



<b>SIGNED OFF BY</b>	Chief Executive
<b>AUTHOR</b>	Doula Pont, Head of Projects & Performance; Catherine Rose, Head of Corporate Policy Pat Main, Interim Head of Finance
<b>TELEPHONE</b>	Tel: 01737 276766
<b>EMAIL</b>	Doula.Pont@reigate-banstead.gov.uk Catherine.Rose@reigate-banstead.gov.uk Pat.Main@reigate-banstead.gov.uk
<b>TO</b>	Executive
<b>DATE</b>	Thursday, 25 June 2020
<b>EXECUTIVE MEMBER</b>	Leader of the Council

<b>KEY DECISION REQUIRED</b>	N
<b>WARDS AFFECTED</b>	(All Wards);

<b>SUBJECT</b>	Covid-19 (Coronavirus): Response and Recovery
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<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>
<p><b>That the Executive:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) <b>Records its thanks for the outstanding efforts of all members and Council staff in responding to the Covid-19 (Coronavirus) emergency</b></li> <li>(ii) <b>Agrees the approach for recovering from the emergency, including the approach to service &amp; financial planning and continuing to deliver on the Council's ambitions as set out in Reigate &amp; Banstead 2025.</b></li> <li>(iii) <b>Agrees the latest forecasts of the financial implications of the emergency which will be updated in June to form the basis for in-year financial reporting and the Medium Term Financial Plan review</b></li> </ul>
<b>REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS</b>

- (i) To put on record the Executive's appreciation for the hard work and dedication of members and Council staff in supporting the borough and its residents through these unprecedented times
- (ii) To formalise the Council's recovery plans and set the framework for the focus of service and business planning over the coming months.
- (iii) To endorse current forecasts for the financial implications and the actions proposed to mitigate them.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Covid-19 represents the biggest challenge that this country has faced for many years.

Local authorities have a formal role in responding to emergency situations as a Category One responder and as a key partner in the Local Resilience Forum (LRF). We have a responsibility to support our local communities (residents and businesses), particularly the most vulnerable in society.

This report outlines the Council's emergency response activity to date and sets out proposals for the gradual transition out of the emergency response phase to the recovery phase.

It also provides an initial overview of the forecast financial implications for this authority. These include the unbudgeted expenditure that has been incurred when delivering the authority's response to the pandemic, reductions in service income receipts and the potential implications for precepting authorities of reductions in income from council tax and business rates.

Throughout the Covid-19 emergency, the majority of Council activities have continued, albeit in some cases with a reduced level of service. Some activities have, however, had to be curtailed either due to Government requirements, strategic decisions taken by the LRF or to enable Council staff to provide the vital emergency support that vulnerable residents have needed. Other services have seen increased demand either directly or indirectly as a result of lockdown measures.

Recovery planning is now underway to bring reduced or on-hold services back on stream. It is critical that this is done in a planned manner taking account of the latest Government guidance, available resources and the need to ensure the safety of both staff and those living and working in the borough.

It is clear that the ways in which we prioritise, target and deliver at least some of our activities will need to change. But there are also opportunities to build on some of the new ways of working that have emerged in recent months and some of the stronger relationships that we have developed.

The Council has clearly articulated corporate priorities, and a robust service & financial planning process; and together with a managed approach to recovery we are well placed to do this.

**Executive has authority to approve the above recommendations**

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. Covid-19 represents the biggest challenge that this country has faced for many years. Local authorities have a central role to play in responding to the emergency, protecting our vulnerable residents and supporting local communities (including the business community) to stay safe and respond to the evolving circumstances in which we find ourselves.
2. This report summarises the Council's emergency response and outlines our plans for recovery. The data included within (and appended to) this report is correct at the time of writing but the situation remains fluid and figures are therefore subject to change.

