

DECISION ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT	PLANNING COMMITTEE	3 JUNE 2020	4
COVID 19 IMPACT ASSESSMENT & RECOVERY			

PUBLIC ITEM

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

SUMMARY

This is an initial report that 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 Planning 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 the 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

Introduction

1. The Coronavirus (COVID-19) world pandemic has had an impact on society never experienced. 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 Planning 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.

General

3. On 13 May 2020, Government published updated Covid-19 Planning Guidance which is available at: <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/news/coronavirus-hub/government-updates>. This guidance has been used in the adaptation of Fylde's Planning Service to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic.
4. The majority of staff within the service are currently working from home and the town hall is closed to visitors. Whilst staff are able to work remotely in order to perform the majority of their role, the quality of some services, for example responding to ad hoc telephone enquiries, has been impacted with the introduction of a 'message and call back' system. Various video conference packages are being utilised in order to facilitate discussions with applicants regarding proposed developments as well as to ensure effective communication within the planning team.

Development Management

5. The number of planning applications submitted since mid-March has fallen when compared to previous years, although the drop in applications has not been as marked as was first expected. This may be as a result of those applications that were in the course of preparation being submitted as planned. If this is the case, there may be a lag before any reduction in applications is experienced. The number of new applications will continue to be monitored.
6. Whilst the number of planning applications has remained relatively buoyant, the fee income from planning application fees has dropped markedly. When compared to the average fee income for the same period in the last 3 years, application fees have reduced by 50%. This correlates with a reduction in the number of major planning applications that have been submitted. It is not clear at this time whether there will be a corresponding increase in applications as the development industry responds to government initiatives to stimulate the economy or the economic situation becomes clearer.
7. As a result of guidance on non-essential travel and working, it was not initially possible to carry out any site visits to assess the potential impacts of development which in turn delayed the processing of those applications that had not been visited prior to the introduction of the lockdown. As national guidance has been revised, risk assessments have also been revised in order to allow certain site visits to take place where these can be carried out having regard to the safety of members of the public and staff. The decision on those applications that require visits to the interior of properties, such as applications for listed building consent for internal alterations, will continue to be placed on hold. All applicants continue to be kept up to date on the progress of their applications.
8. On the announcement of the lockdown, the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) announced that all appeal hearings and site visits would be postponed or placed on hold. Although new cases are being registered and processed as far as possible, there has been delay in the issuing of some appeal decisions. PINS are working to implement digital solutions such as holding hearings and inquiries via telephone or video conferencing.
9. A number of housing developers shut down their construction sites at the commencement of the lockdown, although most major developers have recommenced construction activity in recent weeks. This will likely result in reduced housing delivery for the year, which in turn may impact on the council's 5 year housing supply position.

Planning Enforcement

10. Government advice issued at the commencement of lockdown encouraged councils to take a pragmatic approach to the enforcement of planning conditions in order to facilitate the delivery of key services, for example through allowing store deliveries to take place outside authorised hours. Some of the initial advice has now been introduced into legislation, whilst enforcement of other matters is being left to the discretion

of individual councils. For example, Government have revised legislation to allow pubs, cafes and restaurants to provide delivery and take-away services without seeking planning permission.

11. The courts have advised that they have ceased hearing all but the most urgent cases and so it has not been possible to progress any planning enforcement cases to prosecution. The availability of the courts to accept new cases will continue to be monitored.
12. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has highlighted that local authorities may have to provide additional temporary support to the travelling community, including making alternative stopping places available, such as transit sites, suitable local authority land. This in turn has implications for the enforcement against unauthorised sites.
13. The work of the planning enforcement team requires a high degree of interaction with the public and this is being managed to reduce the level of associated risk to staff and members of the public.

Planning Policy

14. Much of the work of the Planning Policy Team involves extensive engagement with local communities. Clearly traditional public meetings and community engagement events have had to be placed on hold. In addition, the Town & Country Planning Regulations require that physical copies of certain documents be placed on deposit to provide for public scrutiny. Government have announced revised regulations to provide for alternative forms of consultation. It is proposed to amend the council's Statement of Community Involvement which sets out how the council will engage with the local community will need to be amended in order to reflect legislative changes (see item on elsewhere on this agenda). This will provide the flexibility that will allow the local plan review and other policy documents to proceed, however, the completion of these projects including the review of the local plan and the adoption of Supplementary Planning Guidance as set out in the Local Development Scheme will inevitably be delayed.
15. The delivery of new housing will continue to be monitored, with the intention of submitting an Annual Position Statement (Five Year Housing Supply) in July as per the normal timetable.

Regeneration and Urban Design

16. As with planning policy, all planned community engagement events have had to be postponed. Some of these will be rearranged, whilst alternative means of public engagement are being explored wherever possible. This will inevitably result in delays in the delivery of projects.
17. Government have recognised the impact that responding to the Coronavirus pandemic is having on local authorities and so they have delayed a number of deadlines for the submission of bid documents including the submission of final business cases for the Future High Street Fund bids.
18. In addition, Government have announced a number of new initiatives to support local businesses and communities in the face of the pandemic. Officers are exploring the opportunities presented by these programmes and recommendations will be brought to committee in due course. There will inevitably be a refocusing of resources in order to deliver key projects during the recovery phase and so the timetables for the delivery of some existing projects will have to be revised.
19. Physical work on projects has also been delayed. For example, Lancashire County Council closed down the construction site at Wood Street in order to allow them to redeploy their resources to assist in the response to the pandemic. Work on site has recently recommenced. There will also be a knock-on effect on other projects that were due to commence construction in the next few months.
20. The tree officer continues to respond to applications for works to protected trees as well as any reports of unauthorised works within the constraints of revised safe working practice.

Conclusions

21. A number of projects have already been delayed as a result of the measures introduced to control the transmission of the virus. At this time, it is not possible to accurately quantify these delays as progress will depend on further changes to guidance and legislation, as well as any requirement to refocus resources as the Council's 'response' phase moves to 'recovery' planning.

22. Social distancing measures implemented as part of phased return to work are 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 first revision of the MTFS will be published in September.

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	This report provides a general commentary of the financial impact to the Planning 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	Safe systems of working have been devised to manage the safety of the community and staff.
Human Rights and Equalities	None from this report
Sustainability and Environmental Impact	None from this report
Health & Safety and Risk Management	Risk assessments have been revised to recognise the risk posed by Covid-19 and safe systems of working have been established to manage the risks to staff and members of the public.

LEAD AUTHOR	CONTACT DETAILS	DATE
Mark Evans	mark.evans@fylde.gov.uk & Tel 01253 658460	May 2020

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Name of document	Date	Where available for inspection
COVID 19 Lockdown Measures	March – May 2020	https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus?gclid=EAlaIQobChMIKCybf6QIVNoBQBh0WqQCIeAAYASAAEgIbR_D_BwE