

<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Managing Director</b>
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<b>Portfolio Leader:</b>	<b>Leader of the Council</b>
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Report Track:</b>	<b>Cabinet: 23/04/20</b>

**CABINET**  
**23 APRIL 2020**  
**COVID-19 PANDEMIC:**  
**RESPONSE OF CANNOCK CHASE DISTRICT COUNCIL AND PARTNERS**

**1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To provide an update on the Council's response to COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.2 To note the Urgent Decisions taken by the Managing Director as part of the Council's response since the last Cabinet meeting took place.
- 1.2 To seek Cabinet approval for the allocation of a budget to cover the costs of additional referrals being made to the various Foodbanks that operate in the District.

**2 Reason(s) for Appendices being 'Not for Publication'**

- 2.1 In accordance with the provisions of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), Appendices 3 and 4 of the report are considered 'not for publication' under the following categories of exemption:
  - Exempt Paragraph 3 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council).

**3 Recommendation(s)**

- 3.1 That Cabinet note the current position regarding service delivery and the actions taken by officers to ensure the delivery of critical services and compliance with Government Guidance.
- 3.2 That Cabinet note the following Urgent Decisions made:
  - (i) Financial assistance to Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles following the closure of Leisure and Cultural Facilities.

- (ii) Consideration of requests from Biffa in relation to the review and payment of invoices for the waste collection contract.
  - (iii) The suspension of pay and Display requirements at Brunswick Road Car park to support NHS staff, patients and visitors using Cannock Chase Hospital.
- 3.3 That Cabinet approve that the Council allocates a budget of £5,000 to cover the costs of additional referrals being made to the various Foodbanks.

## **4 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendations**

### Key Issues

- 4.1 Cannock Chase Council, working with partners across the County, have put worked quickly over the last few weeks to put in place arrangements to ensure that critical services continue to be provided as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been necessary to make a number of changes to the Council's normal operating procedures in order to do this
- 4.2 A number of urgent decisions have had to be taken over the last few weeks, particularly with regard to the Council's key contracts for waste collection and leisure services as well as providing free car parking for NHS staff, patients and visitors at Cannock Chase hospital.
- 4.3 The Council has been working with voluntary sector organisations to support vulnerable people in the community. There is a need to provide grant funding to the two food banks that operate in the District for reasons explained in the report.

### Reason for Recommendations

- 4.4 That Cabinet notes the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic; the details of decisions made by officers under the Urgency procedure rules since the last meeting of Cabinet on 18 March 2020 and considers providing grant support for the District's two food banks.

## **5 Relationship to Corporate Priorities**

- 5.1 The Council's response to COVID-19 seeks to ensure the delivery of critical services to residents and businesses across the District over the coming months. It also seeks to comply with new legislative requirements of the Coronavirus Act 2020 that grants the Government emergency powers to handle the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. This Act received Royal Assent on 25 March 2020.

**6 Report Detail****Governance and Priorities**

- 6.1 A team of officers has been established to lead the Council's response to the COVID-19 situation comprising:
- Managing Director (Chair)
  - Head of Finance (s151 Officer and Deputy Managing Director)
  - Head of Economic Prosperity
  - Head of Housing & Partnerships
  - Head of Environment & Healthy Lifestyles
  - Head of Governance & Corporate Services
  - Head of Technology (supported by other ICT staff as necessary)
  - Monitoring Officer
  - HR Manager
  - Policy & Communications Manager
  - Democratic & Resilience Services Manager
- 6.2 Governance arrangements have been established to support and evidence the Council's management of the response to the pandemic. These arrangements are in line with the Council's guidelines for managing a Major incident.
- 6.3 These include:
- (i) Decision logs being maintained for the Incident Management meetings. The Managing Director and Heads of Service are also keeping a record of any decisions they make regarding the day to day operation of their services, in accordance with their delegated authority.
  - (ii) Where appropriate items are referred to the Group Leaders' teleconference for consideration and other matters requiring a formal decision will continue to be referred to the Cabinet.
  - (iii) A protocol is in place to deal with any urgent decisions which cannot wait for a formal Cabinet meeting. These are documented on a pro-forma and will be reported to the next scheduled Cabinet meeting.
  - (iv) A Log is being maintained of all additional expenditure being incurred by the Council and a record maintained of additional funding received.
- 6.4 In terms of democratic oversight, a teleconference is held weekly with the Leader, Deputy Leader, Managing Director and Deputy Managing Director; a teleconference is also held weekly with the Group Leaders to keep them updated on the Council's response and to consult on any key issues that require a decision. A teleconference is also held weekly with Amanda Milling MP which is joint with the local Chief Inspector of Staffordshire Police. The Council also participates in teleconferences chaired by the Secretary of State, Rt. Hon Robert Jenrick as well as those organised by the West Midlands Combined Authority, Regional MHCLG CEO Network and the District Council Network.

- 6.5 The key priorities that the Council has been working on during this period can be summarised as follows:
- (i) The Government's **Social Distancing policy** is critical as this is the main strategy for containing virus transmission and has to apply to everything the Council are doing.
  - (ii) **Keeping essential Council services operational** e.g. waste collection via Biffa, CCTV, Burials, Mortuary, Homelessness and Tenancy Support, Payments, Post, PR and Communications, ICT, HR & payroll etc.
  - (iii) **Business Support** – the Council has had a funding allocation from Government of £24m and has already made a huge number of grant payments to businesses and is administering the new business rates relief scheme.
  - (iv) **Community Vulnerability Hub** – to support vulnerable people in the community in partnership with Staffordshire County Council and voluntary sector organisations that are already delivering significant help in the community. The Council will also administer the Council Tax Hardship Fund allocation from Government.
  - (v) **Supporting our workforce** especially as it is now almost exclusively a remote workforce.
  - (vi) **Working with our LRF partners across Staffordshire.** There are a whole range of issues that we are involved in such as extending mortuary capacity, securing PPE masks for the public sector;
  - (vii) **Communications** – at times like this with so much confusion, it is critical that the Council communicates as clearly as we can. There are major groups that we have to continue to communicate with – residents, businesses, elected Members, local MP, LRF, public, volunteers, partners etc.

An update is given against each of these seven key priorities below.

