


Agenda Item No:	5	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	12 May 2020	
Report Title:	COVID-19 Update Report	

Cover sheet:

1 Purpose / Summary

- To update Cabinet on the actions taken by the Council to date in dealing with implications of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2 Key issues

- The Coronavirus or COVID-19 epidemic has spread rapidly throughout the world causing over 200,000 deaths to date.
- The impact of COVID-19 is increasingly evident across the UK. Fenland is also feeling that impact.
- At the start of this pandemic, the Council quickly mobilised its business continuity arrangements in preparedness to deal with COVID-19. These plans have ensured that key services have continued to function with the minimum amount of disruption.
- By working as one unified member and officer team, this Council is doing everything in its powers to positively respond to the Governments call to arms in providing every possible support to our communities, their residents, and our highly valued local businesses.

3 Recommendations

- Cabinet is asked to note the content of this report.

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Chris Boden - Leader of the Council
Report Originator(s)	Paul Medd - Chief Executive Jo Blackmore - Executive Officer
Contact Officer(s)	Paul Medd - Chief Executive Carol Pilson - Corporate Director Peter Catchpole - Corporate Director Jo Blackmore - Executive Officer
Background Paper(s)	N/A

1 Background / introduction

- 1.1 The Coronavirus or COVID-19 was first diagnosed in December 2019 within China. Since that time it has spread rapidly to the extent that the World Health Organisation (WHO) has classified it as a pandemic. People have now been infected in 185 countries with over 20,000 fatalities in the UK alone. Globally the number of deaths is thought to be well in excess of 200,000 with figures continuing to rise every day.
- 1.2 The impact of COVID-19 is increasingly evident across the UK. Fenland is also feeling that impact. It is affecting our physical and mental health, our movements and our economy. It is impacting on all aspects of daily life.
- 1.3 At the start of this pandemic, the Council quickly mobilised its business continuity arrangements in preparedness to deal with COVID-19. These plans have ensured that key services have continued to function with the minimum amount of disruption.
- 1.4 This report gives a detailed account of the work that has been carried out by the Council to support our local residents, our businesses and our workforce during these incredibly challenging times.


2 Community Support - C19 Hub

- 2.1 The C19 Hub was set up on 25 March to provide assistance to the most vulnerable members of our local community. With many residents being advised to stay at home due to their age or underlying health conditions, the Council set up the C19 Hub to link community volunteers to those who needed assistance.
- 2.2 Volunteers contacting the Fenland C19 Hub are initially signposted to the county wide COVID-19 coordination hub where they receive guidance on how to stay safe whilst volunteering, safeguarding information and other relevant volunteering advice. They are then matched with relevant volunteering opportunities in their local area.
- 2.3 The C19 Hub is staffed by a range of Council workers who manage the offers of help from volunteers, thereby maximising support for local communities. As well as signposting access to food, medicines and other supplies, the C19 Hub also organises friendly phone calls to help reduce feelings of loneliness. By liaising with active voluntary and community groups in the district, the Council is helping to ensure that resident's needs, including health and social care, are met as quickly and efficiently as possible.
- 2.4 Since the opening of the C19 Hub on 25 March to close of play on 27 April, 1,353 requests for service have been received and signposting has been given to services available
- 2.5 As well as answering incoming enquiries, the C19 Hub has been proactive in contacting residents who may need help. By liaising with partners and voluntary organisations, they have been targeting those households who may be in need of assistance. This includes sending letters to:
 - 730 families on either Early Years Pupil Premium or who qualify for the funded 2 year old programme
 - 370 families receiving support through Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) children and families early help caseworkers

- 880 vulnerable adults who recently have received a service from adult social care
 - 12,000 residents who are aged 70 or over
- 2.6 The Council has been successful (working with CCC) in receiving £5k for hardship calls to the FDC or County wide hub for issues such as:
- essential food provisions for those with special dietary requirements/allergy needs
 - baby/child formula/foods
 - non-prescribed medicines
 - personal hygiene products
 - emergency energy top ups
 - landline/mobile credit top ups
 - emergency hot meals
 - Optical (payment assistance for glasses/contact lenses)
 - Hearing aids/assistance
 - Emergency household maintenance - plumbing, electrics, batteries, lightbulbs etc. (B&Q currently selling essential items only to public – click & collect service)
- If you need help during the **coronavirus** outbreak, please contact us on:

☎ **01354 654321**

✉ **covid19@fenland.gov.uk**


#reachout
- 2.7 Anyone who needs help can contact the C19 Hub on 01354 654321 or email: covid19@fenland.gov.uk. The C19 Hub is open between 9am and 4pm, Monday to Friday and 9am to 12 noon on Saturdays.

