

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
COUNCIL 17 SEPTEMBER 2020
REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Council with a further update on the activities undertaken in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This remains a continuously evolving international situation and once again this report presents information available at the time of writing. Councillors will be aware of the previous update reports provided to Cabinet and Full Council and this report sets out significant further activity undertaken by the council in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic.

2 Recommendation(s)

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

3 Explanation

- 3.1 Councillors and officers continue to reprioritise workloads and activities in order to respond to this emergency; and although services are moving ahead with recovery efforts and regaining a level of normality, officers remain vigilant to ensure we are prepared for any "second peak" or tightening of measures necessitating a return to response led activities.
- 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. As per the regulations, and to minimise risk, the Council continues to run council business through remote meetings.
- 3.3 The sections below provide key updates on the current situation regarding our priorities and objectives.

3.4 Our Community

3.4.1 Safe Communities

Officers continue to represent the Council on various Hertfordshire-wide Covid-19 related groups which feed back into the wider Local Resilience Forum structures.

In addition, the Safety Advisory team is working with all event organisers to ensure Covid secure events take place. Over recent weeks, the Safety Advisory Team has received notifications of events across the borough and

some of these have required intervention from the Environmental Health and Licensing teams as well as partners such as the Police, Public Health England and HCC Public Health to ensure safe arrangements are in place. One particular event resulted in several multi agency Incident Management team meetings as well as out of hours site visits over the weekends. Several notifications in respect of events that are planned to take place in 2021 are also being received and therefore the team have been assessing documents and liaising with the organisers to ensure, where it is safe to do so, events go ahead.

The review of Caravan site conditions is continuing to ensure that they are consistent and meet Health and Safety requirements.

The Hackney Carriage Team has continued to operate and deliver a full service as there was no provision in the emergency legislation for the licence applications or renewals to be deferred. However as working arrangements did change slightly, learning has been taken and the team are now looking to introduce a new appointment system for drivers for use in the future. The Hackney Carriage team is also supporting a countywide scheme to support “Covid secure” cabs to help give assurance to the taxi trade and public.

The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) ensured targeted messaging went out to residents via online channels to give advice on how to keep themselves and their loved ones safe during lockdown. Key priority areas included domestic abuse, child safeguarding, mental health and anti-social behaviour. The CSP also continued to work closely with partners to ensure the safety of the borough. Key colleagues met weekly to discuss new trends and current issues faced due to Covid-19 and how to adapt our approach as/when government advice changed. A daily CSP news bulletin sent key information and updates on services across various networks helping to keep everyone informed.

The Community Partnerships Team organised training for youth professionals on ‘Supporting Children/Young People with Anxiety and How to Stay Safe’. This was in response to heightened levels of anxiety within young people due to Covid-19.

3.4.2 Public Health

The Public Health and Protection team continue to provide Covid-19 secure advice, support and guidance to all our businesses and organisations. Regular visits are undertaken to ensure social distancing and other requirements are in place, so that customers and staff are safe when visiting or working locally.

The team is working closely with colleagues across Hertfordshire to support the local outbreak plan and ensure we can deliver any required track and trace investigations and enforcement. We are currently exploring the implications of the announcements about changes to Public Health England and how this may impact on the local arrangements for contact tracing.

Officers from Public Health and Protection have also been representing the authority on various Covid work streams across Hertfordshire such as Hertfordshire Health Protection Board, District Outbreak Management Group and the Hertfordshire Business Group.

Welwyn Hatfield is also leading on the task and finish group in respect of working with and supporting Universities and colleges to be Covid-secure.

Other work tasks which the team are actively involved in include:

- a) creating and maintaining registers of high-risk settings
- b) taking action to prevent and manage outbreaks in certain settings
- c) developing plans and procedures in respect of contact tracing in complex situations handed down from PHE/NHS Test and Trace where requested,
- d) developing plans and deliver on prevention and enforcement for certain workplaces
- e) lead contact tracing and outbreak management for certain settings
- f) ensuring leisure facilities are COVID-19 secure in partnership with the Health and Safety Executive.