### **Government Social Distancing Policy**

- 6.6 The Council is following Government guidance on social distancing ('Guidance on social distancing for everyone in the UK') across all its activities to prevent virus transmission:
- (i) procedures were put in place to enable homeworking;
  - (ii) employees who were classified as vulnerable were sent home to work immediately;
  - (iii) those with childcare issues and vulnerable dependents were given 2 weeks to put in place suitable arrangements to include homeworking wherever possible and all now have appropriate arrangements in place;
  - (iv) The delivery of essential Council services complies with the Government's social distancing guidance.
- 6.7 Overall, compliance across the District with social distancing has been high with only one significant breach in relation to a party over the Bank Holiday weekend that required the intervention of Staffordshire Police, Cannock Chase Housing

and the Community Safety Partnership. 164 letters were subsequently sent to members of the public involved in this incident

- 6.8 With the Government's announcement on 16<sup>th</sup> April that existing restrictions will remain for a further three weeks, the Council will review if there are any further implications and will continue to work in partnership with Staffordshire Police to promote compliance.

### **Keeping essential Council services operational**

- 6.9 The focus in the first few weeks has been on maintaining critical services whilst adhering to the Government's social distancing policy. The Council has prioritised the services that it provides to determine those ones that are critical and need to be maintained during the pandemic.
- 6.10 A business continuity plan is in place for each of the critical services to identify the resources required to keep the service operational, the level of service being provided etc.
- 6.11 Delivery of the critical services is being monitored to ensure that any issues can be dealt with quickly. Some services are experiencing low levels of staffing due to employees being unable to work and it has been necessary to re-allocate resources accordingly.
- 6.12 A number of services are experiencing an increase in demand due to the pandemic and where necessary additional resources are being identified to support these e.g. the Business Rates team who are processing the business support payments.
- 6.13 Some services are only being provided on a reactive basis for emergencies e.g. dangerous trees, buildings.
- 6.14 A number of low priority services are not being provided currently and others have been suspended to support the Government's guidelines regarding social distancing e.g. closure of play areas and car parks attached to parks to discourage large numbers of people from using them.
- 6.15 A detailed description of service levels currently being provided are set out in Appendix 1. These service levels are monitored on a daily basis.

### **Business Support**

- 6.16 A major priority is to support businesses in the District, many of which are not currently operating and significantly concerned about their future viability. The Council is administering the Business Support Grants on behalf of MHCLG/ Department for Business Energy and Industrial strategy. Work started in advance of the full guidelines becoming available with businesses that the Council believed would be eligible for one of the grants. The Council wrote to businesses on 27 March requesting bank details where we did not hold this information as many businesses in the District are exempt from paying business rates. Businesses are required to complete a form from the Council's website to

supply and verify their bank details and certain other information that the government expects us to capture in order for fraud checks to be undertaken.

- 6.17 Grants were paid with effect from the 6 April with the authority being one of the first authorities in Staffordshire to make payments. Payments made as at the 16 April amount to £10 million and staff have worked over two weekends to progress cases however the process has been delayed by:
- Lack of contact details for businesses closed as part of lockdown.
  - Information being provided that is not in accordance with Government Data requirements
  - The volume of calls for support to businesses and Council Tax payers in general.
- 6.18 Payments of grants remain the first priority of the Council and payments are expected to be completed by the end of April.
- 6.19 Work thereafter will continue with the implementation of reforms as contained in the government's budget (and subsequent announcements) including the 100% discount/business rates relief for Retail/Leisure and Hospitality ratepayers.
- 6.20 The Council's Economic Development team has been deployed to support the Revenues and Benefits service to ensure as many eligible businesses as possible can quickly access grants. This has involved Officers telephoning a large number of businesses to explain what support is available and what they need to do to facilitate the quick processing of payments. Furthermore, work has been done to update the Council's website and ensure that appropriate business support information is easily accessible with links also made to Local Enterprise Partnerships / Growth Hub websites where in-depth information and advice can be obtained. Information on the website is regularly reviewed to ensure it takes account of the latest Government support that is available.
- 6.21 The Contact Centre is also going to be used to support the Revenues & Benefits service with handling enquiries.

### **Community Vulnerability Hub**

- 6.22 The Government has committed nationally, via the NHS "shielding" scheme, to support people who are vulnerable as they have acute underlying conditions and/or are undergoing treatment that compromises their immune systems. People in this group have been contacted to encourage them to register for support. If they register they are able to request a delivery of a weekly food parcel to their home if they are unable to access food through family, friends and so on. The deliveries continue for the 12 week isolation period and are being undertaken by national food distribution companies.
- 6.23 Staffordshire County Council is providing support to those people who have registered as part of the NHS shielding scheme. The County contacts these people to check if they have sufficient food to last them until their first NHS parcel arrives. If not, the County will provide a parcel sufficient for one week. The NHS parcels have standard contents and are not tailored in any way. People

who are unable to use any of the contents due to allergies, dietary or cultural issues, are advised to contact their Local Authority.

- 6.24 The County's helpline also responds to other (non-NHS) vulnerable people who are self isolating – assessing needs and, if necessary, providing a food parcel to last one week. These cases are then referred to Districts to pick up for further support.
- 6.25 Cannock Chase Council has established a local community hub to support vulnerable people in the District. The hub is being run by Council staff who are unable to undertake their normal duties either in full or part and have volunteered to support this work. The hub is designed to complement the services already being provided by other organisations. A substantial amount of support for vulnerable people in the District is being provided via the voluntary sector including Support Staffordshire, Chase Coronavirus Support Network, Cannock and Rugeley Foodbanks, Chase Lighthouse, Salvation Army and Help a Squaddie to name but a few. The Council is working in partnership with many of these organisations. The Council's leisure provider, Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles is also providing staff to deliver support to vulnerable people. A copy of the Support Network flowchart is attached as Appendix 2.
- 6.26 More recently, Council officers have analysed data from approximately fifteen Council databases to identify people who have at least one vulnerability. 2,300 letters have been sent out to those identified and contact will be made to check that they have the appropriate level of support now and into the future. This should enable the Council to identify the "quiet vulnerable" who may not be asking for help but may need some.
- 6.27 The Council also has specific responsibilities for its housing tenants, homeless people and rough sleepers. Contact has been made with the most vulnerable tenants and food and other essentials have been provided where necessary on a regular basis. The Council is providing similar support to homeless individuals and families and have secured accommodation for local rough sleepers - as directed by the Government. A system is in place to support those people who contact the Council asking for support, or are referred to us by the County Council, where they are self isolating and don't have support from family, friends or trusted neighbours. Cases are assessed on an individual basis so they can be advised where to get help.
- (i) Those able to pay for their shopping or in need of pharmacy or social support, such as a telephone call, are referred to the Chase Coronavirus Support Network (CCSN) or other organisations who are offering specialist support
  - (ii) Those who don't have money are referred to the local foodbanks in Cannock and Rugeley;
- 6.28 Subject to Cabinet approval arrangements are to be put in place to cover the additional referrals that the Council are making in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The recommendation is to cover the costs of additional food parcels that are being distributed. A budget of £5,000 will cover the costs of

approximately 250 food parcels based on £20.00 per food parcel (figure based on food parcels distributed by CCDC).

