalation processes to prioritise services to highest need. This inevitably impacts poorly on people's wellbeing as some services are delayed.
8. As at 29 July, there were 28 active outbreaks within care homes across the county. This again causes disruption to continuity of care and places care quality at risk where staff absence is high.
9. Within the home care workforce there is considerable service disruption. Home care is seeing increased levels of demand with reduced capacity. This is threatening the Council's ability to support hospital discharge consistently across the county. The department continues to work closely with care providers in order to manage, mitigate and reduce associated risks and concerns. Quality and Market Management colleagues are involved in incident management meetings which have been set up specifically to discuss care homes and home care to ensure that all system partners are working together and that messaging to care home and home care providers is clear. There is frequent communication and contact with care providers to ensure they are kept up to date on changes in government guidance and the implications of this, e.g. continued use of personal protective equipment (PPE), testing and visitor testing from 19 July and clarity on the implementation of guidance regarding exemption from self-isolation for social care staff in exceptional circumstances.
10. Support is also being provided to tackle issues of concern in relation to some delays in care staff receiving test results and to help to drive uptake of vaccination in the care sector. The COVID-19 Taskforce – set up to support the social care market late last year – has increased its meetings to twice weekly in response to the current situation.
11. There is extreme pressure in mental health services across the whole health and social care system, including the Council's Approved Mental Health Practitioner Team. In July the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee approved [a report setting out the department's recovery from COVID-19](#) and the need for investment to help manage demand for support within services experiencing significant pressures, including mental health and safeguarding. This equates to just over £3.3m which will be used on a range of staffing arrangements and resources.
12. As well as a temporary increase in staffing across community teams and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, the report requested staffing resources to enable and accelerate departmental plans and improvements that were paused by the pandemic response. Work is well underway with regard to getting the posts filled as quickly as possible – most likely through agency staffing – with the hope that it will help to ease the pressures faced by the department. There remains however considerable risk for mental health service capacity.

Support for Vulnerable Children and Families including Schools

Early Years, School and College Settings

13. During the last weeks of the summer term, school staff, supported by their governing bodies, have ensured that all children have continued their learning despite the significant ongoing challenges of an increasing number of children and young adults testing positive for COVID-19. As the summer term progressed, schools had a significant number of children and adults required to self-isolate as close contacts and this resulted in more children returning to learning at home. As of the 8 July data suggests the approximate attendance in Nottinghamshire schools was 80%, comparable to the national situation, and the number of pupils absent due to COVID was 12%, nationally this was approximately 11%.
14. Schools have faced significant changes since 19 July when Step 4 of the road map was implemented. Whilst headteachers could maintain their existing arrangements until the end of term, headteachers were no longer legally required to send bubbles home as close contacts of a positive case. This responsibility now lies with NHS Test and Trace. Also, from the 19 July, face coverings in school have no longer been required, although there is an expectation from government that they are worn in enclosed or crowded spaces.
15. Staff and secondary school aged pupils have continued to be offered Lateral Flow Tests twice weekly and urged to continue to use the tests throughout the summer period. It should also be noted that from 16 August, self-isolation for close contacts under 18 or for those who are fully vaccinated is not required although they are advised to get a PCR test. On site testing of secondary aged pupils has been planned for the start of the autumn term and schools have been required to prepare an 'outbreak management plan' to ensure that arrangements are in place should a school face multiple positive cases in the autumn term and beyond. Additional government guidance is expected as schools reopen at the start of term.
16. 37 secondary, special schools and other education establishments in Nottinghamshire have provided summer schools funded by government to support children to catch up with lost learning and transition into their next phase of education. As the academic year concluded schools were provided with further guidance on catch up. All publicly funded schools are required to publish details of the way catch-up funding is being used on their school web site. Catch-up will continue to be a clear focus of each school's curriculum going forward.
17. Support for children and young people's mental health and well-being will continue to be a key priority for all who work in education going forward. The Nottalone web site has now been designed by young people and a soft launch will commence in September 2021. Members can access more information about the web site, its layout and related information by viewing a short [You Tube video](#). Key partners include Nottinghamshire County Council, Nottingham City Council and Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. A formal and wider launch is planned for November 2021.
18. The COVID Local Support Grant was extended by the Department for Work and Pensions to cover the summer holidays. NCC used this allocation to provide supermarket vouchers to all school aged children claiming Free School Meals, and 2-, 3- and 4-year olds from low income families accessing funded childcare. The scheme enabled NCC to issue vouchers to 27,174 eligible children and young people, resulting in approximately 679,350 meals. [A report regarding both the COVID Winter Grant Scheme and the COVID Local Support Grant](#) was presented to the Children and Young People's Committee in July 2021.

