

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET ON 20 JULY 2020

SUBJECT: THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC SITUATION

REPORT AUTHOR: Nigel Lynn, Chief Executive

DATE: 27 June 2020

EXTN: 37600

PORTFOLIO AREA: Corporate Support

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: This report updates Cabinet on the Council's response to the pandemic situation and possible proposals for economic recovery.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Cabinet is requested to resolve to:

- (1) note the actions taken to date;
- (2) note the minutes and recommendations from the Coronavirus Recovery Working Party held on 2 July 2020 and identify any proposals it wishes to take forward.

1. BACKGROUND:

This report is divided into two main areas in the, now, usual manner. The first part provides an update on progress since the last Cabinet report of 22 June 2020 in relation to the Covid-19 response by the Council. The second part highlights the main themes discussed at the Covid-19 Recovery Working Party which took place on 2 July 2020. The minutes and any recommendations from that meeting will come to this Cabinet meeting for discussion and possible approval of any of the suggestions made by the Working Party.

Part one - Covid-19 update on the Council's response since the last Cabinet report on 22.6.20

Welfare of Staff and Members

- 1.1.1. Restricted access to the civic buildings continues, with the majority of staff still working from home where they are able to, in line with Government guidance. Plans for limited return to work arrangements are underway, with consideration being given to the safety and wellbeing of staff, Members and contractors.

- 1.1.2. Considerable thought needs to be given to minimising the risk to people entering the building and a Recovery Team have been working on ideas to enable this, such as a 'one-way' route through the offices; identifying staff in 'teams' and considering 'shifts' to minimise the number of contacts. This is being progressed and when Government guidance is issued to allow a safe return to the office, this will be actioned. Calculations are being made to assess the number of staff who could return to the building based on the new 1 metre plus Government ruling.

Communications

- 1.1.3. Contact via social media continues to be a popular means of gathering information. Weekly reminders of our news bulletins and social media posts are issued including regular reminders about social distancing, avoiding busy places,

Homelessness

- 1.1.4. A total of 44 households have now been assisted and our focus is now on ways of accommodating those households once the lockdown status is lifted. As of 22 June 2020 there are currently 21 Covid placements.
- 1.1.5. On 24 June 2020, MHCLG announced an additional £105 million to help local authorities implement a range of support interventions for people placed into emergency accommodation during the Covid-19 pandemic. This includes supporting moves into the private rented sector, helping individuals to reconnect with friends or family, and extending or procuring interim accommodation. The Council awaits confirmation of the funding allocation we will receive.

Waste Collections

- 1.1.6. Waste collections continue as normal.

Parks & Open Spaces

- 1.1.7. Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAs)/skate parks reopened from 18 May 2020 and from 4 July 2020 playgrounds can reopen. The Greenspace team will now ensure that all areas are prepared for reopening including cutting the grass, checking equipment and installing new signage which will include messages around social distancing.

Community Hubs

- 1.1.8. The Council has received 218 referrals between 31 March and 21 June 2020. 81 of these related to food (shopping, collection etc) and 94 related to medication collections. The Government announced on 21 June 2020 that those shielding from coronavirus will be advised they can spend more time outside their homes from 6 July 2020 and that from 1 August 2020, the guidance will then be relaxed so clinically the extremely vulnerable will no longer be advised to shield. The food and medicine boxes facilitated by the National Shielding Service will stop as of 1 August 2020 as individuals are advised they can visit shops and pharmacies. Arun District Council officers will liaise with the West Sussex Community Hub about the

necessary communication plan as they have been dealing directly with the Shielded cohort to date. In addition, WSCC have been the point of contact for food distribution to date so our officers will liaise with them about the best way to publicise any changes to residents.

