

## **Wiltshire Council**

### **Cabinet**

**19 May 2020**

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**Subject: Wiltshire Council's Response to COVID-19**

**Cabinet Member: Cllr Philip Whitehead, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Development**

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#### **Executive Summary**

Wiltshire Council has been playing an integral role in leading the local response to COVID-19, working with partners across the footprint of Wiltshire, to ensure that those most vulnerable in the community are supported, local businesses receive the government funding allocated to the county and critical council services can continue to deliver essential services during what is an unprecedented and rapidly changing incident.

This report sets out the public health data in respect to COVID-19 at a county level and provides a summary of the Council's response to date, the impact on services and an overview of the Council's current financial position.

Overall, Wiltshire Council has overseen a significant and timely response to the emerging threat of the pandemic in Wiltshire. This has involved the suspension of a number of services, the redeployment of staff to support the most vulnerable, extensive support to businesses and suppliers, strong partnership working with health and care and other agencies, a significant communications effort and close working with local communities and voluntary groups. Schools and early years settings have also been supported to rapidly adjust to new government guidance.

#### **Proposal(s)**

Cabinet is asked to

1. Note the update with respect to the response to COVID-19 and recognise the impact that it has had across Wiltshire on its residents, communities and businesses, the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector (VCSE), public sector partners and the Council itself.
2. Note the Section 151 officer's summary of the impact of COVID -19 on the council's 2020 / 2021 budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

3. Note the changes to local authority powers and duties introduced by the Coronavirus Act 2020 and supporting guidance.
4. Note the decisions taken by officers under delegated authority in Appendix 1
5. Thank local communities, the voluntary sector, businesses, strategic partners and education settings for their support during these unprecedented circumstances.
6. Acknowledge the significant and exceptional effort of staff working throughout the COVID-19 response.
7. Note that a further report will be presented in June, which will include additional information on the Council's response and recovery plans.

### **Reason for Proposal(s)**

These are unprecedented times for local government and this report provides Cabinet with an overview of the work both undertaken and ongoing by Wiltshire Council in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, together with the associated challenges and risks. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic will have immediate and undoubtedly long lasting significant financial implications for Wiltshire's economy, communities and residents as well as the Council itself.

**Terence Herbert, Chief Executive Officer, People**  
**Alistair Cunningham, Chief Executive Officer, Place**

## **Wiltshire Council**

### **Cabinet**

**19 May 2020**

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**Subject: Wiltshire Council's Response to Coronavirus**

**Cabinet Member: Cllr Philip Whitehead, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Development**

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### **Purpose of Report**

1. To provide an update on the impact of COVID-19 in Wiltshire and the Council's primary focus in responding to the incident together with the associated challenges and risk. The priorities outlined in the report will continue to provide the focus for response and support the Council's overall vision to create strong communities, through protecting the vulnerable, growing the economy and working innovatively and effectively.

### **Public Health Update**

2. COVID-19 is a disease resulting from a new strain of coronavirus that the World Health Organisation (WHO) identified as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHIEC) on 30 January. This was followed on 11 March when it declared COVID-19 as a pandemic, pointing to the 118,000 cases across 110 countries. The number of confirmed cases worldwide now exceeds 3.58m with 252,000 deaths.
3. As of 4:26pm on Sunday 10th May, 219,183 people in the UK had tested positive for COVID-19, and there have been 31,855 deaths of people who have had a positive test result. Further information available at <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/>
4. With specific respect to Wiltshire, the first 3 positive cases were identified on 5 March, and as of end of 10th May, 633 cases have tested positive for COVID-19. There have been 164 registered deaths involving Covid-19 in all settings. further information available at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/causesofdeath/datasets/deathregistrationsandoccurrencesbylocalauthorityandhealthboard>
5. Restrictions on public life were introduced on 23 March with UK residents being told to stay at home and only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only of those who can't work from home) in order to protect NHS staff and ensure that the demand can be managed. At the time of writing this report the country is still in lockdown with the Government extending the current measures for a further three weeks from 16 April.

## **Wiltshire's response to COVID 19**

6. Wiltshire and Swindon Local Resilience Forum (LRF) established the Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) involving all category 1 responders at the end of January and declared COVID-19 as a major incident on 19 March, with the agreed aim to provide a co-ordinated multi-agency response to mitigate the potential impacts of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). As of 5 May, the SCG has met 22 times.
7. In March, Wiltshire Council established a COVID 19 Gold group to oversee the Council's response, chaired by the CEOs and attended by Directors and other senior officers. A number of cells have also been established to lead on specific elements of response:
  - Health and Care Group
  - Community Resilience Hub
  - Education & Critical Workers
  - Public Health
  - Economy
  - Death Management
  - External Communications
  - Staffing & Organisation Resilience
  - Legal and Governance
  - Finance
8. The focus for the Council during this period of response has been to work innovatively and effectively to protect the vulnerable, support the economy and support and, where possible, mobilise staff for where they are most needed during these very challenging times.
9. The Wiltshire Wellbeing hub was established at the onset and has made contact with over 14,000 of Wiltshire's most vulnerable residents, worked with 450+ voluntary groups to distribute over 1000 food parcels and 129 batches of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and in conjunction with the Community Foundation which has distributed £150k in grants. This has been aided by the support of a Military officer. Over a million units of PPE have now been delivered to the Hub of which 30% goes to Swindon. Wiltshire's allocation is distributed to reablement staff and social workers, with the remaining Wiltshire stock distributed to care homes.
10. Initiating a Contact Centre providing advice and support to over 2300 Wiltshire businesses (7 days a week).
11. Designing and delivering a £100m grant process for 8500 eligible businesses, including mobilising a separate team who have identified and contacted 2500 eligible businesses who had not applied for the grant. As of 5 May this team has distributed £71m to 6000 businesses.
12. Designing and preparing to deliver a new £5m business grant scheme recently announced by government.

