

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
COUNCIL 6 MAY 2020
REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Council with an update on the activities undertaken in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This serious situation is continuously evolving and as such this report is a snapshot in time. The council is a Category 1 responder for the purposes of the Civil Contingencies Act meaning the council has a duty to work with partners to plan for and recover from emergencies, and also to keep critical services going. Full Council will note from the report that in response to this emergency all services and teams, and both officers and members, have pulled together to provide a true #OneTeam response to this unprecedented situation.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That members note the content of the report, the impacts of the pandemic on the council's operations and the work undertaken to date.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 The Covid-19 pandemic is an international health emergency and has seen an unprecedented global response. In the UK, a Level 4 Health Emergency has been declared, and within Hertfordshire major incident response plans have been triggered. This has resulted in councillors and officers rapidly reprioritising workloads and activities in order to respond to this emergency. A significant amount of work has been undertaken by officers, including critical front line staff, to continue and adapt service delivery in response to emerging national guidance. Alongside this, officers have prioritised work to ensure the most vulnerable in our communities are supported, and that residents and businesses are able to access the help available to them.
- 3.2 As the borough's elected representatives, councillors have also been essential in ensuring the council is able to continue to deliver its critical services and to support multi-agency partners and the community. The council continues to operate during this emergency period and key decisions continue to be made by councillors, including under the emergency decision-making provisions contained within the Constitution.
- 3.3 The Leader meets weekly with other Hertfordshire Leaders to share information and help coordinate work across the county. The Leader is also one of four Hertfordshire Leaders who are part of the Community Reassurance Cell which aims to provide leadership and reassurance in the coming months.

- 3.4 Cabinet members are meeting regularly, sharing information and addressing issues as they arise, and they are in ongoing contact with senior officers to ensure a coordinated and timely response is being made by the council.
- 3.5 The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on all council services, and the borough's communities and businesses. The sections below highlight effects on Our Priorities and Objectives.



3.6 Our Community

3.6.1 Safe Communities

Officers are representing the council on various Hertfordshire wide Covid-19 related groups which feed back into the wider Local Resilience Forum structures. This goes all the way up to the Hertfordshire Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) of which the Chief Executive and Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) are members. Various teams have daily liaison with the police and other key partners around any particular issues of concern.

We are carrying out community reassurance and issuing reminders that key services such as domestic abuse services, hate crime, Herts Help support are available – both on and offline. The Community Safety Partnership continues to safeguard our vulnerable young people through Positive Pathways and SOS.

The Risk & Resilience Manager and Health & Safety Officer have assisted and supported all teams across the Council; dealing with many different scenarios to ensure they can operate and deliver the services they need to in a safe manner.

Hertfordshire Building Control are currently providing a full service to the council, residents, professional agents and builders: prioritising dangerous structures incidents and maintain the out-of-hours service.

Planning Enforcement officers are continuing to log and investigate breaches wherever possible, issuing enforcement notices where relevant. Officers are not visiting all complaint sites, but will do site visits in cases where it sounds dangerous or especially harmful.

Safeguarding issues and referrals are being co-ordinated remotely.

The council understands this is a difficult time for many people and there is a dedicated section on our website providing information on support for people struggling to pay council tax/other bills at:

www.welhat.gov.uk/coronavirus/financial-help

The Council Tax team is also working with our software supplier to administer the Council Tax Hardship Fund, where up to £150 will be paid to the working

age council tax support claimants' council tax account. This is set to benefit over 3,800 people

3.6.2 **Public Health**

Work has been reprioritised to ensure delivery of the business-critical services. Much of the regular statutory work, such as the licensing functions, health and safety duties as an employer and food safety interventions remain in place and are required to be delivered by the council. General complaints are still being received, some of which require urgent responses and we are providing a response to health and safety enforcement interventions on a risk based response. Over the past few weeks, there has been an increase in the number of requests for service in respect of nuisance issues, such as loud music and bonfires. Due to the social distancing requirements it is not possible for the team to deliver the out of hours' noise service ("Operation Reprise") and unfortunately this has been suspended during the outbreak.

