

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE ON 23 MARCH 2021

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

REPORT AUTHOR: Nigel Lynn, Chief Executive
DATE: 8 March 2021
EXTN: 37600
PORTFOLIO AREA: Corporate Support

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: This report updates Overview Select Committee on the Council's response to the pandemic situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Overview Select Committee is requested to resolve to:

- (1) note the actions taken to date.

1. BACKGROUND:

- This report provides an update on progress since the last report to Overview Select Committee on 26.2.21.
- Members are asked to note that due to the report being written in advance of the meeting, the information included in this report is to 8 March 2021 (the date of writing this report).
- Members are asked to note that the detailed work that all officers are doing across all departments in relation to responding to the Covid pandemic is causing significant strain and pressure on resources and many other projects and workstreams cannot be implemented to full capacity until after the Covid pandemic.
- On 22 February 2021, the Prime Minister gave a statement to Parliament on the roadmap for easing lockdown restrictions in England and published the 'COVID-19 Response – Spring 2021' roadmap. This roadmap sets out how the Government will begin to lift restrictions in England from 8 March, starting with schools and colleges. It outlines four steps for easing restrictions. Before taking each step, the Government will review the latest data on the impact of the previous step against four tests.
- The impact on the Council is (at the time of writing this report):
 - **Easing of restrictions** - The Council will be reviewing the latest guidance from Government in relation to the easing of restrictions and will implement the necessary actions to comply with each stage as directed by Government.

- **Office presence** - 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. After 21 June 2021, the government will complete a review of social distancing and other measures that have been put in place to cut transmission, in order to inform decisions on the timing and circumstances under which rules on 1 metre plus, the wearing of face coverings, etc, may be lifted. This will also inform guidance on working from home – which should continue wherever possible until this review is complete. The Council will not be allowing all staff back into the office or opening the Council offices (apart from the reception area for homelessness presentations) until guidance is received from Government.
- **Emergency Management Team** - The Emergency Management Team are meeting weekly 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 from existing workloads as well as the Covid pandemic.
- **Leisure Centres, Play areas and Skateparks** - Our leisure centres and leisure facilities (such as adventure golf) have been closed and the Council will continue to work with Freedom Leisure to address the significant financial implications. Play areas remain open. Skate parks have been closed, as per Government guidance. In the Roadmap the following are anticipated reopening dates but these are subject to Government confirmation:
 - 29 March - Outdoor sports – tennis, golf, skateparks can reopen
 - 12 April - Leisure centres - reopening of gyms and swimming pools – no group classes
 - 17 May - indoor gym classes and cinemas may reopen
- **Covid Marshalls** – Arun has been working with East Hants to assist with this role including officers patrolling the District including hotspot areas. Arun's Environmental Health team have continued to patrol the smaller supermarkets, garden centres, click and collect premises, where they receive complaints from the public and where there are positive cases confirmed. East Hants have provided regular feedback reports to Arun so that appropriate action can be taken where necessary.
- **Environmental Health & Enforcement** - Work by Environmental Health continues advising and enforcing the business restrictions which have changed regularly, as well as managing workplace-based outbreaks.
- **Implementing Guidance** - The Council is working to ensure that all Government Guidance is adhered to and that all procedures for dealing with Covid related matters including grants, enforcement etc are followed.
- **Vulnerable assistance** - We continue to provide the necessary support to the most vulnerable in conjunction with WSCC, via the community hub.
- **Rough Sleepers** - We continue to work with partners such as Stonepillow and Turning tides to protect these individuals.
- **May 2021 elections** – officers are working to Government guidance to ensure that the elections are conducted in a safe and Covid secure manner. Information will be given to Councillors, the public and staff involved in the Elections as more clarification is received for all of the different aspects of administering and delivering the elections.

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 have been issued every week since 24 March 2020 and there have been 52 editions to date.

Welfare of Staff, Members and the Public

- Following the announcement of the January National Lockdown, staff are working from home unless they have made specific arrangements. Staff attending an office location must take all Covid precautions set out by the CEO.
- 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.
- After 21 June 2021, the government will complete a review of social distancing and other measures that have been put in place to cut transmission, in order to inform decisions on the timing and circumstances under which rules on 1 metre plus, the wearing of face coverings, etc, may be lifted. This will also inform guidance on working from home (which should continue wherever possible until this review is complete) and the reopening of Council offices to more staff and customers. The Council will not be allowing all staff back into the office or opening the Council offices (apart from the reception area for homelessness presentations) until guidance is received from Government.
- 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.

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 since the middle of March 2020 on a weekly basis.
- 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 finally starting to reduce, although still high. Data is being collated and analysed every day to identify outbreaks. Interventions to support and manage the outbreak are delivered by WSCC Public Health or our Environmental Health team.

