

Appendix 4

Corporate Services

The recovery focus areas for Corporate Services are Registration Service, Governance, Legal and Property. The corporate functions of Digital and People are captured through the Principles workstreams.

Registration Service

1. From October 2020, the registration service had begun to recover towards business as usual. Death registrations are still conducted by telephone, but all other appointments were continuing to be conducted face to face. The backlog of births had been caught up with only 50 births remaining from the original backlog of over 900.
2. Unfortunately, the death rate started to rise again slightly in November-December, with a large rise in Covid related deaths. An increase to over 100 in November.
3. The second national lockdown beginning on November 4th saw more disruption to wedding ceremonies, as ceremonies were again suspended, until December. The third national lockdown commencing in January 2021 until March saw all ceremonies again suspended and added to over 1000 ceremonies that were already postponed from 2020. The overall number of ceremonies cancelled or postponed by the end of the lockdown is over 1500.
4. March saw a large-scale recruitment of casual staff to cover the excess ceremonies scheduled in 2021, with July-August alone having nearly double the amount of ceremonies seen in a pre-Covid year. These extra ceremonies add a large amount of admin work with approx. 2000 email enquiries into the service per month, an increase of over 130% on pre-Covid figures. The excess ceremonies also see an increase in notices of marriage of over 35% in Q1 to over 1900 appointments. Compared to pre-Covid, business as usual numbers, July-September has seen over 700 excess ceremonies.
5. Deaths continue to be registered by phone, with electronic transfer of paperwork from GP's to registrars, and from registrars to funeral directors, using powers given by the Coronavirus Act. Feedback from the public is positive, removing the need for them to physically attend an office, but the process of 'triaging' this paperwork and contacting the next of kin to book an appointment proves labour intensive, and adds extra strain to the service whilst ceremony demand is at an all-time high.
6. The easing of restrictions through summer 2021 sees a return to full citizenship ceremonies, clearing any backlog from spring when ceremonies were conducted individually via digital meetings.

Governance

7. The emergency Regulations 2020 for virtual meetings ceased after 7 May 2021. Since then, Committee meetings with voting members of the Council have reverted to taking place in a “physical” format.
8. The benefits of virtual and hybrid meetings will continue to be employed, however, where appropriate including for “guests” at meetings and for, such as Scrutiny pre-meetings, inquiry days, work planning days.
9. The review of Governance continues, with the Constitution and Schemes / Sub Schemes of Delegation being updated as and when necessary along with the communication of any changes.

Legal Services

10. Legal Services have continued to offer a full range of services throughout the pandemic and have reacted and adjusted its priorities to align with the changing priorities of SCC generally and specifically in relation to Covid.
11. Team members from the employment and contract teams who were previously tasked to provide high level support to IMT are now embedding back into their former substantive roles although, by virtue of their dedication and hard work, they continued servicing their own areas of work whilst supporting IMT.
12. The team have offered support to and are working within the changing climate caused by the Children and Families System Transformation Programme. This includes offering advice and guidance on any risks within the programme and working to support implementation of the programme through the provision of training.
13. The team are working with Families and Communities, Health and Care and the Court System to address any remaining backlog in court cases in childcare and Adult Social Care.
14. The team continue to work on ensuring that development can proceed at pace supporting the building of additional housing and bringing support for the creation of new educational establishments. Contrary to initial expectation this work did not reduce during the pandemic. The work of the team on capital receipts and realisation of assets also supports very important income generation for SCC.

Property

15. Progress by the Property group includes a successful bid for funding from Get Building Fund through the Stoke and Staffordshire LEP, for the development of the Shire Hall in Stafford. The relevant planning permission and listed building consent have been granted and works are planned to commence shortly.

Policy and Insight

16. The Policy and Insight Team continue to direct significant analytical capacity and capability to support Local Outbreak Control. The team is managing, processing and analysing a wide-variety of different data on a daily basis, to enable Staffordshire to identify and respond quickly to rising COVID-19 cases and outbreaks. The team continues to maintain, a suite of interactive dashboards that bring together all the key datasets related to COVID-19 and which are updated daily. These dashboards are shared across the Local Resilience Forum to enable evidence-based decision making across Staffordshire. The Team is also providing regular situational reports for a wide variety of different outbreak boards and incidents.
17. Beyond Local Outbreak Control, the team are also supporting the long-term recovery from COVID-19, assisting Cabinet and the Senior Leadership Team to develop the Strategic Plan for 2022-2026.

Customer Services

18. Customer Services: Customer Services continue to play a crucial role through supporting the ongoing response required to the COVID-19 outbreak. The flexible nature of the resource has enabled the team to respond quickly to demand.
19. To date the Local Outbreak control has been supported by making over 60,000 phone calls to positive COVID-19 cases and their associated contacts, contributing to the successful control of a number of outbreaks. The team continue to work with our local district partners to improve intelligence and continue enforcement efforts.
20. A dedicated phone line has been developed to support the public by providing one front door for support. Information, advice and guidance regarding care needs, financial support and food, is given to improve isolation compliance across Staffordshire.
21. The Customer Service team is working to streamline other processes and call types, working with service areas directly, to release as much resource as possible. This resource is also being used to support Local Outbreak control and other parts of SCC who are working hard to support the public.
22. As normal services resume and demand increases, the Customer Service team are working hard continue the new ways of working that were employed during the peak of the pandemic.