3 Delivery of key services

Refuse and Cleansing

- 3.1 All refuse, recycling, garden waste and cleansing services have been delivered since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak. This achievement by frontline staff is all the more impressive due to waste and recycling levels increasing over recent weeks along with the number of residents subscribing to the Garden Waste Service (20,300 subscriptions are now in place).
- 3.2 There has been an overall increase of 17% in the total amount of refuse collected which includes a 12% increase in dry recycling and a 36% increase in garden waste. Staff have cancelled leave bookings and worked on their allocated days off to keep the service running as smoothly as possible.
- 3.3 Levels of fly-tipping remain similar to historic figures and litter has reduced in some areas as a result of the lockdown measures.
- 3.4 Our Commercial Waste Service has continued to offer waste and recycling collections to the 60% of our commercial customers who remain operational.

Homelessness and Rough Sleepers

- 3.5 The directive received from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on 25 March stated that Councils were required to provide self-contained accommodation for all rough sleepers and those living in shared bedrooms (e.g. night shelter).
- 3.6 Bed and breakfast accommodation was sourced in Wisbech and Peterborough to meet demand. This vulnerable client group are being further supported through

the provision of food on a weekly basis in partnership with 'Change, Grow, Live' (CGL) support workers and Ferry Project teams.

Customer Services and Contact Centre

- 3.7 In line with Government advice, the Council has temporarily closed its Customer Service Centres and Hubs (in local libraries). However, the Customer Contact Centre remains open for 6 days of the week to support local residents and businesses.
- 3.8 This year, the Customer Contact Centre also remained open on Good Friday, Easter Saturday and the Easter Monday bank holiday. During that period, Customer Services colleagues were successfully able to support 94 local residents.
- 3.9 As well as dealing with the incoming Council enquiries, staff in the Customer Contact Centre have also been assisting with an outbound call campaign in relation to contacting companies that have yet to submit documentation for the Small Business Grant Scheme and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Scheme. Action Fraud have reported a 400% increase in Coronavirus scams during March 2020 and so some businesses are understandably suspicious of financial scams at this already difficult time. The Council is doing whatever it can to ensure that all those businesses that may be entitled to the grants have the opportunity to access the financial support available.

Environmental Health

- 3.10 The Council's Environmental Health team continue to carry out work which protects the public, businesses and environment from harm.
- 3.11 The Corona Virus (Business Closure) Regulations gave direct responsibility to Environmental Health staff to investigate and apply any business closure requirements. The essence of the regulations is to protect health and reduce the spread of the virus whilst enabling essential products to be on sale safely. In addition, the requirement for social distancing in retail and other outlets became enforceable under health and safety legislation.
- 3.12 At least 150 reports of businesses either breaching the regulations or not having regard to social distancing have been received and responded to. Advice and support has been offered in a pragmatic way to ensure where businesses can continue to trade they are supported to do so compliantly.
- 3.13 A number of calls have been received regarding gatherings in public locations. A protocol has been agreed with Police colleagues and close working enables these matters to be reported to the police who are monitoring and attending where possible.

Communications

- 3.14 The Council is continuing to follow and publicise national Government and Public Health England (PHE) advice and guidance in respect of COVID-19.
- 3.15 The latest information is being shared through the Council's COVID-19 web page at www.fenland.gov.uk/coronavirus and the Council's social media accounts. Council news and service information relating to COVID-19 is also being heavily publicised.
- 3.16 As well as sharing key Government messages with the public, the Council is also working hard to signpost residents and businesses to the help available as well as sharing 'good news' stories in these difficult times.