### **Supporting our workforce**

- 6.29 Within the space of a few days of the Government lockdown announcement, the vast majority of the Council's employees had moved to homeworking.
- 6.30 20 laptops and a number of mobile phones have been procured to enable all applicable staff to work from home with these being allocated on a priority basis, subject to Cabinet approval, to those delivering critical services.
- 6.31 Currently there are just a handful of key employees in the Council offices or out on site each day where this is essential to the delivery of services.
- 6.32 Not all employees are able to work from home fully either because of the nature of the service they work in or due to a lack of suitable technology. For those employees who aren't able to work from home because of the nature of their duties, they are being asked to support the operation of the Community Hub either with deliveries or telephone calls. Additional laptops have been ordered for those employees who don't have any suitable technology but could work from home; there is however a shortage in the supply of these and delivery is still awaited.
- 6.33 Employees who aren't able to work from home fully or whose service has been identified as a low priority are to have their skills assessed to see if they could be reallocated to support other critical services.
- 6.34 The move to homeworking has been a significant achievement by the Technology team in supporting many staff who were not previously set up to do this. This has also included supporting the use of systems remotely which had not been attempted or tested prior to this e.g. the telephony system.
- 6.35 At the time of reporting there are 10 employees in total affected by symptoms of or self-isolation relating to COVID-19. Of these 4 have symptoms and are too unwell to work and 6 are in family self-isolation due to symptoms of family members. Of the 6 in family isolation 5 are able to work productively from home. The Council employs a workforce of 455. The figures above demonstrate that less than 1% of the workforce is currently showing COVID-19 symptoms and just over 2% of the total workforce is either affected personally or is living in household where symptoms are present. Data in this regard is updated daily and reported to appropriate regional bodies for monitoring purposes.
- 6.36 Managers have been briefed to support all staff during this period in terms of welfare and in facilitating all staff to work remotely. There has been a significant change in working practices brought about by this pandemic and the Council needs to retain much of these after the pandemic is over.

### **Working with our LRF partners across Staffordshire**

- 6.37 The Council is also working in conjunction with partners across the County in response to the pandemic. The majority of the work is being co-ordinated

through the Staffordshire Resilience Forum (SRF). A Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) has been set-up and this is currently meeting twice a week via teleconference. The SCG is supported in its work via a number of sub-groups which focus on specific work streams. The Managing Director represents the Council at the SCG meetings and other officers sit on the sub-groups as appropriate. The Managing Director is also the strategic lead for the Mortality Management work stream.

6.38 The Council has also provided a significant amount of mutual aid support on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to LRF organisations across Staffordshire. This was facilitated by a significant donation of 10,000 masks plus a commitment to donate a further 5,000 from a local e commerce company called Supersmart. The Council also stocked up on 70% alcohol gel sanitiser from a local company prior to shortages of this product occurring. To date, the following organisations have been supported with their PPE requirements from the donation and other Council stock:

- Staffordshire Police (500 masks)
- Walsall Council social care staff (2,000 masks)
- Staffordshire Fire and Rescue (1,000 masks)
- Lichfield District Council (1,000 masks)
- Stafford Borough Council (1,000 masks & sanitiser)
- Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council (500 masks)
- Drake Hall Prison (masks and sanitiser)
- Stafford prison (sanitiser)
- MFPT District Nursing Services – Cannock Chase (masks / sanitiser)
- NHS Covid community hot site (masks, sanitiser, coveralls)
- Chase Coronavirus Support Network (sanitiser)
- Cannock Food Bank (sanitiser)
- Salvation Army – Cannock Chase (sanitiser)

6.39 Most recently, the LRF asked all District and Borough Councils (and Stoke City Council) to contact all funeral undertakers in their area and check if they had sufficient stocks of single use PPE to protect their staff in handling suspected or confirmed COVID-19 deceased (gloves, aprons, masks and eye protectors). If there are validated problems or gaps in supply, each local authority has been asked to be a supplier of last resort. Cannock Chase Council officers have completed this exercise and identified that some undertakers were struggling to get certain items of PPE and these have now been supplied.

6.40 The Council has recently been allocated a stock of PPE by the LRF that was part of a Government allocation for each LRF area. The Council has also been allocated 60 FFP3 respirator masks on request by the LRF to be used at Cannock mortuary. The Council is required to report on its stock of PPE to the

LRF on a weekly basis. The Council's stock of PPE remains robust but is monitored on a regular basis.

## **Communications**

6.41 Good communication is a key part of the Council's strategy in managing the current situation. The Council's Communications have focussed on:

- Residents and stakeholders – keeping them informed of changes to Council services, signposting them to where they can find advice and support. This is being done via press releases, use of social media and information on the Council's website.
- Employees – providing them with weekly updates on the Council's approach and supporting their wellbeing whilst working remotely.
- Members - Group Leaders are being updated and consulted on key issues via twice weekly teleconferences and Members receive a weekly update from the Managing Director.

6.42 The Council is also supporting national campaigns and those of partner organisations including from Public Health England, the NHS, Staffordshire County Council and Staffordshire Police; as well as the voluntary sector such as Citizens` Advice and Support Staffordshire.

6.43 To date, 16 press releases have been issued to the media with all covered in some form or other by the media. This includes a live radio interview on BBC WM regarding the donation of 15,000 face masks by a local company.

6.44 The Council is represented on the Intelligence and Communications Sub Group of the Staffordshire Local Resilience Forum which meets `virtually` twice a week to share news and developments from a communications perspective.

6.45 As to be expected, social media sites managed by the Council have been particularly busy and a large number of issues have been publicised and many direct enquiries answered or directed to other officers to deal with. We have seen increases in sign ups, to 8,866 followers on Twitter and 6,069 Likes on Facebook as of 16 April.

