

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET ON 8 FEBRUARY 2021

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

REPORT AUTHOR: Nigel Lynn, Chief Executive

DATE: 22 January 2021

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.

1. BACKGROUND:

- This report provides an update on progress since the last Cabinet report of 14 December 2020 in relation to the Covid-19 response by the Council. Members are asked to note that due to the report being written in advance of the Cabinet meeting, the actual date range that this update is for, is from 17 November 2020 (the date of writing the report to Cabinet on 14 December 2020) to 22 January 2021 (the date of writing this report).
- A National Lockdown was declared by the Prime Minister on 4.1.21. The impact on the Council is (at the time of writing this report):
 - **Office presence** - Due to the new variant of Covid and how quickly this is being transmitted, CMT agreed that staff attendance at the Council's buildings should be at an absolute minimum, with staff ONLY attending a Council building if they have agreed this with their manager. Councillors are not permitted to enter any Council building at the current time.
 - **Emergency Management Team** - The Emergency Management Team are meeting weekly (each Monday) to consider all current issues in relation to the Covid response. The EMT and CMT regularly review the capacity in each service area due to work pressures and staff absences. It should be noted that staff are under increased pressure to perform existing workloads as well as responding to the Covid pandemic.

- **Play areas and skateparks** - Play areas have been identified to remain open, usage is being monitored, new signage is being erected and risk assessments reviewed. Recent guidance from both Skateboard GB & Sport England states that they have interpreted recent Government guidance as requiring skate parks to close under the latest restrictions. Alongside this there have been numerous instances within Arun of users congregating at skate parks and failing to adhere to social distancing. Sea Road skate park has been closed off using fencing, other skate parks will have signs put up and will be closed as practically as they can be.
- **Covid Marshalls** – Arun will working with East Hants to assist with this role including officers patrolling the District including hotspot areas such as promenades, parks, recreation areas and skate parks, ensuring compliance. Arun’s Environmental Health team will patrol the smaller supermarkets, garden centres, click and collect premises, where they receive complaints from the public and where there are positive cases confirmed. The major supermarkets will be covered by the H&S executives. East Hants will provide daily feedback reports to Arun after patrols; looking at number of interactions, businesses visited and notes on hotspot areas. These reports will be considered by Arun officers so that appropriate action can be taken where necessary.
- **Events** - Dominic Raab has indicated that we are likely to see a return to the local tier system post lockdown. Communications from Arun to include message that although we can’t be sure what restrictions will be in place, in the spring/summer months, it would be useful if event organisers refer to the tier system restrictions when making plans
- **Environmental Health & Enforcement** - Work by Environmental Health continues advising and enforcing the business restrictions which have changed twice over the past two weeks and managing workplace-based outbreaks.
- **Implementing Guidance** - The Council is working to ensure that all Government Guidance is adhered to in relation to other service areas and is ensuring that all procedures for dealing with Covid related matters including grants, enforcement etc are followed.
- **Leisure Centres** - Our leisure centres and leisure facilities such as adventure golf have been closed as required by government and the Council will work with Freedom Leisure to address the significant financial implications of this.
- **Vulnerable assistance** - We are providing the necessary support to the most vulnerable in conjunction with WSCC via the community hub.
- **Rough Sleepers** - We are working with partners such as Stonepillow and Turning tides over rough sleepers.

Communications

- 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 and considerate use of our beaches and town centres. The public are being kept well informed of all key messages.

- Councillors, Partners of Arun and the Town and Parish Councils have been updated with new information from partners, other authorities and Government bodies via emailed briefing notes from the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive since the start of the pandemic in March 2020. These are issued every week.

Welfare of Staff, Members and the Public

- Following the announcement of the new National Lockdown, staff must work from home unless they have made specific arrangements with their Manager to attend the Council offices. Staff attending an office location must take all Covid precautions set out by the Council including attending the office for the minimum time, not being in contact with other staff and wearing face coverings.
- The Council has not opened its reception areas (apart from providing a service to homeless presentations), meeting rooms or communal areas in line with Government guidance and officers are working hard to ensure that the public can access all services either online or via our contact centre.
- With the potential for an increase in residents seeking support or advice due to the new National Lockdown, Arun is continuing to liaise with the County Council so that assistance is coordinated via the West Sussex Community Hub. Directing enquiries to the Community Hub as a single point of contact will ensure that residents are properly identified and their issues logged so that their enquiry can be directed to the most appropriate service to meet their individual needs. The number of referrals into the WS Hub are relatively low and none have been referred to the Arun Hub for a local response.