13. A multi-professional discharge flow hub has been established to act as a single point of access for discharge referrals and to triage patients to the most appropriate pathway. 234 people have been discharged from hospital via this pathway. As well as securing 50 additional Discharge to Assess beds in care homes; 47 care home places for COVID-19 patients; 1800 additional domiciliary care hours; 7 delirium beds. Planning to address latent health demands is also underway. It is and has been a cross-council effort.
14. Managing the construction of two temporary mortuaries capable of holding a total of 1000 bodies across Wiltshire and Swindon
15. The Council has completed a detailed analysis of the workforce to provide information on access to equipment, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearances, training in key areas (e.g. paediatric first aid) to enable us to contact relevant staff quickly and from this survey in excess of 375 staff have been redeployed to business-critical roles.
16. In line with Supplier relief guidance issued, the Council has worked hard to pay suppliers invoices promptly, or in advance, thereby ensuring cashflow to the Council's supply chain is maintained during this time. In April, over 21,600 invoices were settled, moving over 350 suppliers to immediate payment terms, paying around £100m. There has been particularly focus and specific arrangements with care market providers to recognise the increased demands and strain on the market during the pandemic.
17. An update will be provided to Cabinet in June, with further detail on performance measures; risk; reviews of capital programmes; plans for recovery; and emerging financial implications. It is clear that the pandemic poses a threat to the sustainability of council finances and Wiltshire Council will continue to work with other councils and MHCLG to ensure this is addressed as far as possible.

### **COVID 19 Legislation and guidance**

18. The Government has issued new legislation and extensive guidance to support local authorities with the vital work that we are doing to respond to the coronavirus pandemic whilst ensuring essential business and services continue. This includes the Coronavirus Act 2020 which was enacted on 25 March 2020.
19. The Act aims to support Government in:
  - Increasing the available health and social care workforce
  - Easing the burden on frontline staff
  - Containing and slowing the virus
  - Managing the deceased with respect and dignity
  - Supporting people
20. The new legislation is time-limited to two years, and not all of its measures come into force immediately. Many of the measures can be commenced from area to area and time to time, so as to ensure that the need to protect the public's health can be aligned with the need to safeguard individuals' rights. These measures

can subsequently be suspended and then later reactivated, if circumstances permit, over the lifetime of the Act. The lifetime of the Act can itself be shortened or extended if scientific evidence and circumstances require.

21. The aim is to make sure that these powers can be used both effectively and proportionately.
22. A summary of the most significant changes to local authority powers may be found via <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Changes%20to%20local%20authority%20powers%20and%20duties%20resulting%20from%20the%20Coronavirus%20Act%202020%20WEB.pdf>
23. In addition, the Government has issued extensive guidance on a wide range of issues which it has been necessary to assess and determine its application in the local context. This has been extremely challenging as the guidance has emerged and changed over time.
24. Details of the guidance issued may be found via <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/coronavirus-information-councils>

## **COVID-19 Cell Updates**

### Health & Care Group

25. Adult Social Care (ASC) has had to make significant changes at pace to respond to the challenges presented by COVID-19 and to safeguard vulnerable people.
26. In response to Government guidance on Hospital Discharge, the initial priority was to discharge as many people as possible from Acute Hospitals Trusts, Community Hospitals and Mental Health Trusts (AWP) into the community. The guidance included creating a 7-day single point of contact for all discharges and this was designed and implemented with health colleagues.
27. To meet the anticipated demand, 50 additional Discharge to Assess beds in care homes and 47 care home places for Covid+ patients were secured. An additional 1800 domiciliary care hours and 7 delirium beds were also secured. In order to support this extended bed base in the community the hospital social care teams were reshaped, and staff were into the community to support the redesigned discharge pathway.
28. Wiltshire Health and Care “home first” service has been integrated with Wiltshire Council’s reablement service to provide one reablement pathway, recruited additional staff and developed an integrated brokerage service with the CCG.
29. The Coronavirus Act enabled Care Act Easements - as yet the Council has not used the Easements but have used some of the permitted flexibilities mainly in response to some services not being available due to closure to comply with social distancing requirements, and also in response to some individuals cancelling support services as others (usually family members) are available to do this for them.

30. In order to achieve this, staff have had to change roles, work at pace and work effectively with colleagues in the NHS and voluntary sector and colleagues across the Council.
31. ASC quickly identified the risk to care homes and quickly increased support 7 days a week with the development of a support strategy which includes a dedicated help line and daily webinars, supply of PPE, support on Infection Control and additional funding.
32. The significant challenges ASC has faced have been enormous and made more challenging by a national rather than local response. The constantly changing guidance on PPE and testing, and the lack of supply of PPE and the unreliability of supply has caused additional stress for staff concerned about their own and their family's safety. The contradictions in the Coronavirus Act and the Ethical Guidance for Social Care, very unhelpful interventions from LGA/ADASS on funding for providers and a focus on Acute Trusts and not on care homes have all proved challenging.
33. The care home market is now increasingly fragile. In order to be financially sustainable, care homes need between 85-90% occupancy and currently some providers are seeing 30%+ vacancies in Wiltshire as a result of COVID related deaths and a reduction in demand. The role of the Council will continue to be significant in supporting and sustaining this market as we move into recovery.

