

Appendix 5

Communities

Overall buildings-based recovery has been slower than anticipated due to local guidance and social distancing measures which have been maintained

The ongoing impact of this is increased isolation, loneliness and is impacting on people's ability to remain independent and resilient.

We are seeing a number of parents who would have previously been fine with the social support now needing additional services and help.

Section A – Recovery Update (October 2020 – July 2021):

Below is an update on recovery of community-based services / support since the previous Recovery Update Cabinet Report in October 2020:

1. Libraries:

- 1.1. During 2021, we have continued to recover the physical library offer in line with government and sector guidance. Aspects of the service have been reintroduced gradually at each recovery milestone. This includes:
 - **From 12 April** - PC access, printing, study space and managed browsing in static libraries
 - **From 17 May** – extended opening hours – including late nights, Saturday afternoon and Sunday opening; managed browsing on our mobile libraries; meeting room use for small groups and 1-1 sessions
 - **From 19 July** - SCC libraries reverted to full opening hours; quarantining of stock ceased; meeting rooms were made available for hire, subject to Risk Assessments; mobile library routes were extended
- 1.2. To keep library staff, volunteers, and customers safe, mask wearing continues to be encouraged in public areas. Hand sanitising, one-way systems, QR codes, Perspex screens have remained in place and are subject to further review.
- 1.3. While the recovery of the physical library offer has been slow, the digital library offer continues to grow.

2. Children's Centres:

- 2.1. Since June 2020, appropriate Children's Centres have continued to provide Childcare with adherence to the appropriate Government Guidance.
- 2.2. Since August 2020, appropriate Children Centres have continued to facilitate Family Time for children in our care. This continues to be a priority for the County Council as

we seek to meet the needs of our children and their families whilst also responding to the requirements of the Courts.

- 2.3. Since September 2020, appropriate Children Centres have recommenced health and wellbeing appointments. Recommencement of health and wellbeing provision has continued to be embedded in line with the recovery plans of health partners.
- 2.4. The Children's Centre Early Years Core Offer reassumed in April 2021 in line with the appropriate Government Guidance. Due to requirements of this, Government Guidance restrictions have remained in place. This has led to a reduction in provision available through the Centres compared to pre-Covid-19. Considering this, the Early Years Coordination Service continues to facilitate a virtual offer which is supported by a broader Family Hub Offer.

3. Archives and Heritage:

- 3.1. Archives and Heritage continued to operate with Staffordshire Record Office open on an advanced booking basis for four spaces supported by a remote enquiry and copying service.
- 3.2. Public services were suspended in November 2020 and from January to 13 April 2021 in line with national restrictions. A remote service was maintained with staff working from home. Staff continued to work from home and from the office where required to manage collections, deliver the public service or to enable them to deliver their role.
- 3.3. The William Salt Library remains closed with the agreement of the William Salt Library Trust. Access to the collection is provided through Staffordshire Record Office.
- 3.4. Stoke on Trent City Archives reopened to the public on 12th May 2021 on a phased basis. Lichfield History Access Point reopened on a booking only basis on 29 June 2021.
- 3.5. **The service launched the Lockdown Memories project in July 2020 to record the community experience of the pandemic. The Pandemic War Diary project has been approved to record the corporate response to COVID-19.**

4. Rural (including Country Parks and Rights of Way):

- 4.1. All countryside sites and car parks remain fully open with COVID signage in place. This includes the Visitor centres at Cannock Chase and Chasewater being open, toilet facilities at most sites, parking machines operational at Chasewater, Marquis Drive and Milford. The Great War Hut at Marquis Drive remains closed at present.
- 4.2. Volunteers are back supporting the country parks. Additional marshals are in place at Chasewater and Cannock Chase for weekends and bank holidays to help manage safety (particularly fire, water safety and parking issues) and engage with visitors.
- 4.3. Cafes are open at Cannock Chase, Chasewater and Froghall Wharf and the play area is now open at Greenway Bank. New play areas are being installed at Cannock

Chase and Chasewater during July and August. Trading vendors (ice creams) have been appointed on new COVID-19 terms.

