

DECISION ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT	ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE	2 JUNE 2020	4
COVID 19 IMPACT ASSESSMENT & RECOVERY			

PUBLIC ITEM

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

SUMMARY

This initial report provides an overview of the known and potential impact of the COVID 19 lockdown measures on the services and functions within the remit of the Environment, Health and Housing Committee. At this stage the information is based on the data available and government policy in place at the time of drafting the report, plans are being made across the council to revise budget forecasts and business plans in response to the changes brought about by the COVID 19 measures. Further reports will be published for the committee over the coming months to provide updates on the impact of COVID 19 measures as the nation moves out of lockdown through a phased approach.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the impact of the COVID 19 measures on functions within remit of the committee are noted and members provide any feedback to support the recovery programme.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS DECISIONS

None

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

Spending your money in the most efficient way to achieve excellent services (Value for Money)	✓
Delivering the services that customers expect of an excellent council (Clean and Green)	✓
Working with all partners (Vibrant Economy)	✓
To make sure Fylde continues to be one of the most desirable places to live (A Great Place to Live)	✓
Promoting Fylde as a great destination to visit (A Great Place to Visit)	✓

REPORT

1. The Coronavirus (COVID 19) world pandemic has had an impact on society never experienced before. The necessary measures put in place through national legislation have had a direct impact on every individual and it is expected that the process of returning to some sort of normality, albeit in a different world, will take months if not longer as the world comes to terms with the changes. It is in this context that officers have collated the known and estimated financial and operational impact of the COVID 19 measures on the services within the remit of the Environment, Health and Housing Committee.
2. The information included in this report represents the current knowledge based on known factors, such as loss of income to date or operational changes, as well forecasts from scenario planning. As society moves

further away from the lockdown period towards a new norm updates on the impact outlined in this report will be provided along with details of additional impacts yet unknown.

Bereavement Services

Bereavement Service prepared a Pandemic Management Plan in 2008 with the latest significant revision in November 2017. Because of this plan, the service was well prepared to deal with the outbreak of Covid19 in Fylde. The fixed nature of the primary infrastructure (Chapel, Cremation Equipment and burial land) has always provided the option to rapidly increase service provision with little additional resource. Therefore, the service has consistently kept up with the added demand caused by this pandemic to date.

At the start of the crisis, there were major unforeseen developments that fell outside the Pandemic Planning. The worst of these being the imposition of Social Distancing (SD) and isolation of household groups (HG).

Another big challenge has been the constant changing legislation and guidelines issued by the Government relating to burial grounds and funeral services including limiting numbers of mourners to funerals and access to the Cemetery grounds. Officers ensured that social media was updated constantly to reflect the constant changes.

Because of the increase in Funeral Services, the amount of clerical work increased. Several volunteers from other departments trained to assist in service delivery, both to help with the excess workload and provide cover should any of the permanent staff become unavailable. ICT provided a basic live, online, funeral streaming service to comply with new Government guidelines. This assisted greatly in easing the problems caused by the massive reduction in numbers of persons allowed to attend services.

At the time of writing this report the service has managed an additional 137 cremations compared to a 10-year average of the same period 9th March – 17th May, with many cremations being undertaken at weekends. Cremation costs range between £399.00 - £753.00 dependent on the requirements. There has been an increase in expenditure due to operational overtime, additional consumables and an increase in safety equipment for grave digging. However, the additional income will be greater providing a surplus to the council. A detailed financial update will be provided, once the service resumes to normal operating procedures, as the full impact will not be known until the pandemic is over.

Environmental Health

Environmental Protection has seen a marked increase in the number and range of service requests and associated workload during the lockdown, including:

- Noise complaints (barking dogs, loud music, children playing, general household noises), contributing to an increased level of conflict between neighbours as people are spending more time at home during the day.
- Burning rubbish/garden bonfires – increased household waste being generated as a result of more people doing DIY/gardening/spring cleaning; exacerbated by closure of LCC HWRC and curtailment of bulky waste collections.
- Fly tipping – approximately 40% increase in incidents across the Borough (consistent with national picture) with some hotspots, the resource available to take enforcement action and investigate incidents of fly tipping has been reduced and unable to operate normal procedures as a result of COVID 19 measures.
- Various complaints with regards to the build up of excess waste in gardens, filthy and verminous properties and minor complaints such as feeding birds/pigeons.
- Air Quality Management is ongoing despite the laboratories currently being shut for testing and we are still dealing with planning application technical consultations. In addition, there has been an increase in Public Health Act funerals and associated arrangements.
- Complaints, including increasing instances of anti-social behaviour, are being prioritised based on severity with support and advice/support offered over the phone and via letter. It is not physically possible or reasonably practicable to visit all complainants at this time and home visits are only being carried out in the most serious cases, obeying social distancing and PPE requirements.