- 3.17 In total, the Council has received 20,074 Coronavirus page views since its launch on 9 March 2020 to 1 May 2020.
- 3.18 The Council has publicised 32 press releases informing residents, businesses and local media of the latest council updates and services relating to COVID-19.
- 3.19 Over 139 Facebook posts have been created along with 247 Twitter posts from the Council's social media accounts. These include information on Council services and news updates. This is in addition to sharing Government national campaigns and relevant partner information.
- 3.20 Staff communications and updates are circulated on a daily basis via emails and the intranet.

Corporate Meetings

- 3.21 The current social distancing measures and shielding advice has inevitably impacted on Council meetings. However, work is progressing on establishing a schedule of revised meeting dates for both the current and the next municipal year.
- 3.22 Corporate meetings will continue but will be conducted in the appropriate manner (i.e. virtually) until the point in time that restrictions are sufficiently relaxed.

Other Council Services

- 3.23 Many other council services continue to be delivered in line with the current restrictions. For example, homelessness advice is still being given, Local Plan preparations continue, and planning applications are still being processed.
- 3.24 IT staff have been instrumental in quickly and efficiently arranging for a large percentage of the workforce to work remotely and Procurement and Building Facilities staff continue to ensure buildings are safe and secure, with the appropriate PPE and cleansing products made available.
- 3.25 'Back office' staff are continuing with 'business as usual' wherever possible to assist with the current crisis as well as ensuring that the Council is in a good position to begin the long and complex recovery stage of the pandemic.

Customer Appreciation

- 3.26 Customers continue to show their support for our frontline services through messages in windows, notes on bins and social media posts. This includes the work carried out by our Refuse and Cleansing crews as well as the help offered to local residents through the Council's COVID-19 hub.





Fenland District Council



Published by Amy Amps [?] · April 22 at 10:54 AM · 🌐

We have a new addition to our refuse crews! What a wonderful little fellow knitted by a local resident 🥰

Welcome to the rounds Keyworker Bear! 🐻

#keyworkers #binmen #thankyou



4,061

People Reached

783

Engagements

Boost Post

👍❤️ 207

15 Comments 13 Shares

👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share



4 Business support

Business Grants

- 4.1 The Government has announced a package of support for businesses which includes a Small Business Grant Fund and a Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund. The Council is administering the funding for both of these schemes.
- 4.2 As of 1 May 2020, the Council has so far paid out £13.855m worth of the Government grants. A total of 1,240 grants have been paid to around 71% of eligible businesses. This comprises of 1,040 Small Businesses and 200 Retail, Hospitality & Leisure grants. The total number of grants paid (1,240) represents 92% of all grant forms registered. Updated information will be reported verbally at the Cabinet meeting on 12 May at which this report will be tabled.
- 4.3 Taking into account responses received and being processed but not yet paid, there remains around 30% of eligible businesses still to respond. These are being actively approached by officers to encourage more responses. Actions include:
- additional press releases and social media coverage
 - follow up direct email and letter
 - direct telephone calls to businesses
 - the publishing of case studies from successful businesses (to explain how simple the process is and to dispel 'myths')
 - the determination of complex cases, which might be delayed because the records held by FDC do not match the claims.

Fenland District Council
Published by Amy Amps [?] · April 22 at 2:04 PM · 🌐

💬 "I found the whole process of claiming a grant so easy and the money was in my bank account less than a week after claiming. It's taken a lot of the pressure off so thank you. I would encourage other businesses to get their claims in, there's no catch and it can really help you get through these worrying times," Jude Stagg, The Cutting and Beauty Rooms, Wisbech.

! If your business is eligible for a business support grant, don't delay. Claim today to get the funding you're entitled to.

📺 More info: <https://fenland.gov.uk/.../Fenland-businesses-urge-others-to->

...

The Cutting and Beauty Rooms

4,969 People Reached 650 Engagements Boost Post

👍❤️ 26 2 Comments 21 Shares

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

- 4.4 The Government published the latest performance information in relation to the payment of grants on 27 April and FDC is located within the mid-table. This position reflects the stance taken by FDC in balancing the swift payment of grants with proportional due diligence to detect and avoid fraudulent claims and minimise the need for recovery action.