- 4.4. Environment and Rights of Way staff are generally working from home but undertaking field work following COVID-safe guidelines.
- 4.5. Availability of contract cleaners is impacting on public toilet provision at some sites, impacting on visitor experience.

5. Trading Standards and Coroners:

- 5.1. Trading Standards Services have continued to operate with the majority of staff working from home and dealing with the majority of issues by telephone and email.
- 5.2. Inspections and visits to business premises have taken place where necessary following Covid-19 guidance ensuring contractual and statutory work has been completed.
- 5.3. Trading Standards have continued to co-ordinate and carry out Covid-19 related enforcement and prevention activities in partnership with Police and District colleagues. This includes serving formal Directions on premises where there have been breaches of Covid -19 restrictions legislation.
- 5.4. Officers engaged with the Sports Grounds Safety Authority (SGSA) and sports ground premise owners planning in advance of the return of spectators into sports grounds and have supported the premise owners with the sporting events that have recently taken place with reduced capacity crowds .

6. Economy, Infrastructure & Skills community work:

- 6.1. The recovery of community assets and activities with E,I&S continues to be managed within their respective service areas as business as usual or is monitored through other Recovery Groups.
- 6.2. The Flood Risk Management team continue to investigate and seek solutions to property flooding problems and have won a £6m bid from Defra to improve community resilience to flooding.
- 6.3. The School Crossing Patrol service continues to adapt to specific needs at individual schools and road safety education is starting to resume within the classroom as well as through the provision of on-line resources developed during the pandemic.
- 6.4. School Transport is fully operational, though during June there has been a significant increase in number of pupils isolating which has impacted on a number of routes serving schools across the county (increasing workload as a result)
- 6.5. Local bus services are now operating at / or close to 100%, patronage levels have increased on average to around 60% of pre pandemic levels.
- 6.6. Household Waste Recycling Sites remain open, with certain restrictions in place.

7. Supportive Communities (taken from Public Health update) & Volunteering

- 7.1. Supportive Communities has worked closely with partners, including the voluntary sector, to ensure vulnerable citizens (including the clinically extremely vulnerable) had access to the support they needed through the lockdown. It has provided communities with information, advice and guidance and linked them to voluntary and local community resources.
- 7.2. 149 Mutual Aid Groups have also been supported to step up during the Covid-19 pandemic to support their communities with varying local offers, through effective relationships with our partners (including local anchor organisations).
- 7.3. In October 2020 18 Community Help Points were launched in trusted venues in local communities e.g. libraries and community venues. These provide a non-digital offer information, advice, and guidance and to actively signpost to very local community assets
- 7.4. A new way of connecting and engaging with communities was developed to tackle fake news linked to Covid and to increase the uptake of the Covid vaccine in the Burton area. The Community Champions programme recruited 50 voices with a reach of over 1,000 people from the Burton community. This included local community representative, individuals, VCSE, Public and private sector. This group has successfully targeted two-way communication resulting in an increase in Covid compliance and vaccine uptake.
- 7.5. £200k grant funding has been provided to support local community groups to stay open and deliver a level of provision between January to June 2021.
- 7.6. There have been several successful campaigns using the nudge theory approach and tied to #DoingOurBit to help tackle some of the potential negative impacts of Covid-19. This include the Happy At Home Christmas gifting campaign and the Let's beat Loneliness Together campaign.
- 7.7. The Do-It Staffordshire platform been used by SCC and NHS partners throughout lockdown. This has involved supporting with urgent issues and requests such as supporting vaccination centres, hospitals, 'entitled to' benefit checker, and temporary mortuaries. 1350 Staffordshire residents to step up to volunteer through the iCare and iCount campaigns.
- 7.8. In addition, the Do-It iCount platform (our internal volunteering platform), has received urgent demand for internal volunteers due to lockdown, Health Protection Board requests, and help required by the NHS. We have had 156 unique iCount volunteers since the Do-It iCount platform went live in September 2020 to date – mostly in response to second peak lockdown demands in January / February.