Support to Local Businesses

- 1.1.9. The Discretionary Business Grant Scheme has been rolled out and as of 26 June 2020 there have been 163 applications and the total financial commitment has been £730,000 based on our original funding of £1.539m, and we have allocated 47.43%. Businesses have been invited to apply for a second round of Discretionary Grants as there is some funding available to pass out to businesses in financial need of this. The grant is being administered by the Economic Development Team.
- 1.1.10. Business Support grants have been paid to 2442 businesses as of 22 June 2020 totalling £29.2m. The Council has now given grants to 97.94% of all eligible businesses who have applied. There are 222 eligible businesses still to apply but some have refused a grant and some have not applied despite sending several reminder letters and issuing requests on social media for businesses to make contact with the Council. The feedback received from such businesses is that they do not require financial assistance. Therefore, the Council is unlikely to reach 100% of payments to eligible businesses.
- 1.1.11. Arun was recently allocated £143,718 from the 'Reopening High Streets Safely Fund', which will be used to support practical measures for Arun's businesses to re-open quickly (when they are allowed to). This included providing signage, street markings and temporary barriers to help prepare for businesses to start trading again whilst observing the social distancing guidelines, and to restore customers' confidence in being able to shop safely. Shops have reopened safely and no significant concerns have been reported. Customers are following guidelines and social distancing measures and shop owners have appreciated the support from wardens and the Council. The Community Information Officers (Wardens) have been extremely proactive in resolving some hot spots and pinch points in both busy locations.
- 1.1.12. The Stay Safe message contributed greatly towards a careful and controlled opening in the key retail areas. A Communications Plan was used to ensure that messages were conveyed to the public quickly via social media, our website, the radio, the press and via the Chief Executive and Leader's VLOGs. Promotional posters and banners were put up in our main towns and marketing campaigns were developed for both Littlehampton and Bognor Regis by the Town Centre Managers.
- 1.1.13. Possible road closures and suspensions where there are anticipated pinch points caused by queueing have been identified. We are working with WSCC to progress these temporary changes. Cleansing continues at an advanced level. We have added the regular cleaning of public seating/benches in Littlehampton due to high usage. The offer to apply for a small allocation of the RHSS funding was made to Town and Parish Councils, that have shopping centres or clusters / parades of shops, to allow them to identify local interventions that they can directly deliver.

Applications were received and all projects which met all the necessary requirements were given the go ahead.

Leisure

1.1.14. Freedom Leisure is in receipt of a Council support package in response to the Government directive to close the Council's leisure centres due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A report was submitted to Full Council on 15 July 2020 setting out the current situation and options to maintain the future viability of the leisure operating contract.

Full Council agreed the following measures, to:

- i. extend the Letter of Variation (Supplier Relief due to COVID-19) to defer the net monthly payment obligations (£66,000) for the remainder of the financial year (to March 2021) and extend the contract expiry date by a further six months to 31 March 2027;
- ii. a supplementary estimate for a sum up to £270,000 (Band D equivalent of £4.38) is made available to support the Council's leisure operating contract for an initial three months and the impact is reported to Cabinet in September;
- iii. a supplementary estimate for a sum of £136,300 (Band D equivalent of £2.19) to regularise the s138 notice reported to Cabinet on 29 April 2020 to reimburse £45,436 per month to Freedom Leisure, subject to open book accounting, to cover the costs associated with the upkeep of the buildings during the period of closure; and
- iv. authority is given to the Group Head of Wellbeing to apply for and receive support funding that may from time to time become available to support leisure and cultural services affected by COVID-19.

The Council's Finances

1.1.15. The final picture regarding the Council's financial position will not be known until the emergency is over. The latest prediction, in our return to MHCLG is that the potential cost to the Council will be approximately £5m, and we have only received £1.6m in funding from Central Government. These figures, however, are only from our "snap-shot" Government returns in April, May and June; the true figure may inevitably be very different. Any future funding from the Government is unknown and is likely to be based on a more sophisticated formula this time than just population. Additionally, expenditure is difficult to predict as we don't know how long the situation will last. Officers continue to work on the Council's financial position using the limited data available to them.

Council Decision-Making

1.1.16. Since the last report to Cabinet on 22 June 2020, virtual Committee meetings have been held including Development Control Committee (DCC on 24 June 2020); Licensing Sub Committee (26 June 2020); Constitution Working Party (29 June 2020); Planning Policy Sub-Committee (30 June 2020) and Full Council on 15 July 2020.

Part two – Covid-19 Recovery Working Party on 2.7.20

1.1.17. The Council must now focus on the future and the recovery of the Economy. It was agreed at Cabinet on 22.6.20 that a Covid-19 Recovery Working Party be established and the first meeting took place on 2.7.20. This Working Party will consider how the Council can take steps to:

1. Address the financial gap created as incomes fall and customer demands change. The gap is substantial in the short term and it is far from certain what the medium/long term position will be for us
2. Develop new strategic targets that fit the new economic and social conditions - Community and Economy are top of the pile, but we need to consider what this really mean in terms of outcomes and investments required to deliver them
3. Learn from the crisis and shape a new operating model for the Council that builds on what we have shown to be possible over the past three months.