Business Information Hub

- 4.5 The Council's Economic Growth Team are offering support to local businesses via the Fenland for Business website. The website enables businesses 'open' during the crisis to share information with customers and other businesses by completing a very brief form (www.fenlandforbusiness.co.uk/coronavirus). At the time of writing there are 70 businesses registered from across the district and the number is growing daily.
- 4.6 Other work currently being carried out includes:
- Promoting the availability of Business Information Hub pages to businesses and the public.
 - Providing advice and signposting to businesses looking for support.
 - Engaging the Job Centre Plus and large employers who are seeking to recruit employees to supplement key sectors, such as food, logistics and agriculture, particularly from businesses that have had to 'lay-off' or 'furlough' staff.
 - Gathering intelligence from businesses that are identifying issues such as transport or travel restrictions for staff or reduced labour supply to the food and agri-sectors
 - Sharing this intelligence with key partners, such as the CPCA Economic Recovery Group and through the Local Resilience Forum, where appropriate



Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) Economic Recovery Group

- 4.7 Discussions have begun to ensure a co-ordinated approach to economic recovery across the CPCA area the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic. Officers from local

authorities are working together to establish an understanding of what is currently happening in each area, identifying patterns and sharing best practice.

4.8 Actions going forward include:

- Commissioning external consultants to carry out a rapid assessment of the immediate impact of COVID-19 on the economy of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough
- Assessing the likely resilience of the local economy over the medium to longer term
- Providing advice on short, medium and long term priorities for local partners to support people and businesses through this period of turbulence.

CPCA COVID-19 Capital Grant scheme

4.9 The CPCA have set up a Capital Grant Scheme to provide a flexible capital subsidy to help Registered Limited Companies in these challenging times. However, an overwhelming number of applications have been received. The scheme and is now oversubscribed and has subsequently closed.

4.10 The CPCA is assessing and approving applications in approximately 7 days from receipt and is looking to allocate against a budget of £5.9m.

Better Business for All (BBFA)

4.11 The BBFA group was established before this crisis developed and its purpose is to bring Compliance Teams (Environmental Health & Licensing) together with Economic Growth/Development Teams within Councils across Cambridgeshire & Peterborough. The BBFA group will meet virtually, as regularly as is necessary, but continue to share important intelligence and trend information, enabling FDC Teams to respond where issues are identified.

5 Workforce support

5.1 The Council's workforce is continuing to deliver key services despite numerous challenges both at work and at home. Staff are working from home wherever possible with a small core team of staff continuing to work in Council offices whilst adhering to social distancing guidelines. The implementation of 'split teams' in key services will help to ensure ongoing business continuity.

5.2 A number of staff (currently 25) have been redeployed from their substantive roles to support other key services such as the Covid-19 Community Support Call Centre.

5.3 Daily communications are being shared with staff advising them of any corporate developments, reminding them of the Government's social distancing guidelines and sharing positive feedback from Members and the public. Guidance for dealing with challenging work and homelife situations are also circulated regularly including tips for working safely and efficiently at home, as well as ways to keep physically and mentally healthy.

5.4 In line with Government guidelines, staff are being asked to self-isolate if they, or members of their household, are displaying any symptoms of the COVID-19 virus. To date these figures have generally been low – the total number of staff self-isolating on any one day is usually under 10.

5.5 There are also 52 members of staff who are absent on medical advice from the NHS, however the majority of these (44) are home-worker enabled. Other

redeployment work streams are being considered for the small minority who are shielding but not currently working from home.