## **EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

### **Command Structure**

3. A Major Incident for the Covid-19 outbreak was declared on Thursday 19 March 2020 by the Surrey Local Resilience Forum (LRF). This meant that all multi-agency partners in Surrey were stood up collaboratively to formally respond to this incident.
4. Prior to the formal declaration of the incident, the Council had commenced planning activities and was following emerging Government guidance. The Council's Incident Management Team (IMT – attended by the Leader of the Council, Chief Executive, Directors and several Heads of Service) commenced meetings on 16 March.
5. The Council's command structures were also established during the week commencing 16 March and comprised IMT (Strategic/Gold), Tactical Coordination (Silver) and three response groups (Operational/Bronze). The response groups established were:
  - a. Welfare (People), led by the Director of People Services to oversee community welfare matters, including the Community Support Centre, welfare contact to those shielding or vulnerable, housing and revenues & benefits.
  - b. Operations (Place), led by the Director of Place Services to oversee depot operations, greenspaces and environmental health
  - c. Corporate (Organisation), led by the Strategic Head of Neighbourhood Services to oversee finance, IT, and employee matters including health and safety and office and other Council accommodation.
6. The Surrey-wide LRF command structure was led by the Strategic Coordination Group with the Tactical Coordination Group sitting beneath that and reporting in progress of several operational cells.

### **Responding to the emergency**

7. An overview of the Council's response to the emergency was provided to the last Executive meeting. Some of the key elements are summarised again in this report, with updated statistics provided in Annex 1.
  - a. From the Harlequin Theatre, repurposed as our Community Support Centre, we have provided food to food banks, issued emergency food packs and hot meals to vulnerable residents, and coordinated the delivery of vital medical prescriptions. The Community Support Centre has been resourced by redeployed Council staff and by volunteers matched from partners at Voluntary Action Reigate & Banstead

- b. Our customer contact team, as well as a new welfare team including redeployed staff from across the Council as well as YMCA staff and volunteers) have been providing telephone advice and support to over 5,000 shielded and vulnerable residents. Council officers have also conducted a number of welfare visits to shielded residents that could not be contacted by telephone.
  - c. The Housing team has supported more homeless households into safe temporary accommodation
  - d. The Revenues & Benefits team has distributed financial support for businesses and assisted households in deferring or otherwise managing their Council tax payments.
8. Throughout the crisis, the Council has kept residents informed of Government guidance and the local response – including the help that is available. A wide range of communications channels have been utilised to ensure both digital and non-digital audiences have been reached.

### **Impact on core services and activities**

9. The majority of Council activities have continued throughout this crisis period, albeit in some cases with a reduced level of service. Staffing levels have remained consistently above 90% with those staff who are able supported to work safely from home (around 250).
10. Services that have been more notably impacted include:
- a. The Harlequin, our community centres and leisure centres have been closed following government advice, with the new Community Support Centre coordinating interim emergency support for vulnerable residents.
  - b. Garden waste services were suspended to allow for the continued delivery of a comprehensive refuse and recycling service.
  - c. Whilst parks and greenspaces have remained open, play areas and skate parks - as well as public toilets – have been closed for safety reasons
  - d. Council car park charges were temporarily suspended, along with some single line parking restriction enforcement
  - e. The Town Hall reception has been closed, with increased resources diverted to the customer contact team to deal with phone and online enquiries.
11. Other services have seen increased pressures:
- a. Homelessness and revenues and benefit services have seen a considerable increase in demand (as identified above)
  - b. Waste and recycling volumes have increased considerably, as have levels of flytipping, creating significant additional work for our waste & recycling and cleansing teams. All depot operational activities were reviewed to ensure that essential services could continue to be delivered despite a number of staff being required to self-isolate. This has included staff redeployment to these services.
  - c. Environmental Health staff have helped over 100 businesses to close and re-open safely.

- d. Non-essential cemetery services have been suspended to allow for the continued safe and sensitive delivery of core services.
- e. The Finance and Revenues & Benefits teams have managed requirements to set up new systems and processes in order to act as the Government's payment agency for the distribution of £23 million in grants to local businesses and to process £18 million of business rate reliefs and £0.750 million hardship support for council tax payers.

### **Planning for a second wave**

- 12. Uncertainty remains as to whether there will be a second Covid-19 wave, when this might be, and the scale and nature of any associated emergency response. Planning is underway (internally and in conjunction with the Surrey LRF) to ensure that the Council is prepared to respond appropriately in this event.
- 13. The emergency planning debrief process will allow for identification of lessons learned, which will be used to improve our emergency planning processes and inform our response to any second wave.

## **RECOVERY**

### **Emergency Planning Recovery**

- 14. Recovery is a central role of the Surrey LRF. 'Recovery' in the formal emergency planning sense is defined as the process of rebuilding, restoring and rehabilitating communities after an emergency.
- 15. The LRF has established the Recovery Coordination Group (RCG) at a strategic (Surrey-wide) level. This group needs to address four categories of impact as a result of the pandemic: humanitarian, economic, environmental and infrastructure.
- 16. These categories are being addressed by the RCG through five sub-groups:
  - a. Health and social care
  - b. Economy and retail
  - c. Community, voluntary and faith sector
  - d. Children and younger people
  - e. Place, travel and transport, climate change and air pollution
- 17. The Council is represented on the RCG and several of the sub-groups; which will ensure complementarity between the central and local recovery work.