3.4.3 Sport & Leisure

In line with government guidance, Hatfield Swim and Leisure Centre reopened from 25 July with a swim, gym and fitness class offer to customers who pre-book with GLL and Covid secure measures in place.

A pre-opening visit was undertaken at Hatfield Swim Centre and a number of control measures were put in place. These include separate access to the gym and swimming pool, restricted lanes for swimming and lockers removed from use.

The High Ropes course at Stanborough Park was also inspected prior to opening and various Covid-19 control measures have been implemented which includes social distancing of 'bubbles' and use of hand sanitizer before access.

Panshanger Golf Course was re-opened from 27 May and has continued to trade well since.

All four parks and playing fields managed by GLL have remained open, with cleaning and grounds maintenance work taking place. Open Water Swimming at Stanborough south lake restarted from 11 July.

The new Splashlands facility successfully opened to the public for the first time on 30 July and has proved extremely popular. The Splashlands operator, GLL ('Better'), has set a maximum capacity of 160 people to ensure safe social distancing can be maintained. They have also introduced a booking system on the Better UK app to enable customers to book in advance.

The Hive has recently reopened its doors to centre users with a positive number of bookings for activities starting back at the centre. On-going reviews to phase in other activities such as soft play at Freddie's Den will be considered following extensive risk assessments based on Government guidance, only re-opening if it is absolutely safe to do so.

The community bus service and Shop Mobility remain suspended, although this is constantly being reviewed considering many factors, but primarily focused on ensuring the service is safe for users should the community bus

service be re-introduced. It is hoped a limited service may be in place from 14 September.

Activities and projects such as the girls Dance project moved online with sessions taking place via Zoom. Herts Sport Partnership also worked with the Council to introduce a fitness boot camp for young people at KGV Playing Fields.

As part of the Big Summer 2020 Campaign, the Community Partnerships team delivered Fast Traxx events, Mini Golf, Graffiti Art and Xplorer sessions all aimed at families, children and young people. All events were delivered in line with government guidance and resident feedback demonstrates that they were truly grateful to the council for giving local people something to do during this time.

There was also 'Welwyn Hatfield's Big Picnic' which was a borough-wide initiative to engender community spirit and encourage families to go and have a picnic in their local open space. Additionally, there was a live calendar of other activities from partners available on the website.

3.4.4 Art & Culture

Campus West cinema reopened its doors on 4 July with two screens operating at reduced capacity and adhering to the government's new safety guidance. Humphreys Café has reopened upstairs, serving drinks and pre-packaged food, with customer routes clearly marked out throughout the building. Roller City and Soft Play remain closed at this time and an update will be provided at the next Campus West Member Panel meeting.

The museum service has been successful in obtaining a small grant of £750 from the Hertfordshire Association for Museums. This has contributed towards the production of virtual tours of both the Mill Green Mill and the Roman Bath House which are now freely available online across all digital channels. Flour sales to the public have continued in recent months and both pre-booked guided Mill tours for up to six people at a time, and a new grab and go cream tea service, started on 11 August. The Mill Green Mill has been entered in the Hertfordshire Association of Museums 'Object of the Year' competition.

A virtual teddy bear fun day was held on 26 August with activities released online on the hour. These included a short-filmed tour with bear spotting at Mill Green, a virtual picnic, short story telling and a virtual teddy bear parade.

The Roman Bath House remain closed to the public at this time, as maintaining social distancing is a key challenge, given the design of the site.

3.5 Our Environment

3.5.1 Clean Streets, Waste & Recycling

The Council's new Streetscene contractor, Urbaser, has continued to work well, however the volume of waste collected at the kerbside and street cleansing waste continues to be higher than the same period last year.

From 2 November, Urbaser will be providing households with a weekly separate food collection. A new green 23 litre kerbside food caddy is being delivered to households in the borough.

3.5.2 Green Spaces

Landscape and Tree Officers and our tree contractors are out-and-about as normal, making sure that trees are healthy and safe, particularly as a result of wet and windy conditions.

The Council's grounds maintenance contractor, Continental Landscape (CLL), is completing all their programmed grounds maintenance work as per specification and schedule.

