

Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 20 May 2020

Staffordshire County Council's Response to Coronavirus COVID-19



Cllr Philip Atkins, Leader of the Council and Cllr Alan White, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Health, Care and Wellbeing said,

“Our response to coronavirus COVID-19 is ongoing with an ever-growing focus on how we help Staffordshire, our economy and our communities to recover from the unprecedented disruption to our lives.

This report provides an update on our leadership role and action, and how we are working with partners to protect the most vulnerable, ease the pressure on the NHS, support the county's care sector, promote public health, and reignite our economy.

I continue to hear about the incredible work of our staff, care workers, volunteers, friends and neighbours who are stepping up and doing their bit for people across the county. So many people are working round the clock to meet this once-in-a-generation challenge and I continue to thank each and every one of them. My thoughts also go out to the many families and friends who have lost loved ones to this terrible disease often in heart-breaking circumstances.

The Prime Minister has now set out plans for reopening our society. As a county council, we have recognised the need to restart our economy with the launch of our Back to Business campaign and we have been planning for how this council will support the county to recover for several weeks, including reopening some of our own services.

It is hugely important for businesses to open their doors, people to get back to work and education and communities and services to rebuild, but this has to be when it is safe to do so and at the right pace.

Over the coming weeks and months, we will all be treading a very fine line as we gradually reopen this county and this country. This is absolutely not a green light for everyone and everything to go back to as we were before the pandemic.”

Recommendations

We recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Notes the progress of Staffordshire County Council's response to coronavirus COVID-19.
- b. Formally extend the Council's thanks to our staff, care workers and volunteers for their efforts to support the response.
- c. Approves that the additional government grant of £15.4m be allocated to the 2020/21 revenue budget.
- d. Approves further extra funding of £4.3m from the additional grant to support care providers as set out in Table 1.
- e. Gives authority to individual members of the Senior Leadership Team (in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader where practicable) to incur further expenditure from the £15.4m budget up to a maximum of £2m per item of expenditure where it is considered necessary by the Council's Incident Management Team or the Senior Leadership Team to address the implications arising from the COVID-19 emergency. Any items of expenditure in excess of £2m will continue to require authorisation by Cabinet in the usual way.

Local Members Interest
N/A

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Recommendations of the Leader of the Council and the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Health, Care and Wellbeing

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Report of the Director of Health and Care

Reasons for Recommendations:

Background

1. Coronavirus COVID-19 continues to circulate across the world and in the UK. As of Monday, 11th May there have been 4.2 million confirmed cases and more than 286,000 deaths globally, with 223,060 confirmed cases and 32,060 deaths in the UK.
2. In Staffordshire we have had 1,979 confirmed cases and 385 deaths. The local forecast is that the number of cases will stabilise and decline slowly over the new few weeks, but this depends on the continuing success of control measures.
3. The Prime Minister addressed the nation on Sunday 10th May with a new message for the public to Stay Alert, Control the Virus and Save Lives. This was followed by publication on Monday 11th May of detailed guidance and a statement

in the House of Commons. At the time of publication of this report, the Council is continuing to analyse and understand the guidance, and implications for the organisation and Staffordshire as a whole.

UK Response

4. The mainstays of control measures in the UK remain:

- a. **Social distancing.** Symptomatic people are required to 'self-isolate' for 7 days and household contacts of symptomatic people required to 'self-isolate' for 14 days. Following the Prime Minister's announcement on Sunday 10th May, the government has updated advice and messaging in a gradual easing of the 'lockdown' in place since late March, with everyone asked to 'Stay Alert' and 'Control the Virus.' If people do have to leave home, they are asked to remain at least 2 metres apart. Non-essential business have been shut down with arrangements for the government to fund them and for them in turn to pay workers. From Wednesday 13th May, employees in industries such as construction and manufacturing who are unable to work from home, are being encouraged to return to work, with guidance provided to employers on social distancing and safety in the workplace.
- b. **Protecting vulnerable people.** The advice not to leave home is emphasised particularly for the elderly and people with underlying medical conditions. A cohort of 'extremely vulnerable' has been identified and advised not to leave the house at all and avoid contact with other household members. They can register for a national 'shielding' scheme which offers support with food and medicine deliveries.
- c. **Ensuring sufficient capacity in health and care services.** The NHS suspended all non-urgent care in order to free up capacity for the care of COVID-19 patients although some of non-urgent care is now resuming. Additional hospitals have been built to provide additional critical care, palliative care and rehabilitation capacity. Local authorities have the option of introducing 'Care Act easements' to prioritise social care. People have been asked to use health and care services wisely and directed to NHS111 as the first point of call for all routine enquiries.
- d. **Infection prevention and control.** This ranges from simple measures for everyone, such as handwashing; to guidance on enhanced cleaning of areas used by the public, such as health and care settings; and guidance on management of possible and confirmed cases of COVID-19, for example in care homes. It also includes appropriate PPE for health and care staff and other essential workers who might be exposed to symptomatic people.
- e. **Testing.** The government is increasing testing to help control and get a better understanding of how the infection is spreading. This will be testing symptomatic people for the virus first, followed by testing of the population for antibodies to the virus when this becomes available.