1.1.18. As agreed at Cabinet on 22 June 2020, the Working Party considered the Council's proposed recovery response by way of a report from the Chief Executive entitled 'Approaching this Review'. This report focused on the following five core themes that are being used by the Government Recovery Group, working with the Local Government Association (LGA) and the District Council Network (DCN) and County Council Network (CCN):

1. Business Communities, Sector and Innovation

- i. Continue to use the Arun Business Partnership to engage with local businesses as this has worked well; and
- ii. For businesses to ensure their cleaning and distancing measures meet current required standards;
- iii. Explore creating an internet directory of local business to raise awareness of what can be sourced locally, within the Arun District.

2. Labour Markets, Unemployment and Skills

- i. Focus on delivering projects/partnerships which will create jobs locally, or stimulate significant investment in the area or will have major social or environmental benefits; and
- ii. Consider reduction in demand for office space, student accommodation and retail and therefore what the future of Town Centres should look like.

3. Visitor Economy and Rural Areas

- i. Identify broadband "not spots" in Arun and consider potential solutions including continuation of the emergency provisions made by service providers under the emergency regulations.

4. Place Making, High Streets and City Centre

- i. Work with partners to enable our Town Centre to comply with social distancing while providing a welcoming and reassuring experience;
- ii. Develop a range of activities to stimulate footfall/visitor numbers in Arun in partnership with others;
- iii. Consider investment in Town Centre infrastructure to redress long-term lack of investment;
- iv. Explore the provision of free Wi-Fi in our Town Centre; and
- v. Looking at alternative uses for empty retail premises on the Belgian model.

5. Green/Sustainable Recovery

- i. Address the financial gap created as incomes fall and customer demands change. The gap is substantial in the short-term and it is far from certain what the medium/long term position will be for the Council
- ii. Develop new strategic targets that fit the new economic and social conditions – Community and Economy are a priority, but we need to consider what this really means in terms of outcomes and investments required to deliver them
- iii. Learn from the crisis and shape a new operating model for the Council that builds on what we have shown to be possible over the past three months;
- iv. Looking at and agreeing on what the Council's priorities should be now;
- v. What should change to make Arun a different Council?
- vi. How can the Council become financially stable in a sustainable way?
- vii. All of the above (i-vi) should run through the other four themes

1.1.19. Furthermore, the Working Party considered a report on “Understanding the Psychological and Social Impact of the Pandemic“ by the COVID Social Study Organisation. This study is the largest study of its kind in the world and has run from prior to Lockdown to date. This presentation highlights the social and community issues which might also need to be considered during the recovery phase. Key highlights from this report include:

What has happened to mental health during lockdown?

- Mental health got worse in the lead up to lockdown coming in
- Levels during lockdown appear higher than usual
- Depression improved a bit as lockdown eased but has plateaued. Anxiety was decreasing but has also plateaued
- Loneliness is also higher than usual and has not improved across lockdown.
- Young people have worse mental health on every measure
- There is a clear socio-economic gradient in mental health
- Specific stressors around basic needs and finances have decreased
- Many people are not particularly scared of the virus itself
- Decreases in fear about Covid have occurred alongside decreases in compliance and confidence in the government to handle the pandemic

How have people been affected by adversities?

- People of lower socio-economic position (SEP) have been disproportionately affected by adversities during the pandemic
- This has not improved in the early weeks of lockdown even in spite of measures taken (e.g. furlough schemes)
- People of lower SEP have also worried more about adversities
- Both worries about adversities and experience of adversities appear to have been driving poorer mental health during lockdown
- The relationship between adversities and mental health has been stronger in people of lower SEP In other words, people of low SEP have been hit three times:
 1. More worries about adversities
 2. More experience of adversities
 3. More of an impact of adversities on their mental health