Environmental Health officers are now authorised officers under The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Business Closure) (England) Regulations 2020 and are working to ensure that all requirements of the legislation are complied with. Complaints continue to be received from members of the public, Councillors and employees who are working in businesses that have remained open and are concerned about issues such as social distancing requirements and PPE. The officers undertake the most appropriate action depending on what circumstances are found during their investigation. A daily reporting of intervention amongst our businesses is required by the Office for Product Safety and Standards.

The Food Standards Agency have asked us to suspend routine inspection of food businesses, but urgent reactive work to address potentially serious public health risk relating to food is still being undertaken. This includes following up on food incidents, investigating outbreaks and exploring any intelligence of change in food business activities that suggest a potential public health or animal health risk. Proactive checks are still required of food businesses with Food Hygiene Ratings of 0, 1 or 2 to verify if they are continuing to trade and have started to operate delivery services or have introduced new processes to enable them to diversify their menu, such as introducing ready to eat meals/food, or are supplying vulnerable groups.

SDK, the council's pest control contractor, is still operating as full a service as possible and are still providing the treatment for many pests.

We are reviewing current guidance on Public Health Burials as well as looking at increasing burial space: this includes the removal of columbarium columns at the Lawn Cemetery.

3.6.3 **Sport & Leisure**

On 20 March 2020, the Prime Minister announced that all leisure facilities must be closed and as a result, GLL ('Better') has closed all of their sport and leisure sites in the borough with the exception of public access to the four parks and playing fields they manage for the council.

Based on government advice, all play areas and skate parks also had to be closed. Signage at play areas has been erected and where possible gates padlocked. Regular social media messages urge people not to use these facilities, particularly when fair weather is forecast.

The Splashlands project is moving at pace and the contractors are working on site, wearing the appropriate personal protective equipment and following social distancing guidelines.

We have produced frequently asked questions for local sports clubs and art/culture groups to support them with any queries they may have around funding and their future etc. We are engaging with the community over social media about ways they can get active at home and stay healthy/exercise.

Continuing our work with secondary and primary schools and partners we are delivering sessions in person or virtually; collating resources for schools to share with students.

The Youth Council is meeting virtually and is working with partners to get key messages to young people over the coming weeks, especially during Easter holidays when young people are not expected to be home schooled. The next online edition of the Heads Up magazine is planned for early April.

3.6.4 Art & Culture

All services at Campus West, Mill Green and the Roman Baths closed to the public on 18 March 2020. Staff remained on site completing a number of duties until the government updated the essential worker/stay at home advice on 23 March 2020. Some staff have now been redeployed into other suitable roles as needed. Managers are going in to the building on rotation to check on all kit and equipment, utility supplies, security of the premises, etc. Preparations have been made for the use of Roller City under Operation Sustain.

We have recommenced our milling operations at Mill Green; with flour available for pre-order from 21 April 2020. Customer collection is being managed carefully to ensure appropriate social distancing measures are in place.

3.7 Our Environment

3.7.1 Clean streets, Waste & Recycling

The availability of refuse crews was a major challenge to our contractors throughout March and April. The high level of staff absence due to sickness or self-isolation meant that additional agency workers had to be recruited to work on our contract. This was further compounded by the fact the overall tonnage of waste and recycling collected from kerbside has increased since the lockdown as more people are staying at home. Extra collection rounds had to be deployed even though the resources for doing the normal rounds were already limited. It is important to note that all refuse, recycling and clinical waste collections were sustained throughout this period. Unfortunately, the council had to make the difficult decision to suspend garden waste collections for a temporary period in order to prioritise our most critical collection service. The service will be restarting from 6 May 2020. Based on a waste survey completed by over 200 local authorities nationally, about 38% had suspended garden waste service by end of March 2020.

It should also be noted that the new streetscene, waste and recycling contract with Urbaser started on 28 March 2020, taking over from Serco. The mobilisation of waste, recycling and cleansing is a major undertaking in normal times which is, to say the least, made more exacting with the lock down. The change-over has gone remarkably well and demonstrates the efforts and preparations that all parties have made during the 12 month mobilisation period.

3.7.2 Green Spaces

Continental Landscape Ltd also started the grounds maintenance contract on 28 March 2020. The Grounds Maintenance crews were initially redeployed to support the refuse collection service. The grounds maintenance service has since resumed.

Our tree contractors have been stood down for day-to-day assessments, but carry out visits and work where a tree appears to be dangerous. We have permanently locked the gates to Northaw Great Wood car park at the request of the police. Other woods and open spaces remain open, as well as allotments, with plot holders expected to observe social distancing rules.