Section B – Priorities moving forward for recovery

8. Libraries:

- 8.1. To rebuild customer confidence and encourage increased engagement with the library offer regular activities will be phased in from September (e.g. Baby Bounce and Rhyme, Places of Welcome, IT Buddies) and the re-introduction of overdue charges will be delayed until 1 Oct
- 8.2. We continue to work with our partner organisations to support the CMLs to recover their library offer and ensure a consistent approach across Staffordshire's library network
- 8.3. Attached as appendix A is the Staffordshire Libraries COVID-19 phased recovery plan.

9. Children's Centres:

- 9.1. Recovery of Children's Centres is continuing with provision increasing over the Summer 2021. The Service is continuing to seek specialist Health, Safety & Wellbeing information, advice, and guidance as it becomes available in order to ensure the Children Centre recovery continues at pace.
- 9.2. Family Time for children in our care continues to be a priority for the County Council as we seek to meet the needs of our children and their families whilst also responding to the requirements of the Courts.
- 9.3. See appendix B for an updated 'Reopening Children's Centres Recovery Plan' for further details on priorities for recovery moving forward.

10. Archives and Heritage:

- 10.1. From 19 July the service will recover its onsite volunteer offer with groups returning to Staffordshire Record Office on a phased basis through to September/October 2021.
- 10.2. From September/October the service will re-establish activities and events, complying with social distancing as appropriate. Capacity for onsite visitors will be reviewed. The Pandemic War Diary project will begin to record Staffordshire County Council's response.
- 10.3. SCC Archives and Heritage will be promoting the onsite visitor offer, the return of volunteers, recruitment of new volunteers to support the offer, and the return to Stafford town centre. SCC will also be promoting the digital offer and online events.
- 10.4. SCC Archives and Heritage **will be monitoring** occupancy rates in visitor spaces, the increase of capacity with social distancing guidelines, and the Impact of COVID-19 on income for the service.
- 10.5. For further information, please see attached an updated Staffordshire Archives and Heritage Recovery plan at Appendix C.

11. Rural (including Country Parks and Rights of Way):

- 11.1. We are exploring how we can restore volunteering on the Rights of Way network, pending changes in guidance and a health and safety review. Transport is a key constraint on many parts of the network, and this is impacting on service delivery.

12. Economy, Infrastructure & Skills community work:

- 12.1. Highways maintenance and construction activities will continue to take place to keep the road network accessible for all; and Highway support continues to be provided to local councils and businesses adapting to changes in social distancing requirements.
- 12.2. To help maintain the substantial rise in walking and cycling levels during the pandemic, all opportunities are being taken to secure funding to provide permanent improvements to walking and cycling infrastructure, in line with the 2021 version of Staffordshire's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)

13. Trading Standards and Coroners:

- 13.1. Coroners inquests continue to be held, making use of digital facilities with limited attendees in person and remote access for most. Inquests requiring a jury are taking place making use of the County Council Chamber.

14. Supportive Communities & Volunteering

- 14.1. A further £50k in small grants is currently being disseminated to VCSE groups by Support Staffordshire Locality Officers. These small grants will be used to offer training, advice, and support for groups to 'open-up' post Covid
- 14.2. Following the success of the Burton Community Champions work, Public Health also intend to roll this engagement model and approach to other localities.
- 14.3. As people are returning to work and social events, the focus of the Do-It volunteering platform needs to change to ensure it is sustainable. The platform will be developed to accommodate the needs of the Community Champions programme as it expands, enabling a digital space to share and communicate trusted information and local priorities.
- 14.4. Champions will also be able to use the platform to recruit volunteers as part of the wider Do It Staffordshire communications plan. Through the Volunteering Task and Finish Group (see below), decisions will be made of the future volunteering priorities of the county council and where the platform fits within them.
- 14.5. Following discussions at the Communities Leadership Group, a Volunteering Task and Finish Group has been established. The first meeting of the group took place on 12th July with officers involved in volunteering from across the Council, as well as our VCSE Strategic Capacity Building Partner. The purpose of this groups is to:
 - **Increase the number of volunteers** into key service areas that have been impacted by Covid-19.

- **Review our offer for volunteers** in order to ensure the Council can provide a consistent and attractive offer and a positive experience for volunteers.
- **Review our internal policies** on volunteering to support and encourage our staff to volunteer within their communities.