3.5.3 Parking

On-street and off-street parking are operating as normal. Car parks have been busier in August compared to July as more shops have reopened, however, there is still a significant reduction in the level of commuter parking.

Parking Services have continued their work on consultations of new traffic regulation orders and parking improvement programme.

3.6 Our Housing

3.6.1 Quality Landlord

We are continuing to provide support and advice to tenants with rent arrears. The number of new Universal Credit claims has now returned to pre-Covid levels and overall rent arrears and rent income collection performance has remained strong.

The ban on evictions was due to end in August 2020, however the ban has been extended by the Government to 20 September 2020. Eviction is only pursued as a last resort, after all other options to engage with the tenant have been exhausted. The teams are working with legal services to prepare cases under the new reactivation notice requirements and to ensure that the courts have a list of our most urgent cases that will require priority listing after the extension is relaxed. From a community safety perspective, we will continue to use other tools such as closure orders and injunctions to address ASB, where necessary. With effect from 7 September 2020, Independent Living Officers will be returning to work from their respective sheltered schemes two days per week. The presence of officers on scheme sites will be phased back to increased service levels, providing a reassuring presence at the schemes across the borough.

All Sheltered Schemes have been visited by the risk and resilience team together with the relevant Scheme Manager to assess Covid secure arrangements and ensure adequate control measures are in place

3.6.2 Housing Need

Hotel accommodation continues to be provided to homeless households and multi-agency groups have been set up to ensure that both housing and support needs can be met for people who were formerly rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping. A funding bid has been submitted to MHCLG under their Next Steps programme; the council's bid seeks funding to expand our Housing First project, as well as making alternative provision for the night shelter, as this can no longer be provided at Queensway House, due to the rules about shared accommodation.

The team is working closely with the households who were formerly accommodated in the Jim McDonald Centre, in order to help find long-term solutions for their housing and other issues, so that they can get their lives back on track. Those individuals who have not yet been rehoused are being accommodated in council temporary accommodation until permanent solutions can be found.

Our lettings service has resumed allocating homes across the board, except for households which are currently unable to move due to coronavirus infection/self-isolation.

3.6.3 Affordable Homes

We continue to make progress with our housing development activity, although there have been some delays on construction sites due to Covid19. We continue to purchase homes through the open market purchase schemes.

We have started on site at Minster House, where we will be delivering 90 new homes for older people. The construction period will be slightly longer, due to the provisions made on site to ensure adequate safety measures.

3.6.4 Housing Quality

The backlog of responsive repairs that was created due to COVID-related access difficulties and furloughing of Mears staff is being addressed and the team is reviewing any outstanding requests to resolve them as soon as possible. During the height of the pandemic the repairs service was reduced to emergencies only, based on government guidance. Capacity is now virtually back to normal and following the easing of lockdown restrictions, all types of repairs are being carried out, unless a household is self-isolating, or residents refuse access on Covid-related grounds. The team is also receiving unusually high levels of service requests and queries following the ending of lockdown, due to pent-up demand. There were some key staff member changes just before and during lockdown and recruitment has recently taken place, with the new starters joining the council over the next few weeks. Temporary staff are being brought in to help meet the high demand for repairs whilst new starters settle into their roles.

The robust procedures put in place to address overdue annual gas safety checks were successful with 100% compliance at the time of writing. The programme of new boiler and heating system installations has re-commenced.

Planned major works such as kitchens and bathrooms have re-commenced with an accelerated programme in place to catch up.

The private sector housing team is undertaking routine inspections and also licensing inspections, as well as moving forward with some large-scale prosecutions, which have been ongoing since prior to Covid.

Much proactive work has been done to provide advice to private tenants and landlords/letting agents, about how to reduce the risk of Covid-19 in shared accommodation settings.

3.7 Our Economy

3.7.1 Sustainable Growth

Local Plan hearing sessions on submitted village sites took place in July and August. The inspector has also written to the Council requesting an updated timetable to conclude the examination. Officers have advised that an interim report would help councillors to make a final decision about additional sites.

Herts LEP prepared a Draft Economic Recovery Plan, which builds on the content of the Local Industrial Strategy and considers the implications of coronavirus. This will be used to help prepare an Economic Recovery Strategy and a Town Centre Recovery Strategy for the borough.

