

# Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

1<sup>st</sup> June 2020



**Report of:** Tim Borrett, Director of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships

**Title:** Response and management of COVID-19 pandemic

**Ward:** Citywide

**Officer Presenting Report:** Tim Borrett, Director of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships

## **Recommendation:**

That members note the council's ongoing response to the coronavirus / COVID-19 pandemic

That members consider the role of Scrutiny in contributing to the longer term approach to 'recovery'.



**Background:** This report, for information purposes, sets out the latest key information on the council's response to the pandemic. This paper seeks to highlight some of the main activities and issues, and does not reflect the entire breadth of the response or cover every issue raised by the pandemic or through the easing of lockdown measures.

**Service Impacts:** The impacts of COVID-19 have been far reaching and the swift implementation of national guidance and the various facets of the Coronavirus Act 2020 (including, where appropriate, local interpretation of guidance or local decision making in the absence of timely guidance) has affected many different services. The national guidance accompanying the easing of lockdown measures will also have a significant impact on service areas. These impacts continue to be tracked centrally within the council's Silver group, supported by the Information and Communications Cell. A list of up-to-date 'Changes to Services' is available on our website at [www.bristol.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/coronavirus)

## Key Information

### 1. Finance

At the time of writing, the Council has received two tranches of central government funding support, totalling £26.4m. An additional £5m in Hardship Funding has been used to extend the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme and bolster the Council's ability to provide emergency grants through its Local Crisis Prevention Fund. The current indication is that the response cost for the Council will be £34.5m. This is an additional £3.4m from the previous forecast and largely due to additional costs in waste and recycling, savings undelivered and administrative new burdens. This cost is £8.1m more than the funding provided by central Government to recognise councils' additional Covid-related expenditure.

The Council is also projecting income losses of £78.3m. Therefore, significant, sustainable long-term additional finance will be required in order to deliver services in an adverse economic cycle where demand for public services will significantly increase. We recognise that for some of the income or expenditure streams the impact will go beyond a single financial year. It will be necessary for a further report to be taken to Cabinet or Full Council at the earliest opportunity outlining the scale of budget gap and if necessary, a proposal for resetting the Council's revenue and capital plans. Joining up with our local and national partners, the Council will continue to work proactively with Government to seek additional funding support to close the gap.

### 2. Business support

At the time of writing, the Council has approved over 6,500 applications with a value of over £83m in grants to support businesses in Bristol. We know there are over 900 eligible firms yet to apply and we have used targeted communications to reach those businesses we can contact, are eligible and yet to apply.

Following additional guidance and funding from central government, the Council has been working in collaboration with other local authorities in the West of England to determine criteria and process to award further grants to support small businesses. This is to include businesses in shared spaces, regular market traders, small charity properties, B&Bs and other businesses which support local economic need. At the time of writing, further details on the application process are to be detailed shortly.

Central government has taken further steps to help businesses re-open and have published COVID-19 Secure guidelines for businesses to consider as part of businesses' risk assessments. The Council has commissioned a business resilience programme to support businesses during this crisis and support practical measures so businesses can re-open quickly when allowed to do so, help staff get back to work and support customers returning to the shops, being confident it is safe. Central government has allocated funding of £415,785 to the Council to help prepare for the safe reopening of high streets and other retail spaces.

At the time of writing, Public Protection Team officers have made 950 visits to businesses, providing information and posters to help them become 'COVID-19 Secure', including in the Stapleton Rd, Gloucester Rd, Fishponds and the Harbourside areas. Further visits will be made across the city over forthcoming weeks, working with Business Improvement Districts. The Council is also mailing circa 18,000 businesses to promote this guidance and have provided posters for businesses to confirm and promote that they have adhered to the steps to make their sites 'COVID-19 Secure'.

The Council is also working with a wide range of city partners through the One City approach to provide consistent advice and support to organisations as they move to 're-open' workplaces and non-essential retail sites from this month (June).

### **3. Homeless**

The Council continues to do all we can to house those without a safe place to live. At the time of writing, we are housing 268 rough sleepers and have a capacity of 298 rooms in total within hotels to provide space for those needing it. This work has been closely managed including providing appropriate support, security and management on-site and ensure those with complex needs are supported.

The pandemic has accelerated our long-term ambitions to end rough sleeping in the city and to provide affordable move-on accommodation in Bristol. Our Move-on programme is focused on both addressing the lack of move on accommodation for people experiencing homelessness, as well as ensuring co-ordinated person centred support which allows people to sustain their tenancy and move on with their lives. We continue to encourage landlords to work with the Council's Private Rental Team to offer 'move on' tenancies to homeless people currently in temporary hotel accommodation. The Council is fast-tracking promotion to letting agents now the Government is to end funding of the accommodation scheme and has lifted Covid-19 restrictions on the rental market.