Covid-19 Prevalence

- Councillors, Partners of Arun and the Town and Parish Councils have been updated on the prevalence of Covid in West Sussex by way of the regular briefing notes.
- The West Sussex Covid Health Protection Board continues to monitor prevalence of Covid-19 cases. The Corporate Management Team, relevant Group Heads and our Communications Team are being informed of the numbers of Covid cases in both Arun and the whole of West Sussex and this is being communicated to officers and Councillors on a regular basis. Covid prevalence in the District is currently high with some areas in the District having the highest rates in the country (due to Care Home Covid outbreaks). Data is being collated and analysed every day to identify setting based outbreaks. Where setting based outbreaks are identified, interventions to support and guide the setting in managing the outbreak are delivered by WSCC Public Health or District and Borough Environmental Health
- In December, WSCC agreed to provide an additional £75k for each District & Borough (in addition to the £75k already received) in relation to the management of local outbreaks of COVID-19. This will be used to supplement the capacity of the Environmental Health team over the next twelve months. That team works with businesses and organisations where there appears to be a workplace based outbreak. WSCC undertake the same role for care homes, clinical settings and schools.

- Public Health England gave their approval for local contact tracing to begin in West Sussex. A collaborative approach is being used to prepare to implement this service; West Sussex County Council is working in partnership with colleagues in East Sussex, and District and Borough Councils across the county with support from Public Health England. West Sussex County Council's Customer Experience Service are managing the Local Tracing process with dedicated Community Hub staff undertaking the contacts for both West Sussex and East Sussex. The Community Hub was established in response to the first wave of the pandemic and incorporates a full ranging customer service centre approach. To ensure a fully localised approach despite operating consistently across both Counties the phone number seen by the individual contacted will be a local number. Out of the positive cases referred to WSCC by NHS Track and Trace, some of these resulted in requests to District and Boroughs for Council tax contact information and this was provided.
- Arun's Environmental Health team has been working in collaboration with The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to carry out Covid-secure spot checks on business premises where we are responsible for the enforcement of health and safety legislation. Since the start of the spot checks, the Council has assisted with follow up visits where required. The Council publicised this through our social media channels.
- West Sussex County Council has worked in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care and our District and Borough Councils to implement a wide range of Covid testing sites across the County to control the Covid rate of reproduction (R), reduce the spread of infection and save lives. An NHS walk through testing facility was opened in St. Martins car park in Littlehampton in early December 2020 and Council officers assisted with the set up of this.
- The Council is ensuring that social media and our website communications are regularly updated with information relating to the roll out of the vaccination programme so that the public are aware that their GP surgeries will contact them directly to arrange for a vaccination to take place.

Financial Impact of Covid-19

- The financial effects of Covid-19 have been severe for the Council, in common with other local authorities across the country. The new lockdown will have further financial implications for the Council.
- Government announced the funding allocations for the 4th tranche of Covid funding to local government to address wider cost pressures. Arun's allocation to date is £498,760.00.

First Tranche of Covid-19 Funding	Second Tranche of Covid-19 Funding	Third Tranche of Covid-19 Funding ²	Fourth Tranche of Covid-19 Funding	Total Covid-19 Additional Funding
£64,612	£1,609,640	£264,767	£498,760.00	£2,437,779