The new "Pavement Licence" regime, which is to be administered by local authorities, and designed to make it easier for premises serving food and drink, such as bars, restaurants and pubs to seat and serve customers outdoors through temporary changes to planning procedures and alcohol licensing has been enacted and we are able to receive and process applications.

The Government has introduced a raft of new permitted development rights that allow commercial buildings to be demolished and rebuilt for housing, blocks of flats to be made taller, detached, semi-detached and terraced housing to be made taller and town centre units to switch between shops, financial services, cafes/restaurants and offices as they wish.

The Government is consulting on a Planning White Paper that proposes a shorter timetable to prepare Local Plans that identify growth, renewal and protection areas, and a much faster process for schemes in growth and renewal areas. It places a strong emphasis on beautiful buildings and places to help overcome opposition to new development. It proposes to combine Section 106 and CIL into a single Infrastructure Fund that includes affordable housing.

3.7.2 Investment & Regeneration

Regeneration schemes have continued to press ahead including the Multi-Storey Car Park in Hatfield and Highview. Link Drive development received planning approval at the end of July and the development partner, Lovell, is working with the council to mobilise pre-development work.

3.7.3 Neighbourhood and Town Centres

As lockdown measures eased, we introduced Street Stewards in Hatfield town centre. Their role was to assist the shops and businesses in enforcing social distancing and ensuring everybody was safe. At this time, BID Ambassadors were operating in Welwyn Garden City town centre.

3.7.4 Business Friendly

The team is progressing its annual grant scheme and finalising an Eastern New Energy project to help local businesses become more energy efficient and enter the low carbon market

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. 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 licensing team also continues to provide a full service to customers by the timely issue of new or revised licences, advice and guidance and Safety Advisory Team (SAT) team partnership working. Following the reopening of our pubs and restaurants we have visited those that require advice or support as well as visiting those for which complaints have been received about lack of Covid secure arrangements. Ultimately, we want to ensure the public are confident in visiting these premises and are kept safe whilst they do so.

The Business and Planning Act was quickly introduced, and our procedures, local conditions and applications were rapidly made available on our website so that businesses could apply. This is a streamlined process to allow businesses to secure these licences as soon as possible and where they are deemed to have been granted, allow these licences to remain in place for a year, but not beyond 30 September 2021. It allows premises serving food and drink, such as bars, restaurants and pubs to seat and serve customers outdoors through temporary changes to planning procedures and alcohol licensing. There are changes to the alcohol licensing regime, which will allow operators with existing alcohol on-sales licences to also serve alcohol for consumption off the premises and to make deliveries.

The team have worked closely with the Welwyn Garden City BID and all other high streets across the borough, to ensure they have ongoing support from the Council during this time.

Working in partnership with colleagues across Hertfordshire and with Better Business for All (BBfA), the Environmental Health team have developed many guides and checklists to assist businesses in becoming Covid secure. These are reviewed regularly to make sure they are up to date and continue to be relevant as well as adding information as the situation evolves. Developing guides together has ensured a consistency of enforcement approach to new legislation and changing guidance. The team have also developed guidance for hairdressers and barbers and for the beauty sector to assist them with preparing for re-opening after lockdown. Guidance is available on Herts LEP website. An officer from the team represented Welwyn Hatfield as a key panellist on a beauty webinar delivered to over 70 businesses in the UK. Other panel members included the Chair of BABTAC (British Association of Beauty Therapy & Cosmetology) and a representative from Russell Cooke Partners, a leading law firm.

The government wrote to all councils requesting the business grant schemes to close on 28 August. The team has done extremely well in making business grant payment to 1,135 businesses and paid out £15.3m (98% of funding available). The Discretionary Business Grant Scheme has also closed. A total of £800k (100% of this funding) was paid to support 72 businesses; the team has received very positive feedback.

Work at the new HatTech Business Centre is progressing well and is due to open later this month.

3.8 Our Council

- 3.8.1 Virtual committee meetings continue to be held as required and the Council has very successfully arranged other virtual events for Councillors and Officers, including all staff briefing and members' training and development events. Members and Officers are becoming much more familiar with the

process. The new Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) has met and we have commenced our more streamlined governance process, through the use of Cabinet Member decision notices.