#### Community Resilience Hub

34. The Community Resilience Hub cell has faced a number of challenges since the government requested Local Authorities to establish a hub to respond to vulnerable residents in Wiltshire. MHCLG guidance was initially limited, but numerous lists were sent directly to the LA. Interpreting and sorting the data was complex, requiring highly experienced analysts whom were diverted from other business.
35. There are 14,791 residents on the master list and almost 12,000 of these have received a telephone call from the hub. Data arrived on an ad-hoc basis which required the local authority to respond when the next batch of data would come through and thus had to be prepared to respond to the volume to assure ourselves that residents needs are met. The response was required immediately whilst also setting up a staff team, structures and processes for the hub.
36. We were initially asked to provide emergency food parcels to those in urgent need, so again had to respond at short notice, accepting the emergency food delivery from MHCLG with little notice. The delivery was poor quality and had to be substituted with food we quickly sourced ourselves over the weekend.
37. The hub has had to trouble shoot COVID-19 related issues so it has been important to manage expectations whilst ensuring queries and concerns have been responded to. Most of the issues raised have not been linked to the hub activity rather back to central government, most notable residents receiving unwanted weekly food parcels or concerned they couldn't get a priority supermarket delivery slot. Engagement with the supermarkets has been extremely difficult and not something which has been resolved although has

become less of an issue as time has moved on. Another challenge resolved working with the CCG and Wiltshire Pharmacies to find a solution to ensure controlled drugs could be safely delivered to residents' homes. Another challenge has been working to provide support to those without internet access particularly as we work to provide health and wellbeing support to residents who would normally access library and leisure facilities. There were inconsistencies in capacity across the county

38. In respect of supporting our most vulnerable children and adults the greatest challenge has been the reduction in referrals into adult and children's services. Most significantly contacts from schools and early years settings (reduced by 75%) reflecting the relatively low numbers of children currently attending these settings. Gathering timely and meaningful performance data across the partnership has also been difficult to obtain.
39. Children's social care have continued to deliver statutory services at the pre-COVID-19 levels, albeit using some creative and remote ways of working. However due to the concern about staffing capacity, new support assessments were put on hold for the initial period and are being reintroduced from 11th May 2020. We continue to work with partners to address the reduction in referrals and prepare for the predicted upturn in referrals post lockdown.
40. Further to the above, on the 23rd March Government instructed to "Get Everyone in" referring to rough sleepers. This instruction was made at the same time as the Government requiring closure of hotels and B&B although that was later relaxed if they were to be used for housing rough sleepers or key workers. To date over 60 rough sleepers have been accommodated, 11 rough sleepers refused offers of accommodation and 8 have been evicted due to anti-social behaviour.
41. The Housing service identified 1,887 households living in Council housing stock who were vulnerable. On the 25th March a programme of contacting all households by phone or welfare visit began. Everyone had been contacted by the 29th April and a follow up support and call back package has been in place since.
42. The neighbourhood cell which sits under the Community resilience hub, have been working in partnership with Wiltshire's Community Groups, Town and Parish Councils and a significant number of volunteers. The volunteers have been invaluable in helping our residents stay safe, access food and access medicines.
43. While we have been required to close Libraries and Leisure Centres our officers continue to ensure our residents have access to these services on line. Library membership has increased during lock down.

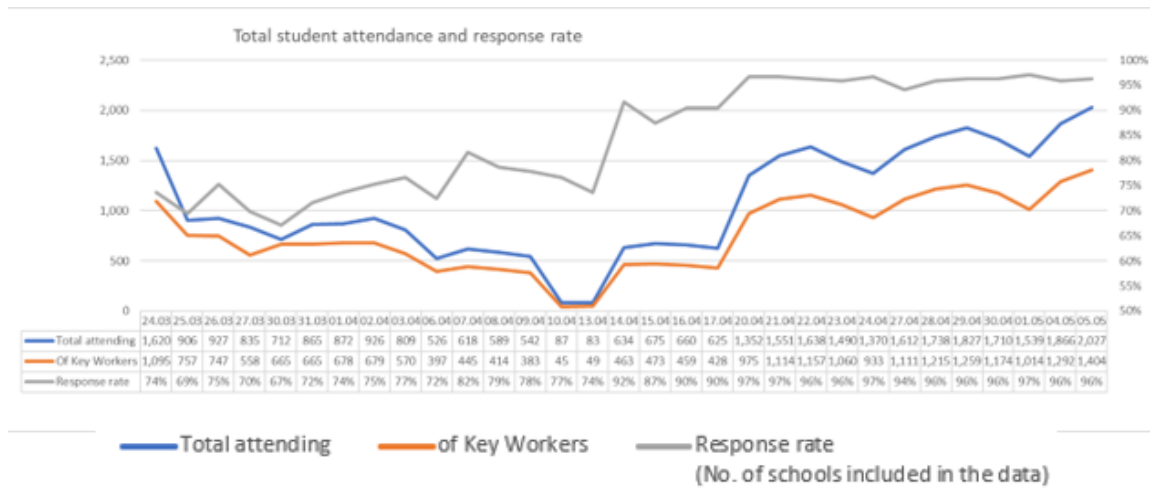
#### Education & Critical Workers

44. The cell has been addressing the immediate, medium and long-term implications following the announcement that educational establishments would close to the majority of children and young people, the cell has focussed on:
  - Ensuring sufficiency of places for children of critical workers and vulnerable children.