- Details of all funding received by the Council as a result of the Covid Pandemic are listed in Appendix A which is attached to this report.
- The Council will be working with Freedom Leisure to address the further financial implications this Lockdown and Cabinet approved further financial assistance to Freedom at their meeting on 14 December 2020.
- The Council is applying to a new £100 million National Leisure Recovery Fund in January to assist with the costs of keeping our leisure centres open. The fund will help meet the additional costs of operating the centres whilst the buildings have limited capacity due to Covid restrictions. This Fund is a most welcome development and will help to ensure that our Centres remain open so that the community can continue to access safe and warm facilities throughout the winter months to maintain and improve their physical and mental wellbeing.
- Business premises forced to close in England are to receive grants under the Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSG) and Discretionary Grants via the Additional Restrictions Support Grant (ARG). The Local Restrictions Support Grants (LRSG - rateable value based mandatory grants) will be dealt with by the Revenues Team. The Additional Restrictions Support Grant (ARG - Discretionary Grants) will be dealt with by the Economic Development Team. In addition, people who have to self-isolate can receive a payment of £500 (for those on lower incomes who cannot work from home and have lost income as a result) and the Council continues to make payments receipt of a valid application. The Council will also be administering the new grants announced by Government on 5.1.21 which are grants for businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors. These one-off top-up grants will be provided on a per property basis to businesses closed as a result of the latest restrictions. As of 18/19 January 2021, the following payments have been made:

The Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSG - rateable value based Mandatory Grants) and Christmas Support payment to Wet-Led Pubs (data as of 19.1.21):

Grant Type	No. of Applications received	No. of Applications paid	Value	No. of Applications awaiting assessments
Tier 2 Restrictions Grant for Closed Businesses	32	19	£10,953.50	8
Tier 4 Restrictions Grant for Closed Businesses	437	134	£69,551.00	299
Business Support Package for Lockdown from 5.1.21	371	2	£12,002.00	369
Christmas Support Payment for wet-led pubs (AAA) Fixed Value: £1,000	49	43	£43,000.00	6
Grant for Closed Businesses – 2.12.20-25.12.20	42	32	£25,339.00	5

National Grant – November 2020	Restrictions	699	581	£923,942.00	61
--------------------------------	--------------	-----	-----	-------------	----

The Additional Restrictions Support Grant (ARG - Discretionary Grants) (Data as of 18.1.21):

- **Additional Restrictions Discretionary Grants Round 2 – now closed**
 - Total applications = 358
 - Approved = 211
 - Approved since 11th January = 9
 - Total Value = £269,507
- **Additional Restrictions Grants Round 3 – opened Thursday 14th January**
 - Total Applications = 161
 - Approved = 53
 - Total Value = £175,250
 - High number of applications v approvals as many businesses incorrectly applied for this grant when they were entitled to the grant for a closed business and others where we require further information.
- **Local Restriction Support Grants (Open)**
 - Total Applications = 256
 - Approved = 107
 - Approved since 4th January = 74
 - Value - £104,872.02
 - Total paid £549,629.20. Payment details have been extracted from the system for payment today.
 - The current Discretionary Grant application window will last until 15th February.
 - LRSG(Open) is now suspended until we go back into Tier 2,3 or 4.
- Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership announced further grants of between £1,000 and £3,000 (up to £5,000 in exceptional circumstances) for specialist advice or equipment to aid smaller businesses adapt to trading through the pandemic. Funding was provided by European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) as The Visitor Economy (Kickstart Tourism) and Wider Economy (Restart & Recovery SME) grant and was subject to eligibility criteria. Applications were invited by 7 December 2020 and the Council publicised this scheme to local businesses.

2. PROPOSAL(S):

Cabinet is requested to note the actions taken to date.

3. OPTIONS:

To note this update report or
To request further information

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)		
6. IMPLICATIONS:		
<p>6.1 The Council also has very limited funds to be able to make direct interventions to assist the public and businesses. The Council has, therefore, focussed on good communication and Government grants that are available. The Council has also been facilitating the recovery process and helping to provide community leadership.</p> <p>6.2 The Government has supported local government with grants to assist our budgets, which covers a proportion of our losses, but there remains a significant shortfall of our income, which is concerning as we look to the future. This shortfall will affect the Council's finances significantly going forward, and, although the 2021/21 budget is balanced, this has been partly due to reduced spending to help cover our losses.</p> <p>6.3 This new (January) Lockdown has further implications on staff workload, capacity and mental health as we strive to continue to provide day to day services, whilst working from home, many with childcare issues (now that schools are closed). Members need to understand that the continuing pandemic is having a negative effect on normal officer duties, although, in the main, front line services remain fully operational.</p>		

7. REASON FOR THE DECISION: For Cabinet to note the Council's response to the Covid-19 Pandemic.
8 EFFECTIVE DATE OF THE DECISION: 8 February 2021 – as this is an information item.
9. BACKGROUND PAPERS: None