- In December 2020, 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 is being used to supplement the capacity of the Environmental Health team. That team works with businesses and organisations where there appears to be a workplace-based outbreak.
- 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. Councillors are also forwarded the regular West Sussex Vaccination Updates as they are received.
- The Council has been giving information to local businesses via social media, our website and targeted Arun Business Partnership publications regarding the Community Testing Programme (Lateral Flow Tests) for which can be provided for the delivery of asymptomatic testing to the following groups:
 - Testing for Businesses with more than 50 employees (established within the last month)
 - Community Testing (from 8 March 2021)
 - Testing for Adults with school age children (from 8 March 2021)
 - Testing in Schools and Colleges (from 8 March 2021)
 - Testing of nominated visitor to care homes (from 8 March 2021)

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 pandemic will continue to have financial implications for the Council.
- Arun has received the following Covid funding from Government to address wider cost pressures. Arun's allocation to date is £498,760.00.
- 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.
- WSCC have a £10m "Contained Outbreak Management" grant and receive more each month on a per capita basis. WSCC and District and Borough Councils are currently working through the detail of how to distribute this fund and how it could be best spent to ensure the following areas are considered:
 - Where resource constraint is an issue
 - Where income has adversely affected the Council's financial position which will be detrimental to its capability to support the Covid response
 - Additional initiatives that can positively impact on Covid control and mitigation of the financial and health resulting from the virus and the impact of the restrictions.

- Officers are working with Freedom Leisure to address the ongoing financial implications and Cabinet approved further financial assistance to Freedom at their meeting on 14 December 2020. The Council has applied to the recent £100 million National Leisure Recovery Fund to assist with the cost of our leisure centres. The fund will help meet the additional costs of operating the centres whilst the buildings have been closed.
- The Council has been giving information to local businesses via social media, our website and targeted Arun Business Partnership publications regarding the various grants available to them.
- Business premises forced to close in England can 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) is being dealt with by the Council's Revenues Team. The Additional Restrictions Support Grant (ARG - Discretionary Grants) are being 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. As of 8.3.21, the following payments have been made.

The Additional Restrictions Support Grant (ARG - Discretionary Grants):

Scheme Name	Submitted Claims	Claims Approved	Claims Approved Value
Additional Restrictions Discretionary Grant - Businesses with RV or property costs up to £15K pa R3	453	235	£799,620.00
Additional Restrictions Discretionary Grant - Business- RV or property costs over £15k to £51k pa R3	66	17	£100,000.00
Additional Restrictions Discretionary Grant - market trader / taxi driver R3	25	23	£22,550.00
Additional Restrictions Discretionary Grant - RV or Property costs of over £51K pa R3	13	2	£18,000.00
Discretionary Grant - Businesses with RV or property costs up to £15K pa R4	199	155	£531,325.00
Discretionary Grant - Business- RV or property costs over £15k to £51k pa R4	26	15	£88,000.00
Discretionary Grant - market trader / taxi driver R4	14	12	£11,700.00

Discretionary Grant - RV or Property costs of over £51K pa R4	2	1	£9,000.00
Local Restriction Support Grant (Open) Tier 2/3/4 Discretionary RV over £51K -2.12 - 25.12.20	32	19	£30,201.60
Local Restriction Support Grant Open T4 Discretionary RV / property costs up to £15K 2 - 25.12.20	152	63	£46,770.75
Additional Restrictions Discretionary Grant - Businesses with RV or property costs up to £15K pa R3	72	35	£37,118.27

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

Grant Type	No. of Applications received	No. of Applications paid	Value	No. of Applications awaiting assessments
Tier 2 Restrictions Grant for Closed Businesses	40	29	£17,382.50	0
Tier 4 Restrictions Grant for Closed Businesses	721	678	£382,711.00	4
Business Support Package for Lockdown from 5.1.21	870	804	£7,662,656.00	4
Christmas Support Payment for wet-led pubs (AAA) Fixed Value: £1,000	57	51	£51,000.00	0
Grant for Closed Businesses – 2.12.20-25.12.20	49	38	£31,174.00	0
National Restrictions Grant – November 2020	851	756	£1,190,700.00	8

2. PROPOSAL(S):

Overview Select Committee 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:	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 continued to focus on good communication and Government grants available to businesses and the public. The Council has also been helping to provide community leadership.</p> <p>6.2 The Government has supported the Council 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 The current Lockdown has increased 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 (when the schools are closed). Members are asked to note that the detailed work that all officers are doing across all departments in relation to responding to the Covid pandemic is causing significant strain and pressure on resources and many other projects and workstreams cannot be implemented to full capacity until after the Covid pandemic. Despite the negative effect that the pandemic is having on normal officer duties, in the main, front line services remain fully operational.</p> <p>6.4 It should be noted that the easing of restrictions will be of benefit to all, however it will entail the continued hard work and dedication of staff to ensure that services are reopened and reintroduced over the coming months.</p>		

7. REASON FOR THE DECISION:	For Overview Select Committee to note the Council's response to the Covid-19 Pandemic.
8 EFFECTIVE DATE OF THE DECISION:	23 March 2021
9. BACKGROUND PAPERS:	None