## **Urgent Decisions**

6.46 As referred to in 5.3 (iii), a protocol has been put in place to deal with urgent decisions. To date the urgent decisions have been made in respect of:

- (i) Payment to IHL
- (ii) Payment to Biffa
- (iii) Suspension of charges on Brunswick Road Car Park

### **Payment to Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles**

- 6.47 In line with Government guidance IHL has temporarily shutdown of all of the Council's Culture and Leisure Facilities. This has had a significant impact on the ability of the Trust to achieve any income to support its operation. Consequently, IHL have requested urgent assistance with the inevitable cash flow challenges and implications resulting from these actions.
- 6.48 In considering IHL's request for assistance discussions were held between officers from the Council and the Trust to ascertain the actions IHL had taken since the closure of facilities to mitigate/minimise the financial impact.
- 6.49 Officers concluded that it was essential to take positive steps to provide some financial support to IHL during this period of closure (April – June), to ensure future service delivery and business continuity. Failure to support IHL could result in the ultimate closure of such services which would not benefit the Council and would significantly limit our residents' ability to lead healthy and active lives. These services will also have an essential role to play to reconnect with communities and bring people together through culture, sport and physical activities once the current lockdown position changes. It is therefore more important than ever that the Council provides our long term partner with the support they require to mitigate significant financial difficulties and risk.
- 6.50 Members may also be aware of Government Advice Notice PPN 02/20 which offers guidance to public bodies on the payment of their suppliers to ensure service continuity during and after the current COVID-19 outbreak. The completed Urgent Decision Template with confidential financial information is attached at Appendix 3.

### **Payment to Biffa**

- 6.51 Officers received a letter on 30th March 2020 from Biffa Municipal Limited, the Council's Waste Collection Contractor, in which the Company's Financial Director expressed his desire to explore possible options contained within the Government's procurement advice PPN/02/2020 and sought a reply by the 3rd April.
- 6.52 Having fully considered this request officers responded on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2020 agreeing to pay the management fees one month in advance (April- June) .
- 6.53 A copy of the correspondence which contains some confidential financial information, together with officers' response is attached at Appendices 4A to 4C.

### **Free Car Parking – Brunswick Road**

- 6.54 Following discussions with the Leader, and after seeking assurances from the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust, officers suspended the pay and display requirements from 25th March 2020 until further notice for NHS workers, hospital visitors and members of the public using the Brunswick Road car park adjacent to the hospital during the COVID-19 outbreak.

- 6.55 The rationale for this decision was to provide support to NHS workers and members of the public during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.
- 6.56 The completed Urgent Decision Template with confidential financial information is attached at Appendix 5.

### **Looking Ahead**

- 6.57 The Council has moved quickly in response to Government guidance and is now reviewing its initial arrangements to strengthen these to ensure resilience in the delivery of critical services over the next few months. In addition to reviewing the delivery and resilience of Council services, the Council's priorities and the projects due to be as set out in the Priority Delivery Plans for 2020/21 will need to be revisited in light of the current situation.
- 6.58 Planning is also commencing for the "Recovery Phase". This will focus on the recovery of the Council as an organisation and the District, and the implications for residents, businesses, employees and Members.
- 6.59 The economic impact for the District will be at the heart of recovery planning. In addition to the immediate public health impact, it is anticipated that the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on the national, regional and District economy, will be felt for a long time to come. The current Government response is to support businesses through loans, grants, rate relief and wage subsidies. However this is a short term response and designed to mitigate the impact of the current Government restrictions on businesses. It is too early to say whether these measures will be successful in stopping large numbers of businesses closing or businesses being forced to lay off staff.
- 6.60 The Council will need to closely monitor the impact of the pandemic on the District's economy, with the focus in the short term, ensuring that as many eligible businesses as possible can access support. In the medium / long term, it is highly likely that there will be a significant structural change in the District's economy and local interventions may be required to help the economy to recover. No specific economic data for the District to demonstrate the economic impact is yet available, but forecasts from the Office for Budget Responsibility released on 14th April, suggest that the Government restrictions will have a large but hopefully temporary shock to the UK's economy and finances, with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) anticipated to fall by up to 35% during Quarter 2 of 2020 and unemployment rising to 2 million people. Cabinet will need to be further updated on the impact of COVID-19 on the local economy once a clearer picture emerges and it is also anticipated that the Council will need to review and refresh its Economic Prosperity Strategy – which was only adopted in January 2020.

## **7 Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

The Council have received an allocation of £0.054 million of emergency funding from the Government primarily aimed at social care but available to cover all costs.

It is estimated that the additional cost of spending pressures, including the issues raised in this report, is in the region of £0.136 million for April alone. In addition the Council will also experience a reduction in income of £0.149 million per month due to COVID-19 pressures.

Allocations of £23.9 million and £0.710 million have been received in relation to providing Business Support Grants and Council Tax Hardship discounts.

### **7.2 Legal**

The Managing Director has delegated authority to incur expenditure in respect of any major incident/emergency within or adjoining the District until the Cabinet meets, and can also designate any officer to carry out such functions as are deemed necessary in the circumstances.

### **7.3 Human Resources**

Employees' contractual terms and conditions and payments have been maintained without detriment to date. Employee Communications is frequent and provided in formats available to all irrespective of access to a workstation at home.

### **7.4 Section 17 (Crime Prevention)**

N/a

### **7.5 Human Rights Act**

N/a

### **7.6 Data Protection**

A range of data sets held by the Council have been analysed to identify vulnerable people. Access to this data has been permitted on the grounds that it is in the interests of the public for health and safety reasons, and follows guidance issued by the Information Commissioner's Office.

### **7.7 Risk Management**

The approach and actions set out in this report have been put in place to manage the risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and to ensure that the

Council can continue to provide essential services to residents and businesses across the District.

### 7.8 **Equality & Diversity**

The Council is working to maintain access to essential services for all residents and businesses across the District; targeted actions are being taken to identify and support vulnerable people in conjunction with partners, particularly in respect of the Council setting up the Cannock Chase Community Vulnerability Hub.

### 7.9 **Best Value**

N/A

## **8 Appendices to the Report**

- Appendix 1: Summary of Council service levels during COVID-19 Pandemic
- Appendix 2: Support Network Flowchart
- Appendix 3: IHL Urgent Decision *(Not for Publication)*
- Appendix 4A: Biffa Urgent Decision Template *(Not for Publication)*
- Appendix 4B: Letter from Biffa *(Not for Publication)*
- Appendix 4C: Council's response to Biffa *(Not for Publication)*
- Appendix 5: Brunswick Road Car Park Urgent Decision Template

### **Previous Consideration**

None.

### **Background Papers**

None.

## Summary of Council service levels during COVID-19 Pandemic

**Waste Collection Services** - since the coronavirus outbreak, our aim, working together with our contractor has been to maintain collections of residual waste, garden waste and dry recycled materials, so as to protect local amenity and public health and prevent waste from building up. To date, ALL normal collection services have been maintained other than our contractor temporarily ceasing the collection of bulky waste items and waste from our bring sites is being treated as residual waste. Our waste collection services have been prioritised in accordance with national guidance and we are in daily contact with our contractor and other Staffordshire Authorities as well as participating in weekly national conference calls with Biffa. A number of press releases have been issued together with daily posts on our website and social media including Facebook and Twitter, to keep our residents informed.