3.7.3 Parking

The council has followed the government guidance to offer free car parking to all NHS workers and social care staff during the Covid-19 pandemic since 25 March 2020. Given that we are not able to easily identify which cars belong to key workers (and that a number of NHS workers have contacted the council to voice concerns about leaving any form of ID on the dashboard), we suspended parking charges in all of our car parks from 31 March 2020.

Recognising that the instruction to stay at home means more people need to park where there are resident permit schemes in place we made a decision not to enforce resident permit/voucher schemes and single yellow lines until further notice. Parking enforcement is focussing on safety concerns such as dangerous parking on double yellow lines or blocking paths where restrictions are in place.

3.8 Our Housing

3.8.1 Quality Landlord

We are continuing to contact vulnerable tenants to ensure they have the necessary support provision in place to sustain their tenancy; officers are providing telephone support as appropriate.

Case management is ongoing for all anti-social behaviour case types with officers largely working from home. High level cases are managed on a risk based approach, only carrying out visits or driving by for the most extreme cases. Where appropriate, we are referring residents to report through 101. The team are working with the police and other council teams to tackle ongoing social/public gatherings in communal areas/gardens.

Rent collection, arrears management and leaseholder services continue and we are actively supporting tenants who are having trouble paying their rent due to the current crisis.

New lettings continue where there is urgent housing need, including for moving households in temporary accommodation.

Right to buy applications are still being processed, but the service has been amended to remove face to face interaction.

Sheltered scheme management staff are working from home except for carrying out fire alarm testing and health and safety checks.

The out of hours control centre is fully operational and responding where community alarms are activated, arranging emergency repairs and other emergency council services out of hours.

The Community Bus and Shop Mobility services have been suspended.

3.8.2 Housing Need

The Jim McDonald centre is being used as a temporary homeless shelter run by Resolve to provide safe and suitable space for those who are homeless and need to self-isolate.

Approaches to the homeless team have increased by 25% and, at the same time, have responded to the directive from government to 'bring everyone in', which has seen many people who were previously sofa surfing or at risk of rough sleeping provided with hotel accommodation. Block bookings at several hotels have been made to cope with the increased demand across the service and the council is delivering food packages to these families.

We are continuing to decant Inspira House and are bringing Burfield Close (former sheltered scheme) into use as temporary accommodation. The plans to decant tenants from Queensway House has largely been paused.

Allocations for all housing are being prioritised to homeless households and those in the highest need (Band A).

3.8.3 Affordable Homes

We continue working behind the scenes to progress new housing developments. This includes bringing forward planning applications and open market purchases.

3.8.4 Housing Quality

Private Sector Housing routine inspections are paused, but the team are available for any emergency or urgent calls and prosecution cases are ongoing.

Disabled Facilities Grant work has mainly been suspended, although each case has been assessed on its particular circumstances.

Mears are keeping the responsive repairs service going despite only having 50% staff. Empty homes are having works carried out where needed, for urgent re-housing cases. Planned and major work (i.e. kitchens/bathrooms/roofs) are currently on hold.

Programmed installation of new gas heating systems are on hold, unless to replace a faulty system. Annual gas safety checks are continuing and only four cases are currently overdue. This may change going forward as there is sometimes difficulty in gaining access due to self-isolation and this is also dependent on workforce availability linked to sickness/self-isolation.

3.9 Our Economy

3.9.1 Sustainable Growth

The Inspector has cancelled the Local Plan hearing sessions scheduled for May 2020, but policy officers are still gathering evidence and submitting statements. The inspector has asked for new dates to be scheduled for July 2020. These are intended to debate village sites in the submitted plan and any other village sites that might be selected for submission based on officer advice and responses to the current consultation document. Full Council will wish to note that the deadline for public consultation has been extended to 1 May 2020.

The Housing Development team continue to work on their projects, including progressing with schemes due to be submitted to Planning.

Construction at Chequersfield, a site of 30 flats, has been suspended. The plans for a start on site at Minster House have been delayed, although work continues on matters such as design work.