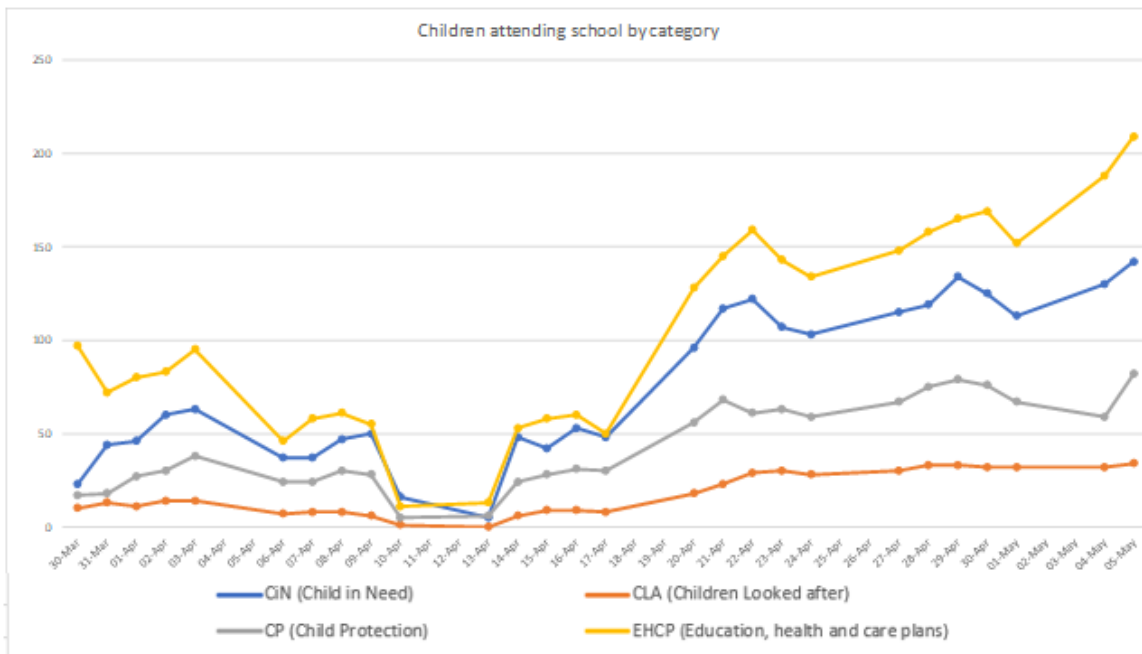


- Developing and supporting home-learning provision.
- Ensuring vulnerable children and young people attend, where safe to do so, and are safe.
- Ensuring those eligible for free-school meals are provided for.
- Ensuring children and young people with SEND (including and EHCP) are safe and accessing provision, where it is appropriate for them to do so.

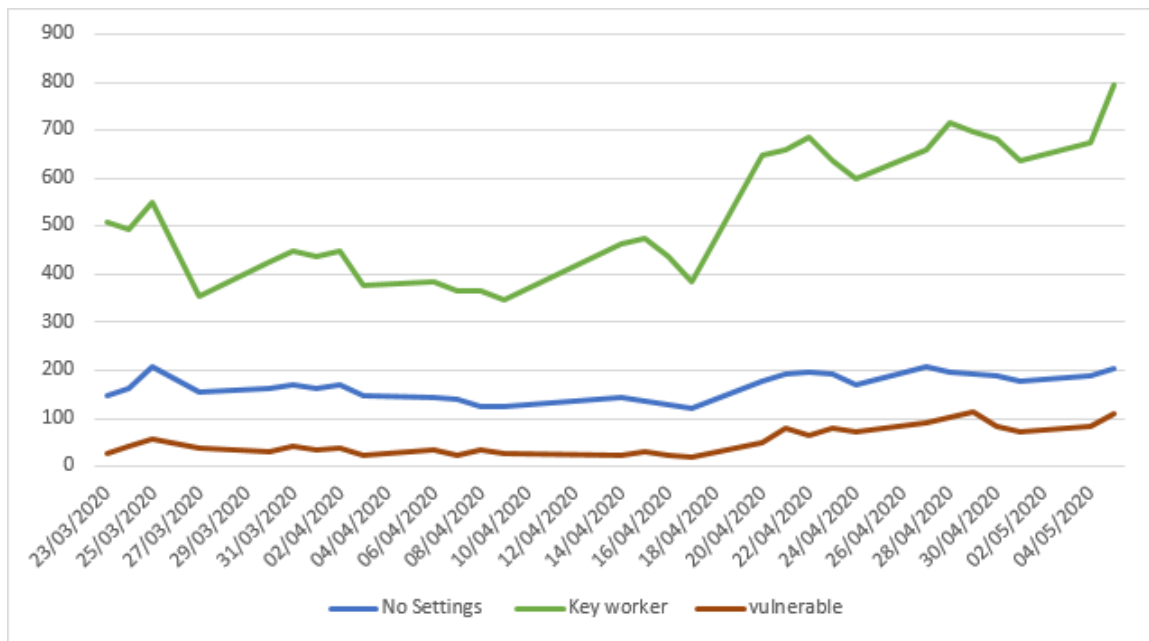
45. Over the period since the 23rd March, the places available to children and young people in schools has increased along with the numbers attending.