**Bereavement Services** - a full service continues to be delivered. Officers are also involved in working with the SCG to understand and assess the likely need for additional burial capacity across the county as a result of COVID-19. There are circa 900 plots available at Stile Cop Cemetery. A number of additional Parks and Open Spaces staff (7) have been trained on using cemetery equipment to provide additional capacity should the need arise. Extra equipment has also been ordered and a new concrete runner installed on the 8th April. The costs for the training, equipment and site works totals £18,777.

**Mortuary** - the Council runs Cannock Mortuary on behalf of Staffordshire County Council and HM Coroner for South Staffordshire, with provision of storage of up to 12 deceased and facility for post-mortems to take place. At the outset of the outbreak it was anticipated that there would be a requirement for additional storage of deceased at Cannock Mortuary to contribute to the overall number for the county, which would have required Officers to procure a temporary cold storage unit and employ an additional staff member (these costs would have been underwritten by the County Council, as commissioner for Mortuary services). Cabinet should note that revised modelling on excess deaths for the county now indicates that much less capacity is required than originally envisaged, as such Cannock Mortuary has been 'stood down' and a central body store facility is being put in place at the County Showground, Stafford. Whilst the risk to the Council in dealing with additional capacity has now been mitigated, Cabinet should note that there are still significant difficulties in operating the Mortuary on a day to day basis, due to staffing issues. Officers are seeking to improve the resilience of the Mortuary, and Cabinet should note that Officers from Environmental Health are assisting with post mortem tasks during this period. Additionally, Officers from Environmental Health have delivered training to volunteers at the body storage facility at Stafford County Showground and have assisted in ensuring all funeral directors in the District have sufficient PPE.

**Planning** - the Council continues to operate a fully staffed Development Control service, with processes revised so that the planning process can continue remotely. Planning regulation has been changed by Government to enable restaurants, cafés and pubs which do not currently offer delivery and hot food takeaway to do so. The Planning Control Committee meetings on 25th March and 15<sup>th</sup> April were successfully held remotely with members able to dial in via telephone. Officers are examining the feasibility of holding future meetings via video conferencing. The Council is continuing work on its Local Plan Review. The next stage of the review is the preferred options consultation in July/August 2020 and Officers will need to consider the impact of any social distancing policies in place at that time on the ability to hold face to face consultation events.

**Business closure regulations** - The Council's Environmental Health team is now responsible for enforcing the requirements of the Government's new business closure regulations and where there is evidence of non compliance, the Council is able to issue prohibition notices and fixed penalties. The regulations cover pubs, bars, restaurants, hairdressers and retail with a number of exceptions, including supermarkets and pharmacies. Officers are actively monitoring businesses and to date there has been a good level of compliance.

**Building Control** – the demand for the shared Building Control service has reduced since the beginning of the outbreak. The service is now only dealing with urgent or critical building inspection site visits and dangerous structure call-outs but is continuing to process Building Regulations applications and Notices remotely wherever possible.

**Property maintenance** – the Council's Corporate Property team is currently only prioritising critical maintenance works or dealing with urgent responsive repairs.

### **Housing Maintenance:**

Essential services being delivered:

- Emergency repairs – priority 1
- In-house housing stores provision including the management of PPE
- Selected priority 2 repairs
- Essential empty property repairs
- Out of hours emergency repairs service
- Safe as houses works
- Support to the vulnerability hub – (collection / deliveries)

Non-essential services – currently on hold:

- Selected priority 2 & 3 repairs
- Empty property repairs
- Vulnerable persons decorating
- External fencing programme

**Homelessness service** (incl. non-priority housing need & rough sleepers) - to date, there has not been an increase in the number of homeless cases but we are starting to see a number of domestic violence cases. Activities including face-to-face interviews, inspections of temporary accommodation not being undertaken. The Government requirement to place all rough sleepers into accommodation has been under-taken. New cases continue to be placed. Some existing cases have been evicted. The Outreach service (via provider) has been affected by self-isolation but it is due to resume in person shortly.

**Housing management functions** - The Housing reception is closed but a telephone is available in the bungalow lobby area for homelessness applicants. The team are responding to enquiries from tenants. The choice based letting system has been suspended – this decision has been reviewed and over the coming weeks we will be re-opening the scheme. Rent income has been impacted adversely and universal credit claims are currently standing at 1005 which is around 25% of council tenants. The team are attempting to make personal contact with tenants and court action is currently suspended.

**Sheltered Schemes** – these are functioning as per normal with a daily visit is being made by the independent living officers. The communal areas have been closed off to encourage residents to stay in their individual properties. The external landscaping and grass cutting is not currently being undertaken.

**Housing Property Services Team** - Gas emergencies are being dealt with and gas servicing is being re-programmed by the contractor PH Jones. Dodds are undertaking essential works.

**Partnerships, Safeguarding & CCTV** - the community safety hub is operating virtually on an almost daily basis. The police liaison meetings are also being undertaken virtually. The Partnerships Manager has been nominated to sit on the SRF Domestic Abuse multi-agency group representing the district community safety partnership. The CCTV service continues to operate.

**Parks and Open Spaces** - all of the Council's play areas; green gym equipment and public toilets are closed and where possible so too are the car parks supporting those play areas and open spaces. All parks and green spaces require people to stay 2 metres apart from others at all times in accordance with national guidance on social distancing.

**Grass cutting** – grass cutting around the district and to vulnerable housing tenants has been suspended but the cutting of some verges and in other areas has been re-introduced where it is safe to do so. Maintenance of the golf course is continuing.

**Tree Team** – Emergency cases only.

**Animal Welfare** - officers from the Countryside Team and Parks Team are ensuring that the welfare of the cattle on Hednesford Hills have had their TB injections and are regularly fed as are the pets and animals at Elmore Park.

**Street Cleansing** - currently we are providing a reduced but more targeted street cleansing, fly-tipping and litter picking/bin emptying service 2 days per week. This is for a number of reasons:

- (i) To comply wherever possible with the Government and Public Health England guidance around staying at home and emphasising social distancing thereby reducing the opportunity for the coronavirus to spread in our District.
- (ii) To protect our street cleaning team, 46% of whom who are considered vulnerable and at a higher risk of contracting the virus
- (iii) To take a longer term view on service delivery. Providing a targeted service (2 days per week) will enable us to respond to cleansing tasks as required and where needed. This decision will hopefully enable us to retain our current resource working for a much longer period and therefore ensure we can provide a cleansing service throughout this difficult and challenging time

**Vehicle Workshop** - a reduced service is being provided by 2/3rds of the normal workforce (due to vulnerability shielding of one employee). Public MOT's and Taxi Testing has been suspended so as to prioritise maintenance of our own fleet.