3.8.2 All our public meetings are currently being webcast and the viewing figures are showing a good reach. The meetings that were webcast pre-Covid have seen an increase in viewing figures, and ones that are newly webcast have equally pleasing numbers tuning in: all contributing to the accessibility and transparency of democracy.

3.8.3 Given the changes in the law to “pavement licences” and the increase desire to hold events, and changes in events legislation the team will be working with members of the licensing committee to make sure that we are able to hold licensing hearings at short notice, should the need arise.

3.8.4 **Equality & Fairness**

In anticipation of more staff returning to the workplace, managers are required to ensure that the process is managed robustly, including taking account of the individual needs of staff. Our internal comms campaign is reinforcing this message.

3.8.5 **Customer First**

Reception was reopened from 29 July and protective screens, floor markings and signages have been installed. A booking system has been introduced to enable customers to make an appointment prior to coming into the reception.

All teams are now working through any accumulated backlog of cases in a priority-based way.

As instructed by the Food Standards Agency (FSA), we are not undertaking planned routine food hygiene inspections in order to prioritise Covid-19 health protection work. However, this is now under review following recent correspondence from the FSA.

Other reported public health and protection matters are being worked through as quickly as possible, with priority given to the most severe and urgent cases. Taking account of the additional demands on public health resources due to Covid-19, reports are prioritised according to risk and officers continue to work hard to respond to all cases in a timely manner.

The coronavirus lockdown resulted in a slight reduction in planning applications, but an increase in pre-application requests, estate management applications and tree preservation order applications. Performance for Q1 April-June was 70% of majors and 87% of minor applications determined within set timescales. There have, however, been some delays in validation which we are working to address.

There were no category 1 enforcement complaints in Q1, although the volume of enforcement investigations for other categories remains high. Each case is prioritised according to its likely impact and progressed on that basis.

The council and staff have continued to carry out their roles from home and as we enter the next stage of recovery some staff and teams are returning to the office. However, it is not possible to completely house all employees in the

Campus East Offices in a Covid secure way and meet the Covid-19 regulations. Work has already started to enable staff who need to come back to the office (as they can no longer work from home) to return to their office; however given the current restrictions and the potential for needing to respond to any upsurge in cases as we head into the winter it will not be possible for entire teams to return to their offices. It remains that the roll out of Microsoft “teams”, zoom and other remote access technology means that staff can work effectively whilst not being in the office and at this point in time it is not yet possible to set a date when all teams will be back into the Campus East Offices.

3.8.6 Employer of Choice

Ongoing work continues corporately as we review services returning to their full capacity. There remains a mixture of working arrangements to co-ordinate as this unfolds. We continue with remote recruitment and have seen an increase in applications. Most vacancies have been successfully filled in this way.

Sessions, in respect of the mental health aspects of remote working, have been delivered to staff and managers.

Employees have consistently risen to the challenge of keeping services operating and new ways of working and volunteering to undertake alternative duties when required.

Following the feedback from the recent staff survey, the generic Covid-19 risk assessments have been reviewed with minor changes, which include the change in guidance that allows vulnerable individuals to return to work if they cannot work from home and allows the use of fans and hand dryers.

The relevant Government guidance documents have also been updated to refer to the most current version and we are working with the communications team to promote the guidance and this includes a separate folder on the first page of eTeam with all Covid-19 documents and guidance. Posters have been displayed in all kitchens advising staff of the change in Fire and First Aid procedures.

The Risk and Resilience Team have produced guidance for Managers and employees to support their return to work and this has been reinforced in the weekly staff communication updates and in the risk assessments. The comms team prepared and disseminated a presentation for all staff on the new control measures in place, including video footage of the employees’ ‘journey’ through the building at Campus East. The return to work focus is on dialogue between employee and Manager giving an opportunity to identify any concerns and ensuring all the information available to prepare for their return to the workplace.