46. The numbers of vulnerable children attending schools has also increased.



47. The number of early years settings and children attending has also increased



48. Individual, multi-agency risk assessments were developed for all vulnerable children; this included those with a social worker, an EHCP or other vulnerability, to ensure they attended school if safe and appropriate for them to do so or were monitored at home by relevant professionals. To achieve this, health, social care and education had to redesign ways of working to adapt to the situation, over 3,500 risk assessments were created, a daily attendance return had to be designed and completed by all schools and settings on a daily basis. Schools and settings needed to adjust to new ways of working to ensure COVID safeguarding procedures were adhered to. The sufficiency of early years places needed to be addressed and settings needed support to access the range of financial options open to them. Home-learning resources were developed and shared freely via RightChoice. Communication with educational settings has been maintained throughout via a daily newsletter and a weekly newsletter for children.

49. The service continues to work to address the implications for capital projects, schools in financial difficulty, school admissions appeals, online access and personal education plans for looked after children. It will continue to support all settings with plans for the return of children once that is announced.

50. Child employment licensing arrangements were initially suspended however businesses have now been informed as to how they can apply for dispensation provided they meet clear criteria to ensure the child’s well-being is safeguarded and the child is able to work in safe conditions.

### Public Health

51. Public Health advised on the emerging science and national guidance and worked with services on their continuity plans. The early modelling work undertaken by Public Health informed the decisions the Council have made when dealing with response. Public Health set up an internal information hub to inform colleagues and mobilised staff to put in place early frameworks, deciphering emerging science and national guidance.

52. The Council established a risk register for Covid and ensured Business Continuity Plans were updated and in-line with emerging evidence.

### Economy Cell

53. The Economy Cell has focussed on:

- Accessing, advising and mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on the economy in Wiltshire;
- Daily meetings with central government (BEIS) to provide feedback on government policy and initiatives arising from COVID-19 and ensuring a two-way flow of information about issues businesses are facing and how these can be addressed;
- Setting up and running a partnership forum of economic infrastructure organisations across Wiltshire, meeting weekly.
- Provide workforce support to businesses (a team of 3.5 FTE being seconded to work within the SWLEP Growth Hub).
- Initiating a Contact Centre providing advice and support to over 2300 Wiltshire businesses (7 days a week).
- Designing and delivering a £100m grant process for 8500 eligible businesses, including mobilising a separate team who have identified and contacted 2500 eligible businesses who had not applied for the grant. As of 5 May this team has distributed £71m to 6000 businesses.
- Designing and preparing to deliver a new £5m business grant scheme recently announced by government.
- Communicating clear signposting and messaging about support for businesses.
- The determination of planning applications, Building Control applications and Land Charge Searches has also continued throughout lockdown, in order to support the economy.

54. The priority for the team moving forwards will be the transition from Response to Recovery. This will draw on local intelligence, further business support, additional grants and bidding and ensuring strong support for local workforces and communications.

### Death Management

55. The Death Management cell has led on the planning and delivering required places with funeral directors, mortuaries, crematoria, burial grounds and transport and ensure relevant ethical aspects are considered, and ensure the process is managed with dignity and respect for the deceased and their families across Wiltshire and Swindon.

56. The biggest challenge in planning for dealing with excess death has been the lack of credible forecasting nationally on numbers of COVID-19 deaths that may have to be managed. The initial predictions and modelling from various agencies produced numbers that varied significantly, sometimes by a factor of 10. The predictions could not be specific about the period in which excess death was likely to occur. Our planning was therefore based on an element of estimation but

backed up by advice from experts who deal with storage, transport and burial of the deceased in normal times.

57. The infrastructure put in place to deal with any excess death was planned and acquired during a period of high demand, as other local authorities were looking the same facilities at the same time. The task was however completed successfully and all the logistical challenges were overcome thanks to the hard work of the team involved, including a military planner.

### Communications

58. Since the outset of COVID-19 the Council has ensured that key messages are delivered in a co-ordinated, targeted and timely manner to the media, partners, councillors, businesses and the public.
59. This has included the design and distribution of a COVID-19 Community and Volunteers Pack and Community Groups Directory which has gained national recognition; approximately four Members Briefings a week; A large number of service-focused newsletters for COVID-19 for residents; (Communities, Business, Schools and Wellbeing); A hugely successful social media campaign, which has generated greatest reach of any Wiltshire Council campaign to date with a 7.6m cumulative reach; 121K COVID-19 webpage visits and 6,500 views of videos on YouTube with significant views directly on social media. Further details can be accessed via <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/public-health-coronavirus>

### Staffing and Organisation Resilience

60. The staffing and organisational resilience cell has been responsible for ensuring the workforce is mobilised to respond to COVID-19.
61. With a workforce approx. 4600, workforce data has been important in supporting the mobilisation and redeployment of staff. Daily "situation reports" created to provide a snapshot of service status have been completed by each head of service and have assisted with identifying staff who are not working or can be diverted to higher priority work.
62. A new COVID-19 policy was implemented fully on 24 March to support the redeployment of staff quickly. This has temporarily superseded some existing policies and was developed with the involvement of Trade Unions representatives, recognising that the successful application of this policy would only be possible through the goodwill, flexibility and commitment of our staff. The policy continues to be reviewed as the situation and national guidance changes, and further changes will be made if necessary.
63. Since the confirmation of the lockdown arrangements all staff, except those in essential services or doing essential work in the community, have been working from home and told not to come into their workplace until further notice. Guidance has been issued to staff about how to work effectively remotely and IT support is being provided as a priority to ensure employees can work from home.
64. There are numerous examples of staff redeployment, but the Community Wellbeing Hub required an initial and rapid response resulting in 75 staff

volunteers being assembled to make calls to vulnerable residents from 27 March until 9 April, including over the weekends. These staff volunteers gave reassurance that the workforce would respond when other issues of capacity needed to be addressed.