**Environmental Protection** - a reduced service is being provided with a number of staff in vulnerable groups and all staff working from home. The reduction in service means that complaints and requests for service will be triaged and prioritised for appropriate action. Only urgent site visits approved by the Service manager are being undertaken. We are still providing response to reports of businesses not closing and to nuisance and other public health complaints and a limited dog warden service.

**Pest Control** – the Council's contractor is only undertaking emergency cases.

**Disabled Facilities Grants** - a reduced service is being provided as both Technical officers responsible for assessing needs; preparing specifications and drawing up plans are considered vulnerable and are therefore working from home. The OT service providers are only undertaking telephone assessments and the majority of contractors are not undertaking major alteration or specialist works. There are currently not attending cases that are considered urgent and we are looking to review all cases by contacting clients and we are also exploring the use of digital technology such as Teams, What's App, Facetime to survey properties where our clients are agreeable and subject to putting safe working practices in place.

**Corporate & Support Services** – those services essential to the delivery of other services and the operation of the civic centre continue to be provided. Staff from key support services are amongst the few staff that are continuing to work at the Civic Offices, this includes:

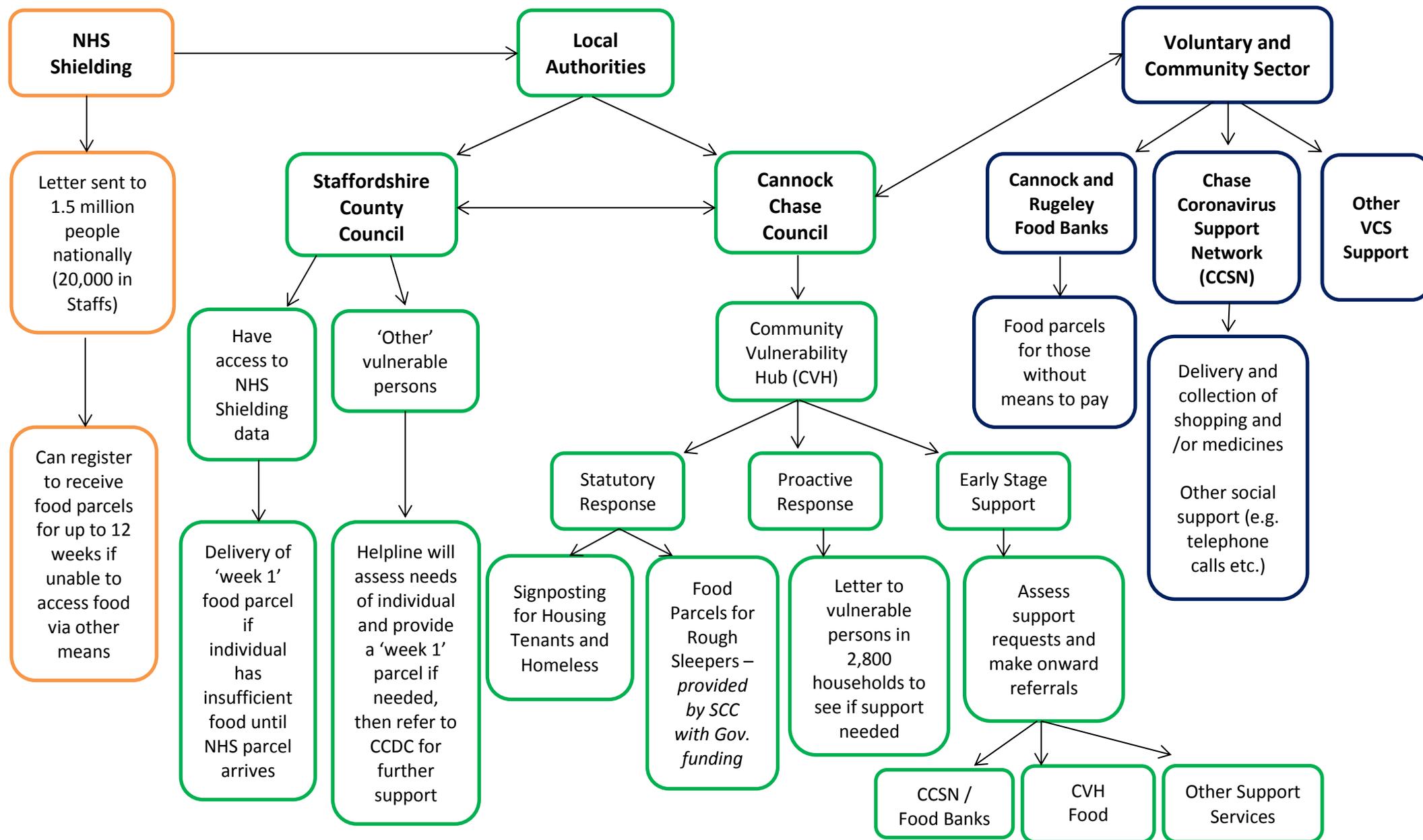
- the caretaker and cleaners to keep the building operational;
- a small team processing incoming/outgoing post and bankings.

The Contact Centre is providing a full telephone service and is going to be supporting the Business Rates team with their calls. The Communications Team are fully operational and are at the heart of delivering key communications messages through a range of channels. Other corporate services such as Health & Safety and Resilience are providing advice and support to aid the management of the Council's response. The Land Charges service is continuing to provide a service. The Democratic Services Team are working closely with colleagues in Technology to support the delivery of Committee meetings through new arrangements such as audio and video conferencing.

**Revenues and Benefits** - The processing and payment of housing benefit remains a critical service of the Council and the service is responding to increasing demands. The Service will also be responsible for the administration of the Council Tax Hardship Grant Allocation via the Local Council Tax Discount scheme. Guidance of how the £150 additional discount is to be administered is still awaited from MHCLG.

**Stafford Led Shared Services** – Human Resources, Technology and Legal Services continue to be provided. The HR Team have been central in providing advice and guidance regarding the Council's workforce and the move to homeworking. They are providing weekly information and guidance to all employees to support their wellbeing during this difficult time. The Technology Service have played a pivotal role in supporting the move to remote working, ensuring that systems remain operational and advising on new technology to support the delivery of virtual meetings through telephone conferencing and audio facilities.