19. As previously reported, the percentage of eligible 2-year olds taking up their funded childcare entitlements reduced during the pandemic. It was however positive to see that the take up rates have started to increase, and rates increased from 68% in the Spring term to 74% during Summer term.

Vulnerable Children, Young People and Families

20. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) continues to operate an “urgent 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. The MASH has continued to see an increase in referrals exceeding the level seen at the end of the first lockdown, putting more significant pressure on the service. A contingency plan is being put in place due to concerns that when schools return in the autumn, there will be a significant increase in need presenting. This will be presented to Children and Young People’s Committee on 13 September 2021.
21. During the third national lockdown, weekly “strengths-based wellbeing” calls to all families receiving early help or social work support were reinstated. Evidence from children and families suggested many benefited from these weekly contacts. As restrictions have lifted, children have returned to school, and families have been able to re-connect with family and community networks it is recognised that not all families now require weekly ‘wellbeing’ calls. From 15 May 2021 it was agreed that practitioners and managers will use their professional judgment in agreeing which children and families continue to benefit from and need weekly wellbeing calls and this has continued.
22. The government reissued its coronavirus guidance for children’s social care services on 17 August, which confirms that staff who are fully vaccinated are no longer required to self-isolate if they have been identified as a close contact of someone with COVID-19.
23. Moreover, there are very significant delays in the Family Courts, this is a consequence of COVID related delay and an ongoing lack of Judicial time. Children are having final hearings delayed by up to six months and hearings are being cancelled at short notice. As cases are not being progressed Social Worker caseloads are increasing and reassessments are being requested when there has been delay. Delays in Special Guardianship Order (SGO) and Adoption cases mean that children are remaining in care for longer.

Community Support and Resilience

Community Support Hub

24. As reported to Policy Committee on 13 May 2020, the Nottinghamshire Coronavirus Community Support Hub went live on 23 March 2020, 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.
25. The number of hits to the Hub website reduced gradually from a peak of around 1,000 a day down to 40 a day. This figure has risen and fallen in response to key moments in the pandemic, for example the introduction of further lockdowns, changes to tiered restrictions, or more recently the increase in the number of those infected. This self-service part of the Hub has been able to deal with the vast majority of demand for help.

26. As at 29 July 2021, 1,456 more complex requests for support, requiring a partnership response, had been received since launching the second phase of the Hub. There are currently 284 voluntary groups, 163 individual volunteers, 87 charity organisations, 20 online community groups and 241 businesses offering support.

Specific cohorts being supported

27. Committee Members will recall that the Government had placed responsibilities on the local authority to give practical support to those identified as clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV), to help them follow government shielding advice. The advice to shield ended on 31 March 2021, and with it the statutory responsibility to offer support. By the end of March, 54,300 residents were classified as CEV, and had received offers of support from the Hub.

28. On the 1 April, a new duty was placed on the system by Government to offer practical support to those who are required to self-isolate and who have indicated they require it (positive cases and their contacts). This has been accompanied by further government funding. This support offer was designed to overcome the barriers to self-isolation that were being reported, including the practical, social, and emotional consequences of self-isolation.

29. From the 1 April, where initial contact from NHS Test and Trace suggested a person may have specific support needs that cannot be met in other ways, these cases were referred through to councils through daily data feeds. The Hub is now required to make proactive contact with these people to offer help in accessing support.