- The pandemic has presented logistical challenges with direct communication, home/site visits and obtaining statements. Enforcement capability has been adversely impacted but FPNs are being issued where appropriate, with ongoing advice and support from the Council's legal team. A number of PACE interviews have been put on hold, frustrating investigations.

Emergency Planning

- The COVID 19 crisis is a major incident from an emergency planning perspective and several response plans have been activated. Whilst the response is primarily led by LCC, it requires district level participation in numerous multi agency teleconferences and subgroups. This has been a shared responsibility among Fylde Officers depending on areas of expertise i.e. communications, human aspects, finance etc.
- Phil Dent, as the lead officer for Emergency Planning, dials into the Tactical Coordinating Group, Business Continuity and the Local Authorities cells, spending up to 2 hours on individual calls several times a week.
- There is an associated mandatory requirement to submit daily/weekly data sets from each Local authority which can be cumbersome and time consuming for officers already stretched with other responsibilities.
- In the early stages of the crisis, each local authority business continuity plan was stress tested – again this was challenging and took officers away from their role in responding to the incident.

Food Safety

- The team is hands on with a face to face approach and the sudden move to more remote working proved a challenge initially, especially around co-ordinating and sharing the workloads effectively without duplication.
- The COVID 19 crisis has generating an excessive amount of admin/reading/research and recording for officers and it is clear that the "fear factor" has been driving up complaint numbers, particularly with regards to the challenges associated with social distancing considerations i.e. queuing in smaller shops and delis for take away foods. The team have worked closely with both the public and businesses to resolve issues and build confidence.
- Many of the substantive tasks have been put on hold as businesses remain closed although there have been several food safety complaints as well as general hygiene and health and safety enquiries. There has been a shift towards dealing with COVID 19 related enquiries and complaints, not just from members of the public, but also from concerned employees (from various organisations) with regards to working conditions, PPE provision and social distancing in the workplace. An additional 80 premises visits have been carried out to deliver education, advice and prevent complacency.
- The annual business inspection program has been put on hold and it remains unclear what impact the pandemic will have on the overall workload for the year (and possibly beyond) as some business may cease to trade, there could be pressure to complete annual inspections within a reduced trimer period and some business may continue to trade with compromised hygiene standards if inspections are significantly delayed. The situation is being monitored and future working practices will be in line with FSA guidance and recommendations.
- The credibility of the National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme is at risk as businesses change working practices and activities by working from home or switching to takeaway and delivery rather than table service; as inspections are not being conducted and advice is offered remotely the premises cannot be rated. Many takeaways have become busier as nearby restaurants remain closed, making it more challenging to maintain hygiene standards and meet customer demands for prompt service. This may be exacerbated by the recent change to government guidance and transition to the "Stay Alert" phase which could encourage more people to venture further from home in search of prepared food.
- Complaints have already been received with regards to certain businesses trading 'underground', hairdressers and barbers. As the pandemic continues, other businesses may be tempted to begin trading which will place additional pressure on the team to enforce against breaches, impacting on available resources.

- It is also anticipated that the proposed 'track and trace' system will be co-ordinated at a local level by Environmental Health officers, adding to existing and revised work pressures.

Health and Safety

- Business closures have led to a reduction in the number of workplace accidents, with an associated decline in RIDDOR accident notifications and investigation. Annual HSE interventions i.e. commercial gas safety and industrial traffic management, have been put on hold, and other proactive work such as swimming pool and spa water safety sampling are paused. Regulatory inspections of caravan parks are presently suspended but may recommence if parks are permitted to trade in the summertime. Any resulting additional capacity has been redeployed into assisting with crisis management.
- Public and trader confusion early on with regards to which businesses were permitted to remain open and trade resulted in a spike in enquiries and erroneous complaints which were time consuming to investigate/dismiss.
- Additional enquiries have been received in recent days since the government began to reduce lockdown, with ongoing confusion around which businesses are permitted to recommence trading.
- Although the team have now made a successful transition to working from home, there is an increasing requirement to visit the Town Hall at least once a week if complaints cannot be resolved over the phone or historical records are required from paper files. Office visits are being co-ordinated to prevent several officers being in at the same time, but this will need to be addressed moving forward as more people return to work.