### Cannock Chase Coronavirus Emergency Response Flowchart



<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Managing Director</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Tony McGovern</b>
<b>Telephone No:</b>	<b>01543 464347</b>
<b>Portfolio Leader:</b>	<b>Leader of the Council</b>
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Report Track:</b>	<b>Cabinet: 21/05/20</b>

## CABINET

21 MAY 2020

### APPROACH TO RECOVERY PLANNING FROM THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

#### 1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this briefing note is to outline the proposed approach to recovery from the response to the pandemic and to agree that the existing priorities of the Council as set out in Priority Delivery Plans will need to be reviewed in light of the consequences of COVID-19.

#### 2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That Cabinet agree the proposed framework for planning for the recovery from the consequences of COVID-19.
- 2.2 That Cabinet agree to a review of the existing priorities of the Council, as set out in Priority Delivery Plans, in light of the consequences of COVID-19.

#### 3 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendations

##### Key Issues

- 3.1 Having dealt with the immediate response to COVID-19 and the Government led lockdown, it is now time to consider how we maintain resilience of critical services, reintroduce other services (where appropriate) and plan for longer term recovery.
- 3.2 As part of our approach to recovery, it will be necessary to take a strategic look at how the pandemic situation may change life on an ongoing basis for our residents, businesses and the Council as an organisation.
- 3.3 It is likely that a new “normal” will need to be established. It will take time to resume service delivery; some services may be reduced for some time to come, the focus of services may change and some may not return. The way we do

things will change with a move to more on-line transactions for our customers and more homeworking for our employees.

- 3.4 There is still much uncertainty about the pandemic, when and how the lockdown might be eased and ultimately lifted. Government guidance is awaited and will be fed into our response and recovery planning. In the meantime, we have begun to formulate a local approach to recovery. This work is in its infancy and has neither a timeline nor resources allocated to it yet. This will be developed as Council officers scope the work and gain a better understanding of the emerging picture.
- 3.5 The Council will continue to remain in the response phase for some time to come and this will occur in parallel with the challenges that the recovery will bring.

#### Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.6 Effective planning will be essential to aiding the recovery of the District and the Council over the coming months.
- 3.7 The lockdown has changed the way the Council, residents and businesses are operating and this needs to be considered in planning for the future. The Council's priorities and plans made before the pandemic will need to be reviewed in light of these changes and the impact that COVID-19 has had on the District.

## **4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 This report proposes that "Supporting Recovery" should be adopted as the overarching priority for the Council moving forwards. The Council's current two priorities of Promoting Prosperity and Improving Community Wellbeing will need to be re-focussed as part of the recovery planning.

## **5 Report Detail**

- 5.1 COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on our community, the local economy and the Council. Planning for recovery, both short and longer term, will be key as we move forward. It is proposed that "Supporting Recovery" will become the overarching priority for the remainder of the current Corporate Plan 2018-23.
- 5.2 The Council will need to consider how our existing priorities of "Promoting Prosperity" and "Improving Community Wellbeing" need to be re-focussed to support the work on recovery and vice versa. The projects planned for delivery in 2020/21 will need to be re-assessed as part of the work on recovery to determine whether they:
- (i) are still essential;
  - (ii) in need of re-scoping; or
  - (iii) should be deferred.

## Objectives

- 5.3 It is proposed that the following objectives should be used to underpin the “Supporting Recovery” priority:
- (i) To understand the challenge of recovery across the District in the short, medium and long term, identifying impacts, critical areas of activity and key services.
  - (ii) To maintain public trust and confidence in the effective co-ordination of recovery.
  - (iii) To ensure that affected communities (of interest, geography, impact and others) are fully involved in the recovery process.
  - (iv) To mitigate and manage the long-term impacts upon the resident population.
  - (v) To support the economy, businesses, partners and infrastructure of the District to a position of stability and functionality in a constructive manner whilst seeking to support access to all opportunities for assistance and growth.
  - (vi) To mitigate and manage the effects on the Council’s budget and medium term financial plan.
  - (vii) To seek to identify and embed the benefits of initiatives and developments that have arisen throughout the response to maximize the reach of new arrangements which replace pre-COVID-19 systems.
  - (viii) To ensure that critical services are resilient and continue to operate effectively over the coming months alongside plans to clear backlogs in work that have accumulated during the response phase.
  - (ix) To undertake a post incident debriefing and identify lessons learnt.
- 5.4 These objectives are based on those being proposed by the Staffordshire Resilience Forum (SRF) Recovery working group and have been adapted to suit the needs of Cannock Chase Council (see 5.22 for more details).

## Work Streams

- 5.5 It is proposed that the approach to recovery planning should be split into 4 work streams to support the delivery of the objectives outlined in 5.3:
- (i) Economic;
  - (ii) Financial;
  - (iii) Community; and
  - (iv) Organisational

## Economic Recovery

- 5.6 It is anticipated that the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will be significant. At the time of this report, it is not known whether the current lockdown will be extended or if there will be a gradual easing of restrictions. This makes it difficult for businesses to plan with any certainty.

- 5.7 Economic forecasts published by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) on 14th April suggest that there will be a contraction in the UK economy of up to 35% in the quarter to June 2020 alongside a 10% unemployment rate. A report published by the West Midlands Regional Development Institute (WMREDI) in late April, set out the likely impact of COVID-19 on the regional economy. This report indicates that the District's GVA is forecast to reduce by 44% in the quarter to June 2020, above the national rate. This is particularly worrying as the District would be one of the worst hit areas in the region if not the country. There is a large amount of uncertainty as to the overall effect of the Government's business support measures in cushioning any impact on the local economy.
- 5.8 It is highly likely that the pandemic will have a significant impact on key sectors within Cannock Chase, but at present it is not fully known if these impacts will be short term or lead to longer term structural change. These sectors include retail/wholesale, tourism/hospitality, transportation and storage, construction and manufacturing. Furthermore, the District has a large percentage (98%) of small businesses (with less than 50 employees) and these businesses are particularly vulnerable at this time.
- 5.9 The Council's Economic Prosperity Strategy was only approved by Cabinet in January 2020, but there will be a need to review and refresh the Strategy to ensure that 'economic recovery' is included as a key objective/priority. Resources that have been allocated to the Strategy may need to be reviewed/re-allocated to ensure that they are directed to recovery. It is likely that the Council will need to consider and address issues such as unemployment, reduction in GVA, business failure and the impact of social distancing on the local economy which were not part of the original strategy.
- 5.10 The Council will work closely with the LEPs, West Midlands Combined Authority and other key partners to ensure that its recovery framework is strategically aligned and to lobby for Government investment to support the region to rebuild its economy.