Lockdown continuation and easing

- The factors people are missing most are seeing family and friends, but other cultural and leisure activities are also being missed
- Young people are missing leisure and culture the most
- Many people have been turning to the arts during lockdown, especially listening to music
- A large number of people (21%) have been engaging more than normal in the arts (we have gained more than we have lost across lockdown)
- Engagement in the arts has been most common amongst younger adults but patterns have varied by arts type for ethnicity and SES

Final messages

- Particularly vulnerable groups include young people, people of lower socio-economic position, and people living alone. The pandemic seems to be widening inequalities.
- Mental health has got worse at times of uncertainty. Lockdown does not appear to have made it worse but has not improved it. Easing of lockdown has helped a bit but improvements have plateaued.
- The worry of potential adversities (financial or basic needs) is currently having the same negative effect on mental health as experience of adversities
- People are turning to the arts, including new audiences.
- A worry is that lockdown measures that prevent arts organisations re-opening could force many arts organisations to close, and could also remove access to activities and venues that people usually use to support social engagement and manage their mental health.

1.1.20. The Working Party also received a copy of a presentation from the Greater Brighton Economic Board which provided a very succinct overview in terms of what the Board sees as the overall impacts of Covid-19 as well as its strategic priorities for the next five years and helped to direct discussion for the Working Party in relation to the five themes above. Key highlights from this presentation, in relation to the Covid-19 Impact Assessment include:

- Estimated temporary closure of business by sector – most affected – arts, entertainment and recreation, accommodation and food, retail, and construction
- No plans to re-open in next four weeks or more – arts, entertainment and recreation, accommodation and food, education.
- Insolvencies and liquidations, by sector – worse affected – professional, real estate, manufacturing
- Commercial real estate – small amount of deals completed in March, April and May
- Claimants – Arun up from 2% to 5%
- Age impact – 18-24 year olds most affected – most furloughed, most lost jobs, most lost hours
- Sectors using Government grants the most – accommodation and food, arts/entertainment and recreation and construction.

1.1.21. The minutes and recommendations from the Working Party meeting held on 2 July 2020 are to be considered at this meeting.

2. PROPOSAL(S):

Cabinet is requested to note the updates on actions taken thus far to respond to the crisis, and to note the minutes and recommendations from the Covid-19 Recovery Working Party meeting held on 2 July 2020.

3. OPTIONS:

Not to support the actions taken or recommendations from the Covid-19 Recovery Working Party on 2 July 2020.

4. CONSULTATION:

Has consultation been undertaken with:	YES	NO
Relevant Town/Parish Council		X
Relevant District Ward Councillors		X
Other groups/persons (please specify) - Cabinet	✓	
5. ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail at 6 below)	YES	NO
Financial	✓	
Legal		X
Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment		
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act		X
Sustainability		X
Asset Management/Property/Land		X
Technology		X

Other (please explain)		
<p>6. IMPLICATIONS:</p> <p>6.1 It must be recognised that the Council also has limited funds to be able to make direct interventions. Instead, it is likely that the Council will need to focus on providing local leadership and policy changes to provide an economic stimulus and facilitate any necessary structural change. This may require seeking out external funding wherever possible. In the main, therefore, this Council will be facilitating the recovery process and helping to provide community leadership.</p> <p>6.2 The final picture regarding the Council's financial position will not be known until the emergency is over. We predict that the potential cost to the Council could now be will be approximately £5m, whilst we have only received £1.6m in funding from Central Government. These figures, however, are only from our "snap-shot" Government returns in June and have a lot of provisos; the true figure may inevitably be very different. Any future funding from the Government is unknown and is likely to be based on a more sophisticated formula this time than just population. Additionally, expenditure is difficult to predict as we don't know how long the situation will last. Officers continue to work on the Council's financial position using the limited data available to them.</p>		

<p>7. REASON FOR THE DECISION:</p> <p>For Cabinet to note the recommendations from the Covid-19 Working Party of 2.7.20 and to note the ongoing recovery work of the Council.</p>
<p>8 EFFECTIVE DATE OF THE DECISION: 29 July 2020</p>

<p>8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:</p> <p>Arun Webpage - Covid-19</p> <p>Cabinet report 1.6.20</p> <p>OSC report 9.6.20</p> <p>Cabinet report 22.6.20</p> <p>GBEB Covid Impact Presentation.pdf [pdf] 1MB</p> <p>Dr Daisy Fancourt presentation.pdf [pdf] 3MB</p>
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