30. During April, 25 cases were referred, which dropped to 12 for May, before increasing to 225 in June. As at 29 July, 1587 cases have been referred and have been sent texts with contact details for the Community Support Hub. It has transpired that few have required to telephone the Hub for help, either using the self-service part of the system, or arranging their own support. As such, demand is currently manageable within existing resources. An exercise was recently undertaken to call a sample of thirty of those referred through. 55% of those called indicated that they did have a support need originally. 85% of that need was in respect of Financial Support for Self-Isolation, a function provided by District and Borough Councils. All those called had the support needed in place.

31. Further, an additional responsibility has been placed on the system to make contact with all CEV people asked to self-isolate, whether or not they have indicated to NHS Test and Trace that they have unmet support needs. It has only been possible to cross reference data sets since 1 June, but in June, 65 were contacted, whilst as at 29th July, 441 have been contacted in July. Once again, very few, if any, have needed to contact the Hub for help.

Corporate Resilience

Workforce

32. The Council's workforce continues to respond effectively to the challenges the continuing situation presents and planning is underway to support a return to offices for those colleagues who have worked from home since March 2020. The Workforce Resilience and Recovery Group, working collaboratively with the Property and Premises Recovery Group, continues to oversee the Council's work on internal communication and engagement, employee health and well-being, reward and recognition and smarter working to ensure that the Council is prepared for whatever the future of work becomes as a result of the pandemic's impact. Regular

discussions continue with the recognised trade unions and the self-managed groups and recent discussions have focussed on changes to the previous restrictions, consultation on compulsory vaccination, provision of PPE in future as well as how and where people will work in future.

33. A new Hybrid Working Strategy was approved at this Committee in July and work is ongoing to implement this in full from the end of October. Supporting guidance, toolkits and frequently asked questions have been developed along with a refreshed learning and development offer to ensure our employees and managers are supported and prepared for the future changes in how staff work.
34. The Chief Executive has asked all managers to prioritise a discussion on future ways of working with individuals and teams by the end of August to understand service imperatives, personal preferences, including addressing any anxieties, to inform the ongoing preparatory work. There will be further opportunities for employees to attend Question and Answer sessions with members of the Corporate Leadership Team as part of ongoing engagement and dates are currently being finalised before publication.
35. The Council continues to facilitate all its employees receiving the vaccine. In line with current national guidance, all members of the workforce are strongly encouraged to take up the offer to be vaccinated when they are contacted to do so. This is the best means of mitigating the ongoing risk presented.

Council Premises

36. As previously reported, 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, and providing safe reoccupation in accordance with Government guidance.
37. During lockdowns Council offices have remained open for staff who cannot deliver their services from working from home, or need to be in for welfare reasons, although the main message has remained for the majority of staff to continue to work from home where possible. Following the further lifting of restrictions on 19 July 2021 the Group has organised the phased reoccupation of offices thereafter based on priority need in the first instance over the summer with a more general return in the autumn as office environments are adapted to suit a hybrid working model. The Group is working with services to understand the office environments that suit their future service delivery.

Disruption to Services

38. 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 is outlined in the table below.

Service	Status
Youth Services	The Youth Service will be on its term time only fixed closure from 2 August to 6 September 2021. On returning back in September the Youth Service will remain responsive to an evolving COVID situation, and operating plans will be refined if the circumstances and guidance change.