- f. **Communications.** People are advised to use official sources of information such as the government, NHS or local authority websites to avoid misinformation that could cause unnecessary anxiety or harm.

Staffordshire County Council's Response

5. The Council continues to run an Incident Management Team daily to co-ordinate our response. The Council's Senior Leadership Team sit as 'Gold Command' weekly. The Local Resilience Forum (LRF), a partnership of local agencies, continues to hold a Strategic Co-ordinating Group twice weekly to co-ordinate the multi-agency response.
6. The Council continues to operate essential services, with many staff working online. Some non-essential services remain suspended as part of social distancing, including libraries, educational residential centres, children's centres, learning disability day opportunities, day centres for older people, facilities at country parks and school crossing patrols. Household Waste and Recycling Centres are reopening on 14th May with some restrictions, temporary guidelines and social distancing measures in place.
7. Council staff working in non-essential services have volunteered through the iCount programme to be redeployed to support essential services. To date 135 have been redeployed, including to support the COVID helpline, food deliveries and into a coronavirus community support network. They join thousands of local volunteers, mobilised through our communities, who are providing support to vulnerable people.
8. The Council has set up a dedicated COVID-19 helpline, which is managing more than 110 calls daily, with people offered advice and signposted to the range of support from local communities.
9. The Council has set up an emergency food delivery service for vulnerable people who have no network of support from family, friends or their local community. This includes 'extremely vulnerable' people for whom the national 'shielding' scheme cannot provide. The service provides a week's supply of food until longer term arrangements can be put in place, drawing on local volunteers. It has now delivered almost 2,000 food parcels.
10. Staffordshire schools are switching to provide education online and remain open to support vulnerable children and children of essential workers. Currently around 2.5% of all children are in school. We have established a weekly register of vulnerable children attending school and ensure that contact is established with those remaining at home to assure ourselves that appropriate safeguarding and support remains in place for those in need.
11. The Council continues to contribute to the COVID-19 hospital discharge pathway in support of the NHS. So far Staffordshire's NHS is holding up well, with services coping with the pressures of COVID-19 related demand and staff absence.

12. The Council has taken a decision to introduce 'Care Act easements' if necessary. This means that if we do have to use them it will be in a planned and managed way so that any impact on individuals can be mitigated. We temporarily introduced a shortened COVID-19 assessment to determine whether people needed care and support and whether this was required immediately. People were informed that their full care act assessment would be completed at a later date. This has helped maintain staff capacity to support the COVID-19 hospital discharge pathway and ensure that everyone can be assessed in a timely way.
13. The Council has been providing extensive support to local care providers, including passing on and interpreting national guidance, proactive contact and reactive helpline for advice on specific issues, extra funding, additional staff, and supplies of Personal Protective Equipment. The Council has sourced a range of PPE to ensure that no care workers go without, and so far we have provided more than 700,000 items to care providers such as masks, gloves and aprons. Staffordshire remains much better placed for PPE than those areas that have relied on national supply chains.
14. There has been considerable concern nationally about the impact of COVID-19 on care homes. The combination of a highly infectious virus and residents who are most vulnerable to complications mean that care homes are at very high risk. The Council, along with PHE is supporting care homes to prevent and manage outbreaks with advice on infection prevention and control, involving expert professionals where necessary.
15. The Council has recruited and trained over 200 volunteers through our iCare programme. They are available to provide care if local care providers are unable to cope with rising demand and staff absence. So far, we have only had to deploy three of them, and they remain a vital part of our response and may be called on at any time over the next few weeks. We are grateful to all those who have offered to work in these roles.
16. The Council is promoting testing of essential workers through the local NHS. This includes our own staff as well as care workers with all our contracted care providers, and workers with some other key contractors. Testing is being carried out at 'drive in facilities' at Stoke City Football Club and Burton Albion Football Club. Parallel national systems have also been developed, and we have been lobbying government to ensure that these are linked to our local arrangements.
17. The Council launched its own £0.5m micro/small business grant scheme in late April to help businesses with nine employees or less who cannot get support from other Government initiatives. Following huge demand, the scheme is now closed to new applications. The emergency fund will support up to 500 local businesses registered in Staffordshire with an annual turnover of less than £2million a year. This includes sole traders such as builders, plumbers and mechanics as well as hairdressers, photographers, cleaners and childminders. As of 10th May, more than 200 applications are 'in process' and 17 of the first grants have been issued and received by businesses. Typically grants are being issued within four to five days of receipt of an application form.

18. On 5th May the Council launched its 'Staffordshire Means Back to Business' economic recovery campaign. It is supporting businesses to get help as easily as possible, and to inform, reassure and engage businesses about plans for rapid recovery, renewal and growth. This will be followed by an economic recovery and renewal strategy, underpinned by appropriate investment and support where it is needed to create stability, growth and jobs. We are also feeding into and advising the plans of regional and central government, including the Midlands Engine and Midlands Connect.