65. Subsequently there has been redeployment of nearly 400 staff to roles supporting essential services, including 86 staff currently supporting calls to and from the hub. Alongside this, many hundreds of the workforce have been undertaking other duties to ensure their services are providing the response needed. For example, staff from the Economic Development & Planning Directorate processing applications for business grants as part of a team of 80 staff doing this work. As part of the council's response many cases staff are working as part of a 7-day rota to ensure the response is provided over weekends and on bank holidays.
66. To prepare for increased demand 37 additional care support workers have been recruited with their training focused on the delivery of domiciliary care and condensed from 5 days to 2.5 days. Work with the health and care cell to develop domiciliary care support for care homes and care providers is likely to require this additional resource.
67. The cell is exploring opportunities to furlough income-funded staff, for example in leisure and City Hall who have not been redeployed, with advice from the office of the Minister of Housing, Communities and Local Government. The cell has also been co-ordinating COVID testing for all staff.
68. Work to identify specific workforce issues that may require additional focus to enable our staff to continue to perform during the ongoing challenges will continue and will support forward planning in preparation for the easing of lockdown restrictions and the anticipated surge in demand for some services. Timescales for returning to a steady state are yet unclear.
69. Further interventions to support the workforce have been:
  - a. A comprehensive staff welfare support offer, with a focus on the mental, emotional and physical wellbeing recognising the impact of COVID-19 on our staff and their families as well as the impact of current working arrangements. We are aware that some staff have struggled with this, particularly where they live alone or have caring responsibilities.
  - b. The roll out of Microsoft Teams which has enabled more 'virtual' face to face meetings and discussions and is supporting staff with the interaction needed with their managers and colleagues. This has been with training provided virtually or via videos, and nearly 1,200 staff have accessed this.
  - c. Regular communications have been key throughout the response and there has been a variety of ways in which these have been delivered to ensure staff receive the information they need as well as positive messages to maintain morale. As well as the usual manager wires and global messages this has included video logs by the senior leadership team and The Leader, a live CEO webinar for staff to ask questions and a range of staff engagement initiatives

including #CommunityHeroes, a social media campaign to highlight the great work of our staff in the response.

70. Work to develop a return to the workplace plan is now underway. This will take account of any reducing of restrictions and is anticipating that working at home will continue to be a requirement wherever possible.
71. An employee wellbeing and engagement survey has been launched with the aim of understanding the impact of the working arrangements during the response and to get information that can inform planning for the future phases of restrictions. It will be important that we maximise the learning and positives from current working arrangements as these will also support recovery and the further need for more agile working and the council's climate change ambitions.

### Legal, Democracy and Governance

72. The new legislation introduced in March to support the Government and local authorities in responding to the pandemic is covered in paragraphs 19-25 above. The legal team have been providing advice and support on a wide range of issues arising from COVID 19 and on the application of the Act and Government guidance in the local context.
73. Regulations made under the Act have enabled local authorities to hold council meetings remotely. This relaxation of the requirements for council meetings will apply up until 7 May 2021.
74. Arrangements have therefore been made for meetings of this Council, Cabinet and Committees to be held remotely to discharge essential business. Details are set out in Briefing Note 20-16  
<https://cms.wiltshire.gov.uk/ecSDDisplayClassic.aspx?NAME=SD4373&ID=4373&RPID=21765589&sch=doc&cat=13483&path=13483>.
75. Specific arrangements have been made for planning committee meetings to be held remotely. The Strategic Planning Committee is holding its first virtual meeting on 13 May 2020. Arrangements for area planning committees will be confirmed shortly.
76. Area Boards are not meeting formally, though Area Board Members are engaging with the public, community groups and parish councils with support from Community Engagement Managers. Urgent decisions, such as grant determinations, continue to be taken by the Leader, after consultation with the relevant Area Board Members. Other informal Area Board business, such as Community Area Transport Groups, Local Youth Networks, Health and Wellbeing Groups, ABC meetings may be conducted remotely where officer and Member resources allow. Arrangements are being made to ensure that the election of chairman and vice-chairman of Area Boards takes place as close as possible to the usual timeframe.
77. Local by-elections and other polls scheduled until 6 May 2021, including the Police and Crime Commissioner election, have been postponed under the legislation.

78. Urgent Executive decisions made by officers under delegated authority in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including those made under emergency powers under the Council's Scheme of Delegation to Officers are included at appendix 1.

79. Arrangements for Overview and Scrutiny during the pandemic have been agreed as outlined in Briefing Note 20-17

<https://cms.wiltshire.gov.uk/documents/s176470/BriefingNote20-17OverviewandScrutinyduringCOVID19.pdf>

### Specific Council Services

80. The Council has continued to maintain essential services throughout the COVID-19, including highways, new waste collection rounds and maintain progress on strategic transport and highways plans. However, following advice and guidance from the Government certain services have been reduced or stopped, e.g. Household Recycling Centres. Many of these staff have been redeployed to undertake other essential work.

81. Government published guidance on 23 March regarding the requirement for people to stay at home to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The four reasons given that effectively defined what would be regarded as being essential travel did not include visiting a household recycling centre to deposit waste. Along with all neighbouring authorities, Wiltshire Council decided on 24 March to close all ten of its HRCs in order to support the public in staying at home, protect the NHS and save lives. We continue to monitor Government guidelines and will review our position alongside this.

### **Recovery**

82. Under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, Wiltshire Council, as the Unitary Authority in Wiltshire, has a responsibility to establish and lead the Recovery Coordinating Group and develop a strategic recovery plan based on a comprehensive needs assessment across the Wiltshire footprint, Swindon Borough Council likewise have the same remit for their respective local authority footprint.