The Council continues to work with registered providers, institutional investors, housing developers and other city partners to explore a range of measures to help secure the additional homes required. Officers remain in regular contact with Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government who are supportive of our approach. The Council continue to make representations to central Government to explore a housing support funding model that would enable co-ordinated people centred support to be sustained.

### **4. Adult Social Care/Care Homes**

Adult social care services continue to operate safely and meet all our statutory duties under the Care Act. We have not needed to implement Care Act easements under the Coronavirus Act and continue to operate at stage 2: Applying flexibilities under the pre-amendment Care Act, as a response to current restrictions. The Council continues to review the ongoing impact of the latest central Government guidance on adult social care services and the people we support, including a review of the closure of day services which remain temporarily closed. We are maintaining contact with the most vulnerable people and their carers and ensuring their needs are being met in alternative ways and they are safe. Officers are working with partners across the BNSSG to support hospital discharge pathways, using discharge to assess models to get people home from hospital quickly, and to make sure they get the support needed to recover.

In partnership with system colleagues, the Council is working on an action plan for supporting care homes in Bristol and is continuing to coordinate the response to the Government's Care Home Support Package to support care providers and keep people in care homes safe, including the allocation of the new adult social care infection control fund. The Council's Directors of Public Health (DPH) and Adult Social Services (DASS) are overseeing joint work including the temporary restructure of commissioning and contracting teams to collect and review intelligence from and about care homes, and to support the care sector. As part of this work, officers are developing of a joint action plan for COVID-19 testing. At the time of writing, the service is aware

of 45 services in Bristol with current Covid-19 outbreaks (40 are within care home settings, 3 within Extra Care Housing and 2 within Supported Living).

We continue to ensure that care providers (internal and external to the Council) and Direct Payment recipients, have access to the required PPE and it has been agreed that the Council will be able to source a stock of PPE for providers which they can purchase. The ASC commissioning team formed a PPE sub-group that has, since the beginning of April, delivered 120,000 PPE items to care homes, fulfilling all requests received. The Council is also part of a cross-BNSSG mutual aid system to support NHS and social care providers in need of PPE and continue to champion an approach with system partners to help provide a stable supply to the sector by purchasing larger quantities of PPE.

At the time of writing, the emergency payments made by Adult Social Care of £9.37m were funded from the first tranche of central government funding paid to the Council at the beginning of April. Spending proposals may vary depending on changes in demand, and additional costs and loss of income incurred during this pandemic period, which exceed this initial allocation. The service may therefore require a further drawdown on the second tranche of central government funding allocated to the Council and this is being kept under review.

## **5. Domestic Abuse**

Though the police levels of reporting have remained broadly static there has been a significant rise in calls to Next Link and Victim Support (our Domestic Abuse Service providers). The Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership Domestic Abuse Response group meets weekly and reports to the Community Safety Cell. Its purpose is to monitor any escalation and demand for service provision, discuss management of high risk victims and perpetrators and to review Comms.

Six additional Safe House spaces have been temporarily acquired by Next Link and the Housing team have been successfully working to free up further spaces in Safe House by providing direct offers to families so that they can move into more permanent accommodation. The local communications campaign work “Are You Ok?” is being developed and will be launched shortly.

## **6. Public Health; Schools**

Central government has announced additional funding for councils to support their role in the COVID-19 test and trace service in England. The funding is to develop tailored outbreak control plans, working with local NHS and other stakeholders. At the time of writing, details on how this funding will be allocated has not yet been published but the Council will need to develop a local control plan in June ahead of further phases of the national infection control framework being implemented. Government has indicated local plans are to be centred around 7 themes:

- Planning for local outbreaks in care homes and schools
- Identifying and planning how to manage other high-risk places, locations and communities of interest including sheltered housing, dormitories for migrant workers, transport access points
- Identifying methods for local testing to ensure a swift response that is accessible to the entire population
- Assessing local and regional contact tracing and infection control capability in complex settings
- Integrating national and local data and scenario planning through the Joint Biosecurity Centre
- Supporting vulnerable local people to get help to self-isolate
- Establishing governance structures led by existing Covid-19 Health Protection Boards.

Bristol’s Director of Public Health will be responsible for defining these measures and producing the plan for the city working through Covid-19 Health Protection Boards.

Following a series of guidance documents from central Government, school leaders have started to undertake comprehensive risk assessments, to understand what can be achieved in each school or setting ahead of phased re-opening of schools from June 1<sup>st</sup>.

The Council believes this is not a binary issue where the national announcement will be correct for every school or every child. We accept that there are some schools in which the safety guidelines can be met, and we will support those that can open from 1 June. We equally accept that many will not be able to achieve that, and we support schools in their decision making. A model risk assessment and equalities impact assessment (EQIA) has been circulated to all schools to help with preparation for returning. Local authority-maintained schools will also submit an EQIA return to confirm this has been completed, and visits from our Health and Safety team will operate through June to review school plans.