Licensing

- A member of the licensing team was re-deployed to assist with call taking for the hub and the remaining member remained in the Town Hall dealing with numerous queries from taxi drivers. This officer has also responded to numerous queries for the team, acting in an admin supporting role to all colleagues within Environmental Services.
- Following lock down, 23 vehicles proprietors have either not renewed their vehicles licence or taken them off road, saving on insurance premiums etc while there is no work. Plans are now being considered to facilitate vehicle testing to ensure a speedy return to work when lock down starts to ease and numbers requiring transport increases.
- Several proprietors have indicated they won't be returning to the trade following the crisis which will have a negative impact upon projected income for the licensing team and FMS where vehicle inspections are undertaken.
- Driver renewals and DBS checks have carried on as normal but there have not been any applications for new driver licences.
- The Licensing Act procedure has carried on as normal with a small number of transfers and variations. An application for the grant of new premises licence was submitted and has attracted representations. A licensing panel briefing has been scheduled to take place via Zoom on the 14th May, with a full virtual hearing planned for the 2nd June.
- At the start of the lock down there were numerous queries from caravan site owners and residents regarding their entitlement to remain on site, with initial confusion as to who may remain on site, and a number of sites wanting to close down to protect their staff (and possibly furlough). While residential sites could remain operational, caravan owners on holiday sites who were unable to return to their primary addresses were seeking permission to remain. Regulation 4(3) of the Public Health (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020, provides: a person responsible for carrying on a business consisting of the provision of holiday accommodation, (including campsite and caravan park), must cease to carry on that business during the emergency period. Following the latest announcement regarding relaxation of some lockdown measures, numerous enquiries were received from caravan owners wanting to return to these sites, but it has since been clarified that this would be regarded as a visit to a second home which is not permitted.

- Routine work unrelated to the pandemic has been ongoing. A significant amount of time has been spent dealing with issues raised by residents of a Chalet Park at Singleton. Several council teams have been involved - Housing, Legal, Planning, Community/Safety & Licensing and it is likely the matter will continue for some time.

Community Safety

- Routine multi agency meetings have not been scheduled during the pandemic, however, working area such as the "Prevent" initiative continue and are being held virtually, including Skype training sessions.
- Support has been provided to the Housing team in the early stages of the pandemic to assist with rough sleepers and street beggars, encouraging them to engage with services; in addition, a Community Protection Warning Letter was issued to an individual who has recently started to beg in St Annes.

Community Hub

During March, the Lancashire Resilience Forum appointed a Humanitarian Group in response to the emerging health crisis affecting the community. The Group is Chaired by Neil Jack, Chief Executive of Blackpool Council, and focused on the establishment of Community Hubs across Lancashire to support the community. Each council is represented by a senior officer and Tracy Manning represents Fylde Council, managing the Community Hub operation from its outset. The Community Hubs had to be established in an extremely short space of time and have various facets including a call centre, a food operation and a volunteer coordination aspect.

Call centre

The call centre has been staffed by up to ten Fylde Council employees who have supervised operations, responding to enquiries via email and on the dedicated phonenumber (01253 658448), and reaching out to those on the NHS shielded list between the hours of 9 am to 8 p.m. Monday to Friday and weekends 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Several volunteers have also supported the hub, including the Chief Executive's partner and daughter and other members of staff have assisted in responding to e-mail enquiries.

The hub has been promoted to residents through the delivery of over 40,000 leaflets to residents (copy attached as an appendix) and personalised letters to those on the NHS shielded list without telephone numbers. Letters have also been sent to all residents being supported through LCC social care, all Council Tax Reduction Scheme recipients and those on the assisted bin collection list.

Food operation

It was originally anticipated that there would be three food hubs, St Annes, Lytham and Kirkham. However, it became clear early on that the St. Annes operation located at the YMCA was enough and has been able to fulfil food parcel despatch across the Borough. Initially the sourcing of food was a major challenge and staff developed a partnership with local supermarkets; this was supplemented by food provided direct by the government. The council was asked to provide an interim bridge, to those on the NHS shielded list unable to leave home. These individuals are supplied with food parcels direct from government but there is an initial lag while arrangements are put in place. Subsequent additions to the shielding list are also supported by the council initially. Sourcing of food has become less frantic with an excellent supply being sourced through Blackpool Council, supplemented as required from local supermarkets.