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 There is now a considerable cannon of Coronavirus specific legislation and guidance which changes on a frequent basis, it remains imperative that as the council works within the context of the pandemic as a service provided, employer or enforcing authority, that the correct legislation and guidance is used. And of course, the Council continues to find 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.
- 4.3 The Risk and Resilience team continue to review and amend our generic Covid-19 risk assessments. This is an ongoing process and needs regular reviewing to ensure our assessments accurately reflect changes to national guidelines. They are also working with our Communications colleagues to ensure accurate and timely dissemination of the information to all staff. Guidance is available to Managers and employees to support their return to work and this has been reinforced in the weekly staff communication updates and in the risk assessments. The team have been heavily involved around the procedures for reopening reception facilities and will be maintaining an ongoing review to ensure that procedures can be adjusted as necessary. Regular building inspections are also being carried out to ensure Covid security measures are all working as intended and that there are no other issues occurring while the building is largely empty.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 A detailed report on the impact of Covid-19 on the council's finances was reported to August Cabinet,
- 5.2 The total estimated budget impact due to Covid-19 amounts to £5.3m.
- 5.3 In terms of the General Fund, the estimated impact amounts to £4.8m. Taking into account the government support available to date of £1.5m and plus the £0.4m Covid-19 reserve set up at the end of 19/20, the net impact is around £2.9m. The income guarantee, along with the phased repayment of collection fund deficit over 3 years, will help to reduce the budget impact further.
- 5.4 All the grant funding element announced so far is for General Fund only, therefore the estimated budget impact on the HRA remains at £0.5m (of which the HRA revenue pressure is £0.168m). However, it should be noted that as referenced in the section above, the government has temporarily extended the time period to spend the right to buy receipts.
- 5.5 The financial implications will continue to be monitored as part of the budget monitoring process.

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.
- 6.2 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 which the Council has in place.

We have ensured that we keep a healthy stock of PPE in preparation for a potential second wave later on in the year.

7 Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 There are no direct implications; however, guidance has been published to local authorities highlighting the risk of fraud in connection with recovery from the pandemic.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

- 8.1 The Council has been acting in accordance with Government guidance to work with and support its contractors during this current pandemic.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

- 9.1 The social distancing requirements of the response to the pandemic have resulted in the majority of staff still working remotely and the amount of face to face contact with our customers reducing in line with these requirements. This has therefore resulted in fewer vehicles being used for work-related tasks and a subsequent drop in work-related vehicle emissions.
- 9.2 There is now a balance to be struck in terms of positive impacts on climate change by reduced commuting and the desire for some employees to return to an office environment. These are matters which the council's climate change sub-group will wish to consider in light of the council having declared a climate emergency.
- 9.3 Work continues to record carbon savings arising from the pandemic response in order to feed into and influence our Climate Change Strategy.

10 Human Resources Implication(s)

- 10.1 The majority of employees have been able to continue working as normal throughout the emergency. There have been some impacts due to some employees being required to home school their children, but this has been mitigated by working to agree more flexible working arrangements. As schools return and the government message "that it is safe to return to the workplace" ramps up we will be working with employees and managers to support those who wish to return to the office working environment. During the pandemic period there have been very low reported employee sickness absences.
- 10.2 We are working with our BAME employees to address their particular concerns and needs to ensure all staff are kept safe.

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. We will support employees who wish to return to an office working environment to make sure that they can do this safely.

The risk and Resilience team have undertaken health and safety assessments at a number of Council facilities prior to them reopening to ensure they have adequate Covid secure arrangements in place.

12 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

- 12.1 The Corporate Communications team continue to co-ordinate all Covid-19 communication activity across the Council. Links to the multi-agency communications cell as part of the LRF structure ensure we are able to provide consistent, co-ordinated and timely communications to staff, members, local residents and businesses.

The Healthy Hub website is now live and regular bulletins are being sent out by the team to ensure that our residents, members, local health providers and community groups have access to up to date information on health and wellbeing. The added benefit of the Welwyn Hatfield Healthy Hub is that the information is also from a local perspective and can provide our residents with access and links to clubs, support groups and activities that are occurring in their neighbourhood.

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 or identified learning requires changes to be more long term, this approach will be re-considered.

Rob Bridge, Chief Executive

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September 2020