### **Borough Council service recovery**

- 18. As well as the formal emergency recovery processes that are outlined above, it is important that the Borough Council considers the recovery of its services and activities in light of changes in the ways that we all live, work and move about for the foreseeable future (the so-called 'new normal').
- 19. Whilst the purpose of the Council remains the same, the way we prioritise, target and deliver our activities will need to change. In addition, as well as the challenge of responding to the wide-ranging impacts of Covid-19, there are also opportunities to build on some of the new ways of working that have emerged in recent months.

20. **Guiding principles:** There are a number of principles that should guide consideration of the Council's focus this year and next, through the recovery period. These are set out below.

**The principles underpinning our recovery**

- Maintain core essential and statutory services
- Provide targeted support for those who need it most
- Draw on resources within our communities to help us
- Strengthen our place in the community and the role of councillors as community leaders
- Manage expectations about non-core activities and encourage personal responsibility
- Become more efficient by maintaining new and different ways of working
- Invest responsibly to help secure the future wellbeing and resilience of the borough

21. **Timeframes:** Initially, our focus will need to be on the continuing emergency response, supporting the gradual transition out of lockdown for residents and ensuring that vital services are able to be provided safely in the short term. We are calling this the 'transition phase'. It is not possible to predict exactly when the phase will run until. Whilst a provisional date of July has been identified in our planning process, this is dependent on circumstances nationally and locally, and on Government policy. It is already clear that some of our emergency response activities are likely to be needed beyond July.
22. Due to the ongoing resource requirements associated with this transition, it will take time to return the wider range of Council service and activities to a more normal footing. This more 'strategic recovery' phase is likely to last until the end of the year (again, based on the best information that is available at this point in time, and subject to change).
23. As we seek to return day-to-day Council activities to full capacity, in light of the experiences of recent months, we may want to change how we deliver services. This could be either due to continuing social distancing requirements or to build on some of the new ways of working that we have developed as a Council over recent months. This recovery phase will not be short term, and while it may be possible to implement some 'transformation' ambitions throughout late 2020/21 and into 2021/22, other elements are likely to take much longer.
24. **Recovery workstreams:** To aid the recovery from lockdown to a new normal, a number of workstreams have been identified. These are:
- a. Community connections, including supporting vulnerable residents
  - b. Supporting local businesses and the local economy to recover
  - c. Council services and projects recovery
  - d. Finances and income to fund future services
  - e. New ways of working and models of service delivery.
25. More information about the remit and initial focus of these workstreams is provided at Annex 2.
26. **Working and reporting arrangements:** Each workstream is being overseen by two Executive members working with relevant officer. The workstreams report into a Recovery Steering Group, comprised of the Leader, Deputy Leader, Chief Executive

and Directors. The Recovery Steering Group is responsible for day-to-day decisions with respect of recovery, and for referring key decisions to the Executive.

27. Recovery updates will be provided to the Executive, with a Recovery Scrutiny Panel also having been established to review the recovery work and report back to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
28. **Progress to date:** Good progress is already being made by the recovery workstreams, including:
  - a. The re-introduction of garden waste collection services
  - b. The recommencement of non-essential highway verge maintenance
  - c. The implementation of measures to provide confidence to residents and businesses in our town centres in relation to social distancing
  - d. A programme for the managed re-introduction of parking enforcement and car park charges
  - e. Developing a programme for the partial re-opening of the Harlequin and community centres
29. The reintroduction of services is being carried out in accordance with Government guidance and in consultation with the Health & Safety Officer to ensure the safety of residents, other service users and staff.
30. **Service & Financial planning for 2021/22:** Recovery work will also feed into the service and financial planning process for 2021/22 alongside the usual service business planning process. Whilst (as noted above) the 'transformation' phase is likely to run on beyond this, this will allow the financial implications for the Council's ongoing response to Covid-19 to be properly planned.
31. **Delivering corporate objectives:** The new corporate plan delivery period commenced at the start of the 2020/21 financial year; however understandably, the focus of the first few months of this year have been on our emergency response rather than the specific objectives set out in the plan. Based on what we currently know, it is considered that the objectives set out within Reigate & Banstead 2025 remain appropriate. However, in the short to medium term, consideration will need to be given to how we prioritise their delivery given current and ongoing resource diversion.
32. The recovery workstreams – feeding into the service and financial planning process for 2021/22 later this calendar year and early next – will provide evidence to enable the Council to consider the longer term implications of Covid-19 on our local communities and economy. This will help in considering what if any changes to the corporate plan are needed.