83. The Chief Executive Officers are already planning for recovery and developing the associated governance, notwithstanding the fact that the timing of the transfer from response to recovery is at this point in time unknown.

### **Overview and Scrutiny Engagement**

84. The COVID-19 task group which has been established in accordance with the arrangements agreed in paragraph 21 above will provide initial views on the Council's response as outlined in this report. The terms of reference of the task group will be determined by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 2 June.

### **Safeguarding Implications**

85. Safeguarding implications have been fully considered as part of the work of on support for vulnerable people within the Communities cell. This has included children at risk, domestic abuse, mental health, learning disabilities, rough sleepers and substance misuse.

### **Public Health Implications**

86. This has been referred to throughout the report.

### **Procurement Implications**

87. A sequential approach to supplier relief has been agreed, ensuring that suppliers access central government support where possible first and work with us on an open book basis when necessary.

### **Equalities Impact of the Proposal**

88. Work is still underway to fully understand the impact of the pandemic on those with protected characteristics. The Council has been working with partners across the footprint on Wiltshire, to ensure that those most vulnerable in the community are supported through this incident. Advice has been drafted to Directors on ensuring equality implications are considered as part of decisions made and in interim changes to service delivery.

### **Environmental and Climate Change Considerations**

89. The pandemic has had a highly disruptive effect on the economy and consequently seen a reduction in greenhouse emissions. As recovery begins, the good practice and lessons learnt on areas such as video-conferencing and alternative service delivery will be evaluated to ensure this continues where appropriate.

### **Risk Management**

90. Risks associated with COVID-19 response have been incorporated into this report and COVID 19 related risks are owned and regularly reviewed by the Chief Executive Officers through the Council's Gold Response structure.

### **Finance Cell Update - Section 151 Officer Commentary**

91. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic will have immediate and undoubtedly long lasting significant financial implications for Wiltshire's economy, communities and residents as well as the Council itself.

92. Government, to date, have announced two tranches of emergency COVID-19 grant funding to Local Government amounting to £3.2bn, for Wiltshire this amounts to £25.5m. In addition, the Council was awarded £3.2m in Hardship Grant funding to provide further council tax relief for vulnerable residents. The Council, together with partners, will continue to press Government hard on ensuring further funding support.



93. In early April an assessment of the financial impact was undertaken by the Section 151 Officer. This took the view of two potential scenarios, the first a period of 3 months lockdown and the second a 6-month lockdown, with both scenarios having knock on consequences over the course of the financial year. The latter scenario formed the basis of the Councils return back to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCGL) on 15 April.
94. It should be noted that estimates at this stage should be caveated, and whilst some are known and can be estimated with a level of clarity e.g. lost income, others are assumptions and much depends on the timescales of the lockdown impact, as well as key metrics and data e.g. universal credit claimants, to gauge the severity of the financial impact.
95. At this time, it is estimated that the total financial impact, that is additional spend, lost income as well as changes to Council plans that can no longer be delivered e.g. saving plans, will be between £47.6m and £80.3m. When this is offset against the total level of Government funding support received to date of £28.8m, leaves a shortfall in Council finances of between £18.8m and £51.5m. The level of General Fund reserves the Council holds, prior to the finalising of the outturn for 2019/20, is £15.1m.
96. The Council will continue to refine and update its modelling based on actual data and updates from Government, particularly around the anticipated lifting of lockdown. Normally, monthly budget monitoring would not take place in April, but this will now be undertaken in detail to assess the activity within the accounts with specific focus on those functions and services where there is additional spend as well as providing an assessment on income lost.
97. With the financial landscape constantly changing, it is hoped that the improved accuracy and clarity on the current forecast will provide a more informed position to enable future critical decisions to be made. Integral to this is the assessment of collection rates and debt that will arise from the Councils main core funding resource, council tax and business rates. It is unlikely that, given the Councils move to support residents and businesses by deferring payments for 2 months until June, this position will not be understood fully until that time.
98. It is without doubt that this represents a significant risk and threat to the continuation of the Council in its current form, and whilst the full picture will become clearer it is almost inevitable that decisions will be required in future to ensure the Council delivers a balanced budget in 2020/21 and ongoing.
99. Many of the funding bases and assumptions around the base level of demand for services within the Council's approved base budget will have now shifted, potentially permanently, e.g. level of car parking income, level of residents claiming council tax support, added to this the anticipated latent health and social care demands within the population that will arise over the long term. The metrics for these will have to be reviewed and assessed to understand the ongoing longer-term impact on Council finances.
100. With the Government's spending review now delayed there is even further uncertainty over the funding position for 2021/22, however the MTFs already had

a gap of £24.5m that would have had to have been addressed before the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

101. CLT have already started to look at existing plans and programmes for 2020/21 with a view to recommending to Cabinet plans to focus and/or defer programmes until there is clarity on the financial position as well aligning the Councils resources for recovery. Proposals on mitigations to the Councils financial position are also be worked on during the coming months, with the focus on right sizing the Councils budget, as far as practical, and reducing the Council's current cost envelope and the forecast financial impact in 2020/21.

## **Conclusions**

102. Overall, Wiltshire Council has overseen a significant and timely response to the emerging threat of the pandemic in Wiltshire. This has involved the suspension of a number of services, the redeployment of staff to support the most vulnerable, extensive support to business and suppliers, strong partnership working with health and care and other agencies, and a significant communications effort and close working with local communities and voluntary groups. Schools and early years settings have also been supported to rapidly adjust to new government guidance. The council is committed to continuing this effective partnership working as we move towards a renewal of strong local communities and a return to growth in our local economy.

