


Agenda Item No:	6	
Committee:	Overview & Scrutiny	
Date:	8 June 2020	
Report Title:	COVID-19 Update Report	

Cover sheet:

1 Purpose / Summary

- To update the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 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 350,000 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

- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee 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 213 countries with over 37,000 fatalities in the UK alone. Globally the number of deaths is thought to be well in excess of 350,000 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 over 90 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 25 May, 1,832 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
 - 16,500 households from Anglia Revenue Partnership (ARP) benefit data assessed as may be experiencing hardship
- 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 (21,655 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. The number of commercial customers using this service is likely to increase over the coming weeks as more businesses reopen.
- 3.5 The reopening of household waste sites is reported to have gone well by County Council colleagues with customers managing their trips and social distancing requirements with few problems

- 3.6 FDC's Bulky Waste Collection service has now also resumed, offering residents another option for safe disposal of large waste items.

Homelessness and Rough Sleepers

- 3.7 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).
- 3.8 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

- 3.9 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 and has increased its hours of operation to six days a week now including Saturday mornings in order to support local residents and businesses.
- 3.10 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.
- 3.11 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

- 3.12 The Council's Environmental Health team continue to carry out work which protects the public, businesses and environment from harm.
- 3.13 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 quickly became enforceable under health and safety legislation.
- 3.14 Since the regulations came into force in late March more than 200 reports of businesses either breaching the regulations or not having regard to social distancing have been received and responded to. The service has responded positively ensuring regular updates to business operators and pragmatic advice ensuring where businesses can continue to trade they are supported to do so compliantly. Many businesses evolved their business models, for example from food catering to take away, so they may continue to trade. The advice given by council staff has been important during this period of change.
- 3.15 No formal enforcement action has been required although a low number of warnings have been given and partnership work with the police has enabled a

swift response to wider community concerns. This work will continue as the closure regulations are lifted and businesses open again.

- 3.16 There has been a 5 fold increase (March / April 2019 compared to 2020) in service requests relating to statutory nuisance and public health ranging from noise and burning to vermin control. This is a national issue and may be related to more time being spent within the home. All calls were responded to, 90% within the target of 5 days. Some cases received a written response only due to the nature of the matter and the urgency of response required.

Communications

- 3.17 The Council is continuing to follow and publicise national Government and Public Health England (PHE) advice and guidance in respect of COVID-19.
- 3.18 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.
- 3.19 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.
- 3.20 In total, the Council has received 23,000 Coronavirus page views since its launch on 9 March 2020 to 22 May 2020.
- 3.21 The Council has publicised 41 press releases informing residents, businesses and local media of the latest council updates and services relating to COVID-19.
- 3.22 Over 206 Facebook posts have been created along with 347 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.
- 3.23 Staff communications and updates are circulated on a daily basis via emails and the intranet.
- 3.24 We have also included a front page advertising strip and the entire back page spread in the Fenland Citizen highlighting the Council's latest Covid news updates for our residents and businesses. Articles were included in the 6, 13 and 27 May, with the final advert programmed in for 3 June.

Corporate Meetings

- 3.25 The current social distancing measures and shielding advice has inevitably impacted on Council meetings. A schedule of revised meeting dates has successfully been agreed for both the current and the next municipal year.
- 3.26 Corporate meetings continue and more recently have been successfully conducted virtually. Virtual meetings will remain in place until the point in time that restrictions are sufficiently relaxed. This ensures that local decision making continues in a timely and effective manner whilst ensuring that we do not place local residents, staff or elected members at risk.

Other Council Services

- 3.27 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. A number of public consultations are live, such as the 3 year public review of public

space protection orders for dog control, and market traders selling essential items remained open.

- 3.28 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.
- 3.29 '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

- 3.30 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 22 May 2020, the Council has so far paid out £17.115m worth of the Government grants. A total of 1,530 grants have been paid to around 87% of eligible businesses. This comprises of 1,248 Small Businesses and 282 Retail, Hospitality & Leisure grants. The total number of grants paid (1,530) represents 97% of all grant forms registered. Updated information will be reported verbally at the meeting at which this report will be tabled.
- 4.3 Taking into account responses received and being processed but not yet paid, there remains just 10% 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
 - sharing of this information with Members to gain their insight
 - 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 In addition to the Small Business Grant Fund and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund schemes, Officers are working on the criteria and payment process for the recently announced Discretionary Grant Fund scheme. This scheme is aimed predominately at smaller businesses who were ineligible for the earlier Business Grant schemes, it is anticipated that the Discretionary Business Grant scheme will go live in early June.

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 almost 120 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 Collaborative works include the coordination of the Discretionary Business Grant schemes that will operate in each District area and the potential to supplement funding streams via the CPCA, but also 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 5.
- 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 submitted a return to MHCLG on the 15 May 2020. Initial numbers submitted show a total impact totalling circa £4m on our budget and this is made up of approx. £2m of lost income and £2m of additional costs. To date as detailed in 6.4a) below we have received funding of £1.088m to mitigate this. A full update on the budget will be presented to Full Council in August.
- 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. Total received to date £1,088,965.
 - b) £8,250 grant from the £3.2m COVID-19 rough sleeper contingency fund. We subsequently applied for additional funding of £211k to fund 49 rough sleepers/night shelter clients for a period of 12 weeks. However, we have now been informed by government that this funding will now not be forthcoming.
 - 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 also receiving substantial monthly grant payments 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 The amount of Council Tax payments received by the Council in April 2020 was £5,310,152 compared with a target of £5,959,696 (so around £650,000 less than expected). This represents an approximate 12% reduction in Council Tax collected in April 2020.
- 6.6 It will be several months before estimates can be made to calculate the impact for the whole year but this 12% 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 (this Council's allocation is £907,222). 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 has also announced that the Business Rates Revaluation due in April 2021 has been postponed to help reduce uncertainty for firms affected by the impact of coronavirus.
- 6.9 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. The current Government advice remains that staff should work from home where possible, which the Council will maintain. In preparation for the potential next stages, officers will need to complete health and safety risk assessments in all areas of the organisation to ensure compliance with all new requirements. In the meantime, the Council continues to delivery all services to our Communities via alternative channels.
- 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.



The poster features a woman coughing into her elbow against a red and orange background. The NHS logo is in the top right. The main text reads 'CORONAVIRUS GOT SYMPTOMS? GET TESTED'. Below this, it lists symptoms: 'HIGH TEMPERATURE OR NEW CONTINUOUS COUGH OR LOSS OF TASTE OR SMELL?'. Further text states: 'No one in your household should leave home if any one person has symptoms. Find out how to get a test, and how long to isolate, at nhs.uk/coronavirus'. At the bottom, a yellow and black striped banner contains the text 'STAY ALERT > CONTROL THE VIRUS > SAVE LIVES'. The HM Government logo is in the top left.

HM Government

NHS

**CORONAVIRUS
GOT SYMPTOMS?
GET TESTED**

**HIGH TEMPERATURE
OR NEW CONTINUOUS COUGH
OR LOSS OF TASTE OR SMELL?**

No one in your household should leave home if any one person has symptoms.
Find out how to get a test, and how long to isolate, at nhs.uk/coronavirus

STAY ALERT > CONTROL THE VIRUS > SAVE LIVES