## OPTIONS

33. The following options are available to the Executive:
34. Recommendation 1:
  - a. To formally record thanks for the response effort. This is the recommended option as it puts on record the Executive's thanks in relation to the Covid-19 response to date.

- b. Not to formally record thanks for the response effort. This option is not recommended as it misses the opportunity for the Executive to record its thanks to all those who have worked so tirelessly to support our local communities through the recent crisis.

35. Recommendation 2:

- a. To agree the proposed approach to recovery. This is the recommended option. It will enable a managed approach to service recovery, corporate and financial planning whilst ensuring that the Council's work is appropriately targeted to meet the needs of local residents, communities and businesses.
- b. Not to agree the proposed approach to recovery. This option is not recommended. It is clear that there will need to be a considerable period of transition, and even at the end of this period, the Council will need to operate under 'new normal' circumstances. It is important that we plan for this.
- c. To agree an alternative approach to recovery. This option is not recommended. The proposed approach to recovery – alongside the usual process of service and financial planning and priority setting – enables comprehensive consideration of the Council's short, medium and long term response to Covid-19. To delay work on recovery whilst an alternative process is considered would put the Council on the back foot in terms of its planning.

36. Recommendation 3:

- a. To agree the financial forecasts. This option is recommended as it will allow them to be used as the basis for ongoing financial reporting and medium term financial planning.
- b. Not to agree the financial forecasts. This option is not recommended. It is important that the Council establishes a robust basis for its future financial reporting and planning, to enable transparency and ensure that our finances continue to be well managed.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

37. No specific legal implications have been identified arising from the recommendations within this report

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

38. The forecast financial implications for this authority comprise:

- Unbudgeted expenditure that has been incurred when delivering the authority's response to the pandemic - forecast to be £1.177m
- Reductions in service income receipts as a consequence of changes in demand or specific policy decisions as part of the council's response - forecast to be £2.260m
- Potential implications for the precepting authorities, including this Council, of reductions in income from council tax and business rates, the details of which are being assessed.

39. Current forecasts are based on information that has been gathered since the start of the crisis. Wherever possible COVID-19 expenditure has been recorded separately from budgeted costs and income trends and shortfalls are being tracked compared to the original budget forecasts. Forecasting for the Collection Fund (council tax and business rate) income is complex as it depends on a range of factors, many of which will only become clear as the year progresses. Further information on current financial forecasts is included at Annex 3.
40. To date the authority has received £1.525 million in COVID-19 funding support from Government, comprising:
- Emergency Grant allocation 1 - £42k
  - Rough Sleepers funding allocation - £2k
  - Emergency Grant allocation 2 - £1.481 million
41. We have also been asked to distribute funds on behalf of Government:
- New Business rate reliefs - £18m
  - Business Support Grants (National Scheme) - £23m
  - Business Support Grants (Local Discretionary Scheme) - £1.1m
  - Council Tax Hardship funds - £0.754m
42. Since April MHCLG has required authorities to submit monthly financial returns (based on the above categories) to help gather information about the financial implications of the crisis at a national level. This information is also shared with the Local Government Association which is producing its own analyses. Their latest assessment, based on the position in May concludes:
- '...In addition to the welcome grant funding announced so far, councils could need as much as £6 billion more to cover the costs of coping with the coronavirus pandemic during this financial year. This figure will need to be kept under review. The MHCLG survey asked councils to assume things return to normal from the end of July. If councils have used this assumption in their returns, then this figure could rise.*
- *Around 60 per cent of the financial challenge related to lost tax income (council tax and business rates) and non-tax income (mostly sales, fees and charges). The rest would be needed to cover extra cost pressures as a result of the pandemic.*
  - *Different councils will face a different mix of pressures, but overall the majority of the cost pressures (and the largest part of the spending of the £3.2 billion grant) is related to adult social care.*
- The LGA remains clear that all councils will need further funding and financial flexibilities in the weeks and months ahead to meet ongoing COVID-19 pressures and to keep services running normally and compensate for lost income...'*
43. Over the short term the authority has sufficient contingency sums built into approved 2020/21 revenue budgets and Revenue Reserves to accommodate the gap between Government funding to date and current forecast financial impacts. The position

should become clearer at the end of June when the first quarter's financial performance reports are prepared.