6 Financial Implications

- 6.1 The COVID-19 epidemic will inevitably result in financial implications for the Council, as well as our local communities, the UK and the rest of the world. We continue to monitor the situation carefully and are building up data ready for the next return due to be completed and sent to the MHCLG during May.
- 6.2 The return is to help departments across Central Government understand the financial impact, both direct and indirect of the COVID-19 pandemic on local authorities. This, they state, is for planning purposes; to help government identify where the greatest pressures are likely to be going forward and to inform their ongoing assessment of likely future costs. The information provided by local authorities will not be used for reporting or auditing purposes.
- 6.3 The financial implications for the Council are across a variety of spending pressures, income reductions and cash flow issues. Virtually every service provided by the Council has been impacted to varying degrees. These are currently being assessed but it is inevitable that, net of any potential funding from government, there will be a significant cost to this Council over and above current budgets for this financial year. A budget update report will be presented to Council shortly which will identify the likely impact and the use of reserves to fund any shortfall this year. There will almost certainly be an ongoing impact on the Council's finances and the MTFS.
- 6.4 Government support at the moment consists of the following:
- a) £65,197 grant funding from the initial £1.6bn emergency grant funding for local authorities. The majority of this funding was allocated to authorities with Adult Social Care responsibilities. On 18 April, the government announced a further £1.6bn funding package to provide additional funding for District's. Our allocation was announced on 28th April 2020 and totalled £1,023,768.
 - b) £8,250 grant from the £3.2m COVID-19 rough sleeper contingency fund. We have subsequently applied for additional funding of £211k to fund 49 rough sleepers/night shelter clients for a period of 12 weeks.
 - c) to assist with cash flow, the government has announced the following:
 - a deferral for 3 months of payment of their share of business rates income due (as determined by the NNDR 1 return, completed in January 2020). This has moved £3.3m of payments due to government in April-June to later in the year.
 - S31 grant due for the year for reimbursement of business rates relief, £1.5m, has been paid in full rather than in monthly instalments. Local authorities are due another substantial grant payment to reimburse them for the cost of the Expanded Retail, Hospitality and Leisure relief scheme. This S31 grant reimburses local authorities for the loss of business rates as a result of additional reliefs given to businesses. Due to the way business rates is accounted for, the impact on the Council's budget is spread over two years but there is no overall impact on the bottom line.
- 6.5 At the time of writing, the amount of Council Tax payments received by the Council is currently £5,296,529. Compared with April 2019 and including an average increase of 3.16% (across all precepting authorities), the amount collected would normally be around £5,870,150 (so around £570,000 less than expected).

Consequently, based on the limited evidence received so far, the Council is seeing an approximate 10% reduction in Council Tax collected at this point in the year.

- 6.6 It will be several months before estimates can be made to calculate the impact for the whole year but this 10% reduction is likely to increase. This will have a significant impact on the Council's cash flow over the year as it is obliged to continue to pay the preceptors their share of Council Tax irrespective of whether or not it has been collected. The impact on the Collection Fund, which is likely to have a significant deficit at the year end, as a result of an increased bad debts provision (the Council's share is around 16%), will impact on the authority's general fund budgets in 2021/22. To what extent the Government may assist to mitigate this impact remains to be seen. The Council have options in place to help financially affected customers including re-profiling of instalments and use of a hardship fund from government to further assist working age customers in receipt of council tax support. Recovery action, although ongoing, will be softened to encourage customers to contact us to discuss their options.
- 6.7 At the same time as announcing the allocations of the additional £1.6bn of funding to local authorities on 28 April, the Government confirmed (as had been widely expected) that the Review of Relative Needs and Resource (Fair Funding Review) and 75% business rates retention will no longer be implemented in 2021-22. This is to allow councils to focus on meeting the immediate public health challenge posed by the pandemic.
- 6.8 The Government will continue to work with councils on the best approach to the next financial year, including how to treat accumulated business rates growth and the approach to the 2021-22 local government finance settlement.

7 Recovery Phase

- 7.1 Staff are already planning for the recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, so far as is possible with the limited information available on how and when lock down restrictions will be lifted.
- 7.2 Plans will be coordinated with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Resilience Forum (CPLRF) who already have several recovery work streams in place.
- 7.3 As always, the Council will look to work with partner organisations to deliver efficient and effective services. This partnership working will be essential during the complex recovery phase of this global pandemic.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 These are unprecedented times and the impact of COVID-19 is profound. However, by working as one unified member and officer team this Council is doing everything in its powers to positively respond to the Governments call to arms in providing every possible support to our communities, their residents, and our highly valued local businesses.



HM Government

NHS

Coronavirus Got symptoms – even mild ones?

DO NOT leave the house at all for 7 days.

EVERYONE else in your household must not
leave the house for 14 days.

STAY HOME ▶ PROTECT THE NHS ▶ SAVE LIVES