### **Financial Recovery**

- 5.11 The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy will need to be reviewed. Aside from additional funding received to support the local response to the pandemic, It is unknown at this time what the Government's plans are regarding local government funding in the short to medium term. Funding to date effectively only deals with the loss of income for April to June whereas although the review of Fair Funding and implementation of 75% Business Rates will not now take place in 2021/22 other details of the 2021/22 settlement are not known. In particular the Government are considering the treatment of Business Rates growth to date and no news is available about the replacement of the New Homes Bonus (Housing Growth) incentive scheme.
- 5.12 Until there is further clarity the Council needs to work on the assumptions in the current Medium Term financial strategy which estimates a need for savings of nearly £600,000 in 2022/23. Consequently, the work done to date regarding service reviews will continue. The reviews will be re-visited to consider whether any changes need to be made in light of the changes that have happened over

the last few weeks and are likely to remain going forwards. The intention will still be to identify options for Cabinet to consider in due course, and to realign resources to priorities, but the timeline may change depending on the Government's plan for Local Government financing.

### **Community Recovery**

- 5.13 Building and restoring confidence of the community in the Council will be essential over the coming months. This work stream will include dealing with the practicalities of dealing with the impact that COVID-19 has had on the community eg loss of life, increases in ASB, domestic violence. There is also an opportunity to build on the positive elements that have emerged in terms of volunteering and community spirit.

### **Organisational Recovery**

- 5.14 This will focus on the changes and challenges we will need to address to return to normal operations. There will be 2 elements to Organisational Recovery:
- (i) Operational recovery; and
  - (ii) Transformational recovery.
- 5.15 **Operational recovery** – this will involve the need to plan for the practicalities of employees returning to working from Council sites in accordance with social distancing requirements. It will also include planning how we deal with backlogs of work and manage our resources effectively – this will include management and the potential reallocation of employees to critical services. The recovery arrangements of our key contractors such as IHL will be included in this work stream.
- 5.16 **Transformation** – consideration will need to be given to what a return to “normal” will be moving forward; it is likely that a “new normal” will emerge. We will need to identify the changes we have made over recent weeks that have worked well and we would like to keep. Further work will need to be done to embed and improve these. There is also an opportunity alongside this to consider what other changes we might want to make. A business case will need to be made for any changes that have financial / corporate implications.
- 5.17 The Organisational Recovery work stream will focus initially on the short/medium term with the emphasis on operational resilience and some limited transformation that is key to resilience. As referenced in 3.16, there is the opportunity for some longer term planning in terms of transforming the Council and how we operate. This would link in to work already planned around the replacement of the current Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and the move towards greater use of on-line forms etc. If there is a move towards more homeworking, this would free-up office space and allow for a review of our accommodation needs.

## **Governance Structure**

- 5.18 It is proposed that working groups should be set up for each of the 4 workstreams led by a Head of Service:
- (i) Economic Recovery – Head of Economic Prosperity
  - (ii) Community Recovery – Head of Housing and Partnerships
  - (iii) Financial Recovery – Head of Finance
  - (iv) Organisational Recovery – Head of Governance & Corporate Services
- 5.19 Leadership Team will maintain oversight of the working groups. It is anticipated that there will be some overlap between the 4 work streams and this will be co-ordinated via Leadership Team. The Lead Officer will be responsible for providing regular updates and reports to Leadership Team and facilitating initial discussions to shape work programmes. Leadership Team will review existing Council PDP priorities and identify proposals and options as part of the recovery phase.
- 5.20 Cabinet will be briefed on the plans and progress being made by the work streams. Key decisions will be referred to Cabinet in line with normal working protocols.
- 5.21 It is proposed that the Corporate Scrutiny Committee will take the lead on scrutiny of the Council's response and recovery plans. In order to engage more widely with Scrutiny, the Chairs of the other Scrutiny Committees could be invited to attend the Corporate Scrutiny Committee meetings.

## **Staffordshire Resilience Forum (SRF) /County Wide Recovery**

- 5.22 In addition to our own local plans for Recovery we will also need to work within the context of the SRF's plans for recovery. The SRF Recovery Group has proposed number of objectives to guide its work. These have been adapted to form the basis of the Council's recovery objectives.
- 5.23 The approach to be adopted by the SRF is one of collaboration and support. It was recognised that the approach by each District/Borough will be tailored to suit their own local needs.

## **West Midlands Regional Recovery**

- 5.24 The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and Local Enterprise Partnerships are also formulating arrangements for the strategic co-ordination of regional recovery and reset and a number of taskforces and working groups have already been set up. The Council will fully participate in this work in informing our recovery strategy and plans for the district; this will be particularly important for the Economic Recovery work stream. The District will also work with the District Council Network and the Local Government Association on recovery issues that are common across the Local Government sector.

5.25 The West Midlands Combined Authority has launched a high level economic recovery plan focused on the following 10 priorities:

- Ensure residents are kept safe and healthy
- Accelerate transport construction plans
- Build more homes faster and reshape town centres
- Get people who lose their jobs back into work quickly
- Support local businesses
- Secure huge new investment in technology and innovation
- Make sure the recovery is inclusive and works for everyone
- Step up green growth plans
- Take the West Midlands out to the world and bring the world into the West Midlands
- Regain control of the region's own recovery
- The Council will consider these objectives when determining the economic recovery strategy for the District.

### **The Government's Plans for Recovery**

5.26 The Government's recent announcement and proposals for easing the current lockdown arrangements together with future plans for supporting recovery will be factored into the Council's recovery planning work streams.

<b>6 Implications</b>
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#### **6.1 Financial**

There are no direct financial implications arising from the report

Paragraphs 5.11 and 5.12 highlight the Financial Recovery issues with the Financial Implications arising from the overarching recovery strategy and individual work streams will be subject to a further report to Cabinet.

#### **6.2 Legal**

None

#### **6.3 Human Resources**

Human Resources implications will present in more detail from the Organisational work stream as well as the Financial work stream groups as they progress. No specific implications in respect of this report at this time

#### **6.4 Section 17 (Crime Prevention)**

None

#### **6.5 Human Rights Act**

None

**6.6 Data Protection**

None

**6.7 Risk Management**

COVID-19 presents a number of risks for the Council and the District. The Strategic Risk Register will be reviewed and used to inform the recovery planning process.

**6.8 Equality & Diversity**

Equality Impact Assessments will be completed where necessary as part of the recovery planning process.

**6.9 Best Value**

None

**7 Appendices to the Report**

None

**Previous Consideration**

None

**Background Papers**

None