44. Over the longer term any legacy impacts (for example, failure of income streams to fully-recover) will have to be taken into account when updating the Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2021/22 onwards which is scheduled to be reported to Executive in July.

## **EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

45. The focus of the Council's emergency response has been supporting vulnerable people including but not limited to those who are shielding. Many of these people will be older and have a disability or long-term medical condition, and/or may not have a close network of friends or family they can rely on for support. As explained elsewhere in this report, we have provided support and information in a range of different ways to support these vulnerable residents.
46. In terms of the Council workforce, information and support continues to be provided for staff. This covers both physical measures to support safe working (both for frontline staff and those working at home) and also support to help staff deal with the emotional and psychological impacts of the crisis. Ongoing support will be provided to help vulnerable staff members return to work, and other staff to return to more normal ways of working; including through health and safety risk assessments.
47. As the national picture continues to change, and the Government continues to publish new guidance and information, we will continue to assess the equality implications for residents and staff. Where recovery planning leads to recommendations for changes in the nature or level of service provision, potential equality implications will be considered ahead of taking any final decisions.

## **COMMUNICATION IMPLICATIONS**

48. The Council has undertaken comprehensive communications in respect of the emergency and the emergency response.
49. Throughout the crisis, the Council has kept employees, residents and businesses informed: reinforcing evolving Government guidance, communicating our local response, including signposting to help available and changes to our services and facilities. We have used our different communications platforms to encourage and celebrate, as well as to discourage certain antisocial behaviours.
50. A wide range of channels have been used, including our established social media channels, website, direct emails, member communications, paid-for media (print and radio adverts), and printed materials distributed to known vulnerable and / or older residents who are less likely to use digital channels
51. Internally, communication has been via managers, the intranet, letters to staff's home addresses, posters and videos, as well as providing a range of support services including for mental health.
52. Throughout the crisis, the Council has collaborated with its Surrey partners via the SLRF's Multi-Agency Information Group to reinforce messaging more widely and ensure a consistent approach. Communications has been vital to our Covid-19

response and will continue to be central to our continuing response and recovery efforts.

## **RISK MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

53. Covid-19-specific risk registers have been established in respect of the emergency response, linked to the command structure.
54. In addition (and elsewhere on this Executive agenda) the Council's strategic risks have been updated to reflect the ongoing need to respond to Covid-19.

## **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

55. **Staffing:** As noted elsewhere in this report, the emergency has required staff to work differently. Whilst some staff have been required to shield or self-isolate and have not been able to work from home, the vast majority of staff have continued to work, either delivering key frontline services from our operational buildings or working from home.
56. Around 90 staff have been deployed (either or fully or partly) to assist in the emergency response, in some cases undertaking tasks very different from their 'day jobs'.
57. **Environment:** The national response to Covid-19 has brought notable related environmental changes, with dramatic reductions in traffic and associated improvements in air quality, and increased usage of our greenspaces. At the same time, flytipping has increased along with general littering of public spaces as lockdown starts to be lifted.
58. The Borough Council is working with the County Council to identify measures to make it easier for those living and working in the borough to walk and cycle whilst usage of public transport continues to be advised against unless essential.

## **CONSULTATION**

59. As noted above, the Council Leader has attended the Incident Management Team (IMT). Regular written and video-conference updates about the Council's emergency response activity have been provided to all elected members and to local MPs. In addition, videos have been used to communicate key information from the Leader to residents and from the Senior Management Team to staff.
60. Executive members are heavily involved in the recovery workstreams outlined above, which are being overseen by the Leader and Deputy Leader. In addition, a Recovery Scrutiny Panel is in the process of being established to review the work of the recovery workstreams and report back to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
61. As appropriate, through the course of the recovery workstreams, consultation will also be undertaken with partners, staff, residents and businesses.

## **POLICY FRAMEWORK**

62. The relationship between the emergency response and recovery and the Council's corporate plan, Reigate & Banstead 2025 is outlined in earlier sections of this report. Budget and service and financial planning considerations are also covered above.