Praise should be noted to the YMCA and its furloughed staff, who have assisted in not only providing the facility for the food operation but also assistance in the preparation of food parcels. The assistance provided has been exceptional.

Volunteer coordination

The recruitment and coordination of volunteers has been supervised by Edyta Paxton, Health and Wellbeing Officer. The support from volunteer groups has again been exceptional. Several voluntary groups have been providing support to the community including the Lytham COVID-19 support group, Rotary, Hope Church, Lytham and Light Church, Wesham. In terms of food supply, whilst many shielding and isolating individuals had the means to pay for shopping, they did not have the ability to organise this for themselves with supermarket delivery slots in high demand. Volunteers have provided support in assisting with shopping,

collecting prescriptions and dog walking. The volunteers have also delivered over 40,000 leaflets to residents in Fylde to promote the Fylde Community Hub, advising on available support and how to get in touch.

During this period Fylde CAB, Age Concern and Our Lancashire have been providing support to clients. Although face-to-face support has been curtailed, telephone support has been available and has been very welcome by elderly and socially isolated residents with a variety of different needs and queries.

General commentary

The Community Hub has been inspected on several occasions and found to be operating well. The inspection included the hub in its widest sense including the call centre, the food operation, a pen picture of support staff, contingency plans, voluntary groups being worked with and how residents had been contacted, details of food supply and emerging threats. Following one visit from a police officer and army advisor from the Lancashire Resilience Forum, they commented the Fylde Community Hub and its execution was '*great*' which gave a fantastic morale boost to the team. Equally, the food operation team were pleased to have a visit from Councillor Aitken during April.

This has been an unprecedented operation, covering aspects of service delivery unfamiliar to those involved, but dealt with competently and professionally. In terms of the future, the council has been put on notice that its Community Hub provision will remain operational for the next 3 months as a minimum, subject to ongoing review during the pandemic. Tracy Manning will give a verbal update at the meeting on the emerging Phase 2 response.

Outputs

- 1463 telephone calls received and processed on dedicated hub phone number
- 60 emails responded to
- 1706 NHS Shielding Clients have been contacted with offers of additional support via phone, letter or direct visit
- 618 LCC Socially Vulnerable clients have been contacted by phone (03) and letter (515) with offers of additional support
- Letters have also been sent out to 162 residents on the assisted bin collection list and 5144 customers in receipt of council tax reduction assistance
- 138 food parcels have been delivered, including 44 interim parcels to people on NHS Shielding list

Positive feedback has been received from residents on the shielding and socially vulnerable lists, expressing gratitude and appreciation for the measures taken by the council and hub staff, in ensuring they were safe and offering additional support.

Housing Covid Care Update

Affordable Housing Delivery

- The service is able to continue as normal in regard to responding to planning queries and the preparation of affordable housing statements for schemes with planning approval. The service is also continuing to process remotely applications for discounted market sale properties. Over the period of lockdown we have dealt with 9 enquiries for discounted market sale accommodation and processed the 6 applications that have been received within the required timescales.

Disabled Facilities Grant Programme and Private Sector Enforcement

- The service is restricted by Government guidance on construction and outdoor work and the vulnerability due to the underlying health issues of the client group. Current operation of the service is restricted to processing applications, managing the service and handling Occupational Health (OH) assessments. On receipt of the OH assessment we are advising clients that as a result of Government guidance we will not be currently undertaking the work. The service currently has 79 disabled facilities grants on going on hold, a waiting list of 26 applications already approved on hold and 16 grant applications on hold due to reasons other than Covid 19. Staff within the service have also been supporting the work of the Community Hub (food operation).

- A report is being tabled to this same Committee for the procurement process of stairlifts and other lifting equipment for adults. Lancashire County Council (LCC) currently procure equipment which is installed in the home of Fylde residents through the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) process administered by Fylde Council. District councils are due to take over these responsibilities from 1 October 2020 and there is a need for district authorities to procure these items direct with suppliers.