3.9.2 **Investment & Regeneration**

Planning officers are no longer carrying out site visits due to social distancing. They are continuing to determine applications, using photos where possible, however being cautious where they can't make a full and proper judgement. In such cases officers will seek an extension of time with the applicant/agent. Planning has a 6-8 week time-lag, so at the moment officers are determining items that were submitted earlier in the year. Over time it will become hard to determine newer items, but that will probably be matched by a reduction in planning applications being submitted. Anything that has been called-in for Development Management Committee will be dealt with via virtual meetings in accordance with the new regulations.

None of the Hatfield Town Centre Regeneration schemes have been impacted by the lockdown and design team meetings are continuing to take place to continue to move the projects at pace as these would act as catalyst to stimulate economic recovery once lockdown measures are lifted.

The work on the Welwyn Garden City Town Centre North development is also ongoing and it is expected that a meeting will be arranged with the Cross Party Project Board once the lockdown measures are lifted or, if they continue, a virtual meeting will be organised.

3.9.3 **Neighbourhood and Town Centres**

Economic Development officers continue to liaise with businesses, retailers, district colleagues, WGC BID, town centre managers and others to signpost available help, offer support and gather information.

Our [Business Matters](#) website provides a wealth of information for businesses of all sizes to access help and support, including guidance on Government loans and funding, who is eligible and how to secure them. The team send out regular newsletters to businesses and are working with county colleagues to carry out a business survey.

Officers are in regular contact with business support bodies to understand how businesses are coping and what issues are affecting them. The Head of Planning is part of the county's Economic Resilience Cell (reporting into the Recovery Coordination Group) which is looking at both immediate and longer-term actions to help businesses and high streets. This cell will be looking at the LEP Local Industrial Strategy, Herts Growth Board growth proposition to Government and other tools such as local plan policies, development sites, strategies for employment areas, town centre management and funding streams to assist economic recovery.

3.9.4 **Business Friendly**

The Hackney Carriage team continue to operate as many taxi drivers are classed as essential workers because they are transporting key workers to and from their workplaces. The team are responding to complaints and liaising with other agencies to ensure the safety of the vehicles, drivers and the general public, including key workers who rely upon taxis for transport.

The Licensing team are aware of the current difficulties faced by many businesses and as such are taking a pragmatic and flexible approach, while ensuring the licensing objectives are safeguarded. The majority of licenced premises are now closed but annual licence renewals still need to be dealt with in the statutory time frame. Animal welfare issues require urgent responses and we receive regular updates from the RSPCA to assist us in deciding on the

most appropriate course of action. In the event that premises are found to be breaching licensing conditions, arrangements will be put in place to hold hearings of the licensing committee using remote access technology.

The Business Rates team have been working to tight deadlines to apply business rates relief to ratepayer accounts. The council has successfully administered over £17m in rate relief for local businesses, including a 12-month business rate holiday for all retail, hospitality and leisure businesses and a £5k business rates discount for pubs with a rateable value below £100,000.

Since funding was received from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on 1 April 2020 for Business Grants to small businesses, retail, hospitality and the leisure sector, the business rates team has been working hard to identify the eligible businesses from our system. As some of the qualifying businesses may not pay business rates due to full relief granted, it was necessary to obtain bank account details from these businesses and the design of an online form has allowed us to capture these. As of 27 April 2020, we have issued £11.6m in grants to 846 businesses – equivalent to 76% of eligible businesses.

Officers from different teams are working together and with other partners to get key messages and signposting information to businesses. We are continuing to support businesses with any questions they have and actively posting on social media the essential businesses that remain open.

3.10 **Our Council**

3.10.1 During this time of crisis, the democratic process is still being maintained and decisions are being made by officers and members with residents' interests at heart.

3.10.2 The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 enable councils to hold remote committee meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic period. This is to ensure local authorities can conduct business during this current public health emergency. The Regulations are effective between 4 April 2020 and 7 May 2021.

3.10.3 We successfully held our first virtual Cabinet on Tuesday 7 April 2020, three days after the new regulations came into force. The meeting was webcast to ensure accessibility by the public and press and went smoothly. As we were one of the first councils to hold a remote meeting, we were contacted by the East of England Local Government Association (EELGA) to be a case study on how we did it. The case study has now been published and has received a great deal of national interest, enhancing the profile of Welwyn Hatfield. Following this, a meeting of the Development Management Committee was held which also went well.