Updated Financial Analysis

19. The 15 April 2020 Cabinet report detailed a range of financial impacts for Staffordshire and for the Council from COVID-19, along with how these might be mitigated and funded. The financial impact consists of direct expenditure associated with the council's response, lost income and planned MTFs savings foregone. The estimated impact could total £50m.
20. In March the Council received a non-ringfenced grant of £22.3m from government to contribute to COVID-19 related costs. An additional grant of £15.4m is expected to be received later this month. These allocations have been used to fund a range of measures including:
- a. extra funding for care providers, in addition to the increases already included in the MTFs, to increase fees and support one off costs arising from COVID-19
 - b. personal protective equipment
 - c. increased volumes of care packages
 - d. facilities for mortality management
 - e. food for vulnerable people
 - f. additional staff to support care providers
 - g. volunteer expenses
 - h. nursery care/childminders to stay open for key workers
21. Other financial impacts include the non-delivery of MTFs cost reduction programmes and the potential loss of a significant amount of income from fees and charges.
22. The grants so far total £3.2bn nationally. Whilst the Council welcomes these allocations analysis across the sector suggests that further grants will be required to meet the financial impact of the crisis. Work is on-going to assess the longer-term impact this will have on Council finances, but key concerns include:
- a. increased demand for adult social care services;
 - b. increased demand for children's services;
 - c. support for local businesses;
 - d. economic regeneration;
 - e. deliverability of transformation and cost reduction programmes previously approved; and
 - f. the stability of Council tax and business rates collections, which are critical to the funding arrangements for the Council.

Funding for Care Providers

23. Care providers continue to face financial pressures from COVID-19 and there remains considerable concern nationally about the sustainability of the care market. The Council has reacted swiftly and decisively to this with extra funding of £13.6m for care providers in 2020/21: £10.6m from the first grant of £22.3m and £3m as planned in the MTFs. We also providing 'support in kind' for care providers including with emergency supplies of PPE. To date the Council has spent almost £2m on PPE for our own staff and to support care providers.
24. To meet the ongoing financial pressures facing care providers the recommendation is to offer further extra non-recurrent funding of £4.3m as set out in Table 1. This would take the total extra funding to £17.9m for care providers in 2020/21. Any extra funding for care providers over and above this would need to be considered in the context of:
- the overall financial impact of COVID-19 on the Council;
 - further evidence of the financial pressures facing care providers;
 - the Council's emerging strategy for the care market post-COVID-19; and
 - longer term return on investment.

Table 1: recommended further additional funding for care providers

Use of funding	Home care / Extra Care / Supported Living / day care (£m)	Care homes (£m)	Total (£m)
To meet higher cost costs of PPE	0.500	0.700	1.200
To postpone uplifts in care home client contributions as their benefits increase from 01 April to 01 September – this supports cashflow as providers are paid net of client contributions		0.300	0.300
To waiver client contributions to day care and maintain payments to providers whilst services are suspended due to social distancing requirements	0.150		0.150
To expand the £0.5m micro/small business grant scheme to include care providers where there is evidence of significant risks to sustainability due to financial pressures.		0.500	0.500
To advance-book nursing		0.600	0.600

home placements – this gives providers short term income in return for longer term price stability			
To commission home based replacement care whilst building based replacement care is suspended due to social distancing requirements	0.400		0.400
To continue to pay providers on commissioned rather than delivered hours for the remainder of the financial year	1.200		1.200
Total	2.250	2.100	4.350

Recovery

25. In planning for life beyond the pandemic, it is becoming clear that Staffordshire will not return to how it was before COVID-19 for the foreseeable future. The government has indicated that some level of social distancing is likely to remain in place for months and possibly years. This will have implications for how we relate to one another, how we care for vulnerable people, and for many of our local businesses. Our challenge is to adjust to this quickly and seize some of the new opportunities that might arise – for example from working online – both for the county as a whole and specifically for the Council.
26. The Council has therefore established a Planning and Recovery Group to plan for how we can minimise the impact of the epidemic on our society and our economy in the longer term and ensure that Staffordshire remains a vibrant and prosperous place to live and work. The Senior Leadership Team member leading this work is Director for Corporate Services, John Tradewell, and the Planning and Recovery Group is Chaired by Janene Cox, Assistant Director Culture, Rural and Safer Communities, supported by Andrew Donaldson, Assistant Director Strategy, Public Health and Prevention.
27. Recovery will run in parallel with the Response, will be a lengthy process, and is likely to take place in several stages as lockdown is eased. The first stage is the reopening of the county's 14 Household Waste and Recycling Centres on 14th May, with temporary restrictions and social distancing measures in place. Preparations are now being made on how we will reopen other council services such as libraries, although no decisions have been made at this stage on when those services will resume.
28. The Staffordshire Local Resilience forum LRF has also stood up a Recovery Co-ordinating Group to co-ordinate multi-agency actions. This group is jointly chaired by Chief Executive John Henderson, and Jon Rouse, City Director, Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

None.

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