103. A further report will be presented in June, which will include further information on the Council's response and recovery plans.

**Alistair Cunningham, Chief Executive Officer, Place**  
**Terence Herbert, Chief Executive Officer, People**

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Report Author: All Directors

11 May 2020

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – list of officer decisions

Appendix 2 – Timeline associated with the COVID-19 response

## **Background Papers**

The following documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:

[Integrated Emergency Management Plan](#)

[https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public.](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public)

<https://local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Changes%20to%20local%20authority%20powers%20and%20duties%20resulting%20from%20the%20Coronavirus%20Act%202020%20WEB.pdf>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsinvolvingcovid19bylocalareasanddeprivation/deathsoccurringbetween1marchand17april>

## **Appendix 1: List of executive officer decisions taken during the pandemic**

- 17/03/2020 Pause on all group activity and gatherings in Libraries across Wiltshire
- 17/03/2020 Closure of City Hall to the Public
- 18/03/2020 Suspension of sports related activity
- 18/03/2020 Removal of the 9.30am bus pass activation time
- 18/03/2020 Postponement of Neighbourhood Planning referenda and elections scheduled from 19 March
- 20/03/2020 Closure of all Libraries and Leisure Centres
- 20/03/2020 Cessation of food inspections (pursuant to FSA advice)
- 20/03/2020 Staffing Policy – COVID-19 Policy
- 23/03/2020 Approach to commercial tenants' rent payments
- 25/03/2020 Closure of Household Recycling Centres
- 25/03/2020 Closure of Play areas

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| 25/03/2020 | Cancellation of Indoor and Outdoor Markets (excepting food stalls)   |
| 26/03/2020 | Free parking and relaxation of civil enforcement   |
| 26/03/2020 | Closure of Salisbury Park and Ride   |
| 26/03/2020 | Approach TEN tenants rent payments   |
| 27/03/2020 | Approach to council tax and business rate collection   |
| 27/03/2020 | Closure of chapels at our seven crematoria   |
| 27/03/2020 | Lease of accommodation for rehousing homeless  |
| 30/03/2020 | Deferral of green waste collection charges   |
| 31/03/2020 | Treasury Counterparty Management Limits increased from £15m to £30m  |
| 01/04/2020 | Suspension of non-urgent housing repairs   |
| 01/04/2020 | Suspension of child employment arrangements during COVID 19.   |
| 06/04/2020 | Emergency food parcel service enabling payment from those that can.  |
| 13/04/2020 | To include BANES patients in the S136 Suite in Devizes, Green Lane Hospital. (with Police, AWP and BSW CCG)                                    |
| 14/04/2020 | Additional financial support to Food Banks   |
| 15/04/2020 | Extension of existing licenses under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals)(England) Regulations 2018                  |
| 20/04/2020 | Move to payment of all Adult care domiciliary providers to advanced payments (based on support plan hours)                                     |
| 20/04/2020 | Variation to payment for early year providers for the summer term 2020   |
| 20/04/2020 | Revision to Child Employment suspension proposal enabling employers to apply for dispensation with health and safety assurances (DfE guidance) |

## Appendix 2: Timeline associated with the COVID-19 response

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| December 2019   | Outbreak starts in Wuhan, China   |
| January 2020    | Heathrow begins screening arrivals from Wuhan.<br>First two UK cases – two Chinese nationals test positive<br>Britons arriving back from Wuhan are quarantined for 14 days  |
| 31 January 2020 | Local Resilience Forum (LRF) Strategic Coordination Group (SCG) considers local preparedness  |
| February 2020   | Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations are laid enabling enforced quarantine for those believed infected<br>First repatriation flights to Boscombe Down<br>Voluntary restrictions, social distancing and self-isolation if symptomatic are advised.<br>First community transmission of cases within the UK |
| 3 March 2020    | Coronavirus <a href="#">Action Plan</a> published by Government   |
| 5 March 2020    | First 3 positive cases in Wiltshire identified. SCG meets weekly.   |

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| 11 March 2020 | Daily meetings of Wiltshire Council 'Gold' commence   |
| 12 March 2020 | Government announces we are moving from 'Contain' to 'Delay' phase – handwashing for 20 seconds and self-isolation for those with symptoms advised                              |
| 16 March 2020 | Prime Minister advises against non-essential travel and contact with others; ends emergency service support for mass gatherings.<br>First related death in Wiltshire announced. |
| 17 March 2020 | Chancellor announces business loans, rate relief and grants   |
| 18 March 2020 | Closure of schools to most, from 23 March, announced  |
| 19 March 2020 | Major incident declared by Wiltshire and Swindon Local Resilience Forum   |
| 20 March 2020 | Prime Minister orders all pubs, cafes, leisure centres, libraries to close. Furlough scheme announced.  |
| 21 March 2020 | Shielding of extremely clinically vulnerable commences for 12 weeks   |
| 23 March 2020 | Nationwide lockdown announced, with police to be granted powers to enforce social distancing  |
| 25 March 2020 | Coronavirus Act passed, postponing elections, enabling virtual meetings, easing some statutory requirements   |
| 26 March 2020 | The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations 2020 permit people to leave their house for limited reasons - food, medicine, exercise or essential work          |
| 16 April 2020 | Lockdown extended for 'at least a further three weeks'  |
| 24 April 2020 | Mobile testing unit opens at Salisbury Park and Ride  |