3.10.4 The report Council is considering tonight on proposed changes to the council's Constitution are requesting the adoption of additional standing orders for remote meetings.

3.10.5 The Elections team are implementing a new software update, so the postponement of the elections has allowed the team to progress this update in a less time pressured manner.

3.10.6 **Value for Money**

We are carefully tracking the financial impacts of Covid-19 for the Council. Further information is in section 5 of this report.

3.10.7 Equality & Fairness

We are providing information and working with partners as set out in the section in section 14 of this report.

3.10.8 Customer First

Reception has been closed since the start of the lockdown, but the contact centre is still operating and responding to email and phone queries.

The 24 hour control centre service provision has been reviewed. A rationalised rota has been implemented to build capacity in case of staff shortages. This ensures the team is best placed to be able to continue to deliver emergency lifeline and other council services.

The corporate communications team has focussed on three priorities in its response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic:

- Sharing and amplifying public health and other messages from the government.
- Updating residents and businesses on service delivery, and the support available to them
- Maintaining an effective flow of internal communication to staff and members

There has been a significant amount of proactive communication activity across all available channels to ensure that staff, members, residents and businesses are informed of any changes to our services in light of updated government guidance.

A multi-channel communications campaign is being delivered to highlight the support available and encourage people to ask for help if they need it, either for themselves or for someone else. The supporting video has been highlighted by the Local Government Association as an example of best practice in resident communications, and they have expressed an interest in using the wider campaign as a case study.

3.10.9 Employer of Choice

As soon as the lockdown measures were announced on the evening of 23 March 2020, the council had to react quickly to start deploying staff to work from home wherever possible. The council had already put arrangements in place to ensure that staff could access their email accounts remotely. Additional staff were issued with laptops, and changes were made to the IT infrastructure to sustain over 300 staff that had to log in remotely. Microsoft Teams software has been rolled out to over 250 staff. This enables improved communication within teams as well as giving staff the ability to attend and host external virtual meetings.

The Risk & Resilience team have facilitated the immediate revision of risk assessments across the council, providing support and guidance to staff and managers as required. As a responsible employer we have ensured managers have been given advice and guidance to assist their teams in adapting to new ways of working and we have shared information with the entire workforce on a daily basis to make sure key messages are disseminated to all staff.

4 Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 The council is a Category 1 responder for the purposes of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 meaning the council has a duty to work with partners to plan for and recover from emergencies, and also to keep critical services going.
- 4.2 The Coronavirus Act 2020 (the Act) was made on 25 March 2020 to make statutory provision in respect of coronavirus and connected purposes. The Act confers a range of new powers to enable public authorities and other organisations to respond to issues associated with the pandemic.
- 4.3 The council is finding ways to ensure it can continue to meet its legal obligations and duties balanced against the requirement to work in different ways during the pandemic emergency period - as can be seen in the commentary for each service area.
- 4.4 In response to the pandemic, there have been many changes in legislation over a short period of time and relevant council teams have put in place systems and processes to respond to these. The council, for example is responsible for the enforcement of the business closure regulations and also retains powers under existing health protection legislation to support the response. Meetings have taken place across the county with relevant colleagues to ensure consistency of approach and proportionate application of this legislation
- 4.5 It should also be noted that under these new regulations, there will be no requirement for councils to hold an Annual Council Meeting during this period and all current councillor appointments will therefore continue until the next annual meeting, unless the council chooses to change these.
- 4.6 All local government elections have been postponed until the ordinary day for election in 2021. A councillor who would ordinarily retire on the fourth day after the ordinary day of election in 2020, will instead retire on the fourth day after the ordinary day of election in 2021 and that councillor's term of office is extended accordingly. Councillors will be elected in May 2021 for a three year term.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 On 19 March 2020, £1.6bn emergency funding was announced by the government to help local authorities respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council only received £51k, which is nowhere enough to sustain the financial pressures faced by the council.
- 5.2 Since then, we have been working with Society of District Treasurers and in particular we have provided evidence where we are facing a significant drop in income but the cost base has not experienced the same level of reduction. There is an LGA campaign asking government to provide more funding for the local government sector. The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government announced on 18 April 2020 a further £1.6bn package for local government sector; the council's share of the funding is £1.23m.
- 5.3 It is estimated that the financial impact of Covid-19 to the council is in the region of £7m. The council is suffering from loss of income from car parking, Campus West, and other fees and charges. At the same time, we are faced with additional costs from ensuring key services, including homelessness

prevention, are maintained. Our leisure provider has also approached the council for financial assistance as they indicated that without their local government clients' support, their cash reserves will be fully depleted in May. The funding will not be enough to offset the full impact of our budget pressures and we will continue to make our case and contribute to the lobbying of Society of District Treasurers.