	In addition, the Youth Service coordinated the Department for Education funded Holiday Activity and Food programme, which offers activities in August for 5-16-year olds who are eligible for free school meals across the county, as well as an offer for vulnerable children, and a tailored offer for young people with special educational needs and disabilities. Over 24,000 places were offered to eligible children and young People.
Library Services	Since 19 July libraries are offering the majority of services. Opening hours have been returning to pre COVID levels in most locations. In person events and courses have resumed and summer reading challenge and mini challenge were provided in full. Click and collect / home delivery are still being provided. Mobile library service has returned to normal operations. Safety measures such as hand gel, additional cleaning and ventilation have remained in place.
Outdoor Education Services	Outdoor education centres and residential centres are all open for overnight stays and day visits. Activity Clubs are being offered for the summer Holidays at the Mill Adventure Base, alongside supporting the Holiday Activity and Food programme. Duke of Edinburgh groups have resumed with meeting up face to face, with training expeditions underway.
School Swimming	On the 23 July School Swimming closed for the summer in line with school holidays and will resume on 6 September when schools return. The aim is to fully reopen the service in September, which will be subject to government guidance.
Day Services	Although the Government announced a lifting of COVID restrictions on the 19 July, NCC Day Services have taken the decision in line with other providers in Nottinghamshire and across the East Midlands to continue to keep COVID-19 infection control measures in place protecting people who are clinically and extremely vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19. Therefore the overall capacity of buildings remains reduced because of social distancing requirements. Services will review capacity in line with national guidance and community transmission rates. This service continues to offer a range of building based and community activities which provide vital respite for carers and opportunities for people to concentrate on their aspirations and engage in activity outside the home helping them remain independent and living well in Nottinghamshire.
Country Parks and green spaces	Country Parks and their facilities are now largely fully open in line with Step 4 of the Government's COVID-19 Roadmap, although some local restrictions may remain in place. Visitors are still being asked to minimise social contact with people outside their household, wear face coverings in confined spaces where possible, and to follow hygiene guidance to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.
Children's Centres	<p>The Children's Centre Service has remained available during the pandemic for virtual and face to face appointments and support. All 17 main sites remained opened throughout, unlike many other neighbouring local authorities who are only now starting to reopen. All Children's Centre satellite sites in Nottinghamshire have also now reopened to deliver service timetables.</p> <p>The service is maintaining social distancing and other infection control measures as detailed on the council's website Children's Centre Service: services during the pandemic Nottinghamshire County Council</p>

	<p>Universal services resumed at the end of June and families are now asked to reserve places so numbers and 1m social distancing can still be maintained.</p> <p>All buildings are COVID secure and external partners continue to 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 (8am - 8pm daily). Social distancing restrictions remain in place onsite and residents are advised to avoid busy periods if possible, such as weekends and between 10am-4pm.
Registration Services	Most Registration Offices are now open to the public. In-person registration of birth and notice of marriage appointments are available. The registrations of still births and deaths continues to be available by telephone. Marriage and civil partnership ceremonies are available, including outdoor ceremonies at premises approved for civil marriage.
Music Teaching	Services continue to operate in agreement with individual schools.
Education Library Service	Services continue to operate in agreement with individual schools. Teacher visits to the showroom no longer require booking.
Inspire learning study programmes	Young people are able to access the study programme face to face.
Inspire learning adult education programme	A full range of courses are on offer both face to face and blended are programmed for the 2021 autumn term.
Archives	Online enquiry, research and reprographic services remain available. Opening hours have returned to pre COVID levels and visitors no longer require an appointment.

Future Reporting

39. It is proposed that this update report will be the final one presented to Policy Committee. Service Committees will continue to receive updates as appropriate, with Policy Committee only to be presented with future reports should circumstances significantly change.

Other Options Considered

40. 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

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

Statutory and Policy Implications

42. 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

- 43. All Local Authorities are required by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government to report the forecast financial impact of the COVID-19 emergency on a monthly basis. The most recent submission, DELTA 15, was submitted on July 30, 2021.
- 44. The additional pressures on the 2021/22 budget are offset by general COVID-19 grant allocations received from Central Government, and a range of additional specific grants and allocations to offset lost income.
- 45. Reports setting out the latest forecast position, including the impact of COVID-19 on income and additional costs, will continue to be presented to Finance Committee on a regular basis.

Safeguarding of Children and Adults at Risk Implications

- 46. 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

- 47. 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 endorse the continuing efforts of services to ensure effective service provision as the country transitions to recovery.
- 2) That Members consider the issues contained within the report.
- 3) That Members agree that further updates be considered by the relevant service Committee.

Councillor Ben Bradley MP
Leader of the Council

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

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Constitutional Comments (KK 03/08/21)

- 48. This report falls within the remit of Policy Committee by virtue of its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (KRP 03/08/21)

49. Information on the financial implications is set out in the report.

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.

- Progress on the COVID-19 crisis Economic Recovery Action Plan, Economic Development and Asset Management Committee, June 2021
- Adults and Health Recovery from COVID, Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee, July 2021
- Covid Winter Grant Scheme and Covid Local Support Grant Final Report, Children and Young People's Committee, July 2021

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All