Homelessness and Housing Advice

- At the beginning of the Covid 19 lockdown period homeless households were identified as a specific category by Government and there was a requirement for:
 1. Statutory services to work together to identify households at risk of homelessness, current homeless households and rough sleepers to provide additional support across all services to work together to manage Covid 19 cases. Services included the NHS, local authorities, Police, adult social care, probation, mental health, family support and drug/alcohol services.
 2. Initially there was a requirement to get all rough sleepers off the streets by the weekend of 28/29 March. In Fylde we have done this for 7 clients at risk of or rough sleeping by providing B&B accommodation in Blackpool and sourcing supported accommodation.
 3. There was a requirement to identify accommodation that was normal homeless accommodation, Covid Protect accommodation for households who are asymptomatic (households are showing no signs of the virus but need to self-isolate due to underlying health issues) and Covid Care accommodation (households who are symptomatic and need additional health support).
 4. Daily Fylde Coast MDT strategic meetings have been held to develop an action plan the covid care and protect accommodation, develop referral pathways in and out from homeless accommodation, hospital and prison discharges. Progress is reported weekly to Lancashire wide Homeless Sub Group MDT meeting chaired by Public Health. Terms of reference for these groups have been developed.
 5. Daily a list of all households in temporary accommodation in the Fylde Coast (Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre) and any concerns the housing service have are sent to a Multi Disciplinary Team of statutory agencies for discussion the next day at 10am. This has led to joined up knowledge about placed individuals with support needs identified and support accessed in 24 hours.
- Within Fylde normal homeless accommodation and Covid Protect is provided by 5 existing units of dispersed interim units in St Annes that could be either normal homeless and Covid Protect accommodation. 5 existing interim units in St Annes with shared main entrance, were classed as normal homeless accommodation along with two B&Bs in Blackpool and one in St Annes. None of this accommodation has shared bathroom facilities.
- Covid Care accommodation, Fylde Council has leased this for 12 weeks, which can be extended if required, 5 self-contained apartments at a separate hotel in Blackpool. This is a separate hotel to the normal B&B homeless accommodation. This was primarily for families who need Covid Care accommodation and households who have received the shielding letter to self isolate for 12 weeks. We have had no families requiring this accommodation and two of the units are occupied by single households with underlying health issues and have received the shielding letter. NHS support is provided for this accommodation if required.
- The service throughout the Covid 19 period has had in temporary accommodation between 23 to 26 households at any one time. We are currently accommodating as of 15th May 2020, 21 households; 12 single people in B&B in Blackpool and St Annes and 5 single people and 4 families in temporary accommodation in St Annes.

Private Sector Enforcement

- Under the delegated powers of the Environment, Health and Housing Committee a revised housing enforcement policy was approved with revised procedures for operation of the service during Covid lockdown in line with guidance produced by MHCLG on Covid 19 and the enforcement of standards in rented properties. Only in cases of emergency will inspection visits be carried out, as described in the

policy. The arrangements for renewing HMO licences are also amended to make to process easier to complete at this challenging time.

- The purposes of this policy are:
 - to provide a framework for private sector housing enforcement activity by the Council during the Covid-19 outbreak;
 - to guide investigating officers and decision makers in carrying out their work; and
 - to help residents and property owners understand the powers and duties of the Council in relation to private sector housing and how they will be implemented at the current time.
 - During the Covid-19 outbreak formal action by the council under Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004 will be restricted to ensuring vulnerable tenants and imminent risks to health are targeted. The most likely course of action will be an Emergency Prohibition Order under Section 43 of the Housing Act 2004 for all or part of the premises concerned. Where a Category 1 hazard exists and it presents an imminent risk of serious harm to the health and safety of any occupiers, the Council may make an Emergency Prohibition Order. This action is likely where Emergency Remedial action is not considered appropriate, which will generally be the case during the Covid-19 outbreak.
3. Social distancing measures implemented as part of phased return to work is expected to have an impact on operations across the council for the remainder of the 20/21 financial year and possibly even longer. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and service delivery plans will be reviewed to take account of the financial and operational impact of COVID 19. The next revision of the MTFS will be published in November.

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	This report provides a general commentary of the financial impact to the Environment, Health and Housing Committee operations of the Covid-19 lockdown measures. These estimates are subject to change as the situation develops. In due course an updated Financial Forecast will provide a more accurate assessment of income loss and additional costs.
Legal	None from this report
Community Safety	Social distancing measures will be in place for the foreseeable period and have impact on service delivery
Human Rights and Equalities	None from this report
Sustainability and Environmental Impact	None from this report
Health & Safety and Risk Management	None from this report

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BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Name of document	Date	Where available for inspection
COVID 19 Lockdown Measures	March – May 2020	https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus?gclid=EAlaIqObChMIlKCymb-f6QIVNoBQBh0WqQCiEAAYASAAEgIbR_D_BwE