- 5.4 A briefing note was circulated to Group Leaders and Group Finance Lead members detailing the financial pressures that the council is facing and the Cross Party Finance meetings are taking place regularly to keep all political groups informed about the council's financial position.

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 A strategic risk is now in place covering the impacts of Covid-19. This is assessed as highly likely to have major impacts, including finance and local economy, community wellbeing and effects on services, staff and corporate projects, and hence the achievement of some corporate objectives. Managers are also addressing Covid-19 impacts within their operational risk registers. Moving forward there are opportunities to integrate some of the changes to working methods into the wider modernisation and transformation agenda the council has in place.

7 Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 There are no direct implications.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

- 8.1 Supplier support has been introduced in accordance with Cabinet Office guidelines which includes revising some contracts to an open book basis.
- 8.2 We are now paying suppliers on immediate term to help their cash flow.
- 8.3 We are also working with construction partners to agree extension of times and delay of some projects.
- 8.4 Specialist PPE is being sourced.
- 8.5 Emergency changes have been made to our Contract Procedure Rules to enable contracts to be completed without staff having to be in the office

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

- 9.1 The social distancing requirements of the response to the pandemic have resulted in the majority of our staff working remotely, as well as the reduction in front line contact with our residents. This has resulted in fewer vehicles being used for work related tasks and a subsequent drop in work-related vehicle emissions.
- 9.2 Whilst it could be argued that the reduction in staff attending the offices has led to a reduction in energy use at the offices, we must also bear in mind the potential increase in usage in homes.
- 9.3 Work is underway to record carbon savings arising from the pandemic response in order to feed in to and influence our Climate Change Strategy.

10 Human Resources Implication(s)

- 10.1 The majority of employees have been able to continue working throughout the emergency. Where some services have closed we have tried to redeploy staff to other critical services. A few employees have had to self-isolate during the last few weeks, either through age or illness.
- 10.2 The council is considering, where appropriate, to furlough staff in line with the government's guidelines.

11 Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)

- 11.1 Home working may have positive benefits, but we are also aware of the negative issues that can result from remote working such as being away from colleagues, adopting a different routine and the feeling of isolation.
- 11.2 The challenge to many of the teams is one of communication and ensuring that all staff members are able to communicate regularly in meaningful ways.
- 11.3 For many of the service areas, critical frontline services are still being delivered to our communities. For others, new responsibilities have been introduced as part of the National Coronavirus Plan. It is essential that we continue to fulfill our duty of care in respect of our employees, contractors and members of the public and as such new risk assessments, new control measures and new systems of work have been implemented.

12 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

- 12.1 The corporate communications team are coordinating all Covid-19 communication activity across the council. They are also linked in to a multi-agency communications cell which feeds into the Strategic Coordinating Group (and its associated groups and cells) to ensure countywide consistency of messaging. Regular updates are published on the council website and social media, reinforcing public health messages and providing service updates, and press releases have been issued regarding major service changes. The current communications campaign, including leaflets to every home in the borough and a video (which features officers and councillors) is directing residents to the support available.

13 Link to Corporate Priorities

- 13.1 The subject of this report is linked to all the council's priorities

14 Equality and Diversity

- 14.1 As set out in the report, critical services and provision for vulnerable people are in operation and information on how to access help is widely available, in a range of media, at borough, county and national level.
- 14.2 On the basis that the changes to other 'business as usual' operations are currently temporary and in response to a national public health emergency, Equality Impact Assessments have not been completed for each of these changes made. Where future government regulations require changes to be more long term, this approach will be re-considered.

Rob Bridge, Chief Executive

Nick Long, Corporate Director, Public Protection, Planning and Governance

Ka Ng, Corporate Director, Resources, Environment and Cultural Services

Simone Chinman Russell, Corporate Director, Housing and Communities

April 2020