

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET ON 17 MAY 2021

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

REPORT AUTHOR: Nigel Lynn, Chief Executive

DATE: 22 April 2021

EXTN: 37600

PORTFOLIO AREA: Corporate Support

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

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 22 March 2021 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 8 March 2021 (the date of writing the report to Cabinet on 22 March 2021) to 22 April 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 5 April 2021, the Prime Minister confirmed that the 'COVID-19 Response – Spring 2021' roadmap is on track and planned easements can go ahead. Significant parts of the indoor economy and further outdoor settings will reopen from 12 April, after data confirmed the government's "four tests" for easing Covid restrictions had been met. However, the Prime Minister continued to urge caution, with no changes to social contact rules and many restrictions still in place. Outdoor gatherings must still be limited to 6 people or 2 households, and you must not socialise indoors with anyone you do not live with or have not formed a support bubble with. From Monday 12 April

additional premises will be able to reopen – with the rules on social contact applying. Indoor settings must only be visited alone or with household groups, with outdoor settings limited to either six people or two households.

- 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.
 - **Future preparations** – Officers have been working to ensure there are extra cleansing regimes and additional litter emptying as we are expecting towns, seafronts and play areas to be busy over the coming weeks as we move through the stages of the roadmap out of lockdown.
 - **Emergency Management Team (EMT)** – they are meeting weekly (each Monday) to consider all current issues in relation to the Covid response. The EMT and Corporate Management Team (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.
 - **Staff attendance at Council offices** - Staff attendance remain low in Corporate offices and no areas of concern are noted. Staff attending reported through to CMT for Group Heads to review to ensure essential staff only are in attendance. Staff will continue to work from home and the Council offices closed to the public (apart from reception for homelessness presentations) until further guidance is given by Government. Government advice is to continue to work from home, expectation currently is that this will not change before 21 June, which is the date the Government are hoping that most restrictions on social interactions are lifted. Phased return to the offices will be planned through the EMT group and pandemic control measures will be needed on a long-term basis. Staff working in civic buildings will be encouraged to take the lateral flow tests to improve safety of themselves and colleagues. No Councillors or staff are permitted to enter the building unless this has been agreed with Management/Group Heads.
 - **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.
- **Virtual Meetings** - On 7 May 2020 Government Regulations came into force to enable Councils to hold virtual meetings for one year, providing certain conditions were met in relation to ensuring openness and public access. There are no current plans by the Government to renew the Regulations from 7 May 2021 and venues to hold Council meetings in a COVID secure environment are very limited. Staff are instructed, by the Government, to work from home until at least 21 June 2021. The Chief Executive may be looking to use his emergency powers to continue with Virtual meetings until after 21 June 2021 when it is planned that all social distancing stipulations may no longer be in place. Alternatively, a Special Full Council meeting may be called to determine the Council's position on virtual meetings. Should virtual meetings continue, the public will be able to participate for Public Question Time and public speaking, as they have done over the past year.
- It should be noted that the Council has continued to offer its services throughout the pandemic with the following notable achievements during this difficult time:
 - 391 households offered accommodation and services maintained throughout
 - Hardship fund has paid out £823k to 12,912 households
 - Small Business Grant Fund has paid out £39.7m to 3,702 businesses
 - The Discretionary Grant Fund has awarded £3,073,295 to 479 businesses (and rising)
 - 70 virtual Council meetings and briefings have been held
 - We have posted on social media 2,255 times. 1,000 on Facebook, 750 on Twitter and 505 on Instagram.
 - We have collected 28,499 tonnes of refuse
 - We have collected 344.98 tonnes of litter
 - We have collected 13,177 tonnes of recycling
 - We have handled 149,554 calls and 2,349 webchat interactions

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.

Welfare of Staff, Members and the Public

- 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.
- 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 businesses. Further publicity has been given to the latest announcement by Government (5.421) that everyone in England will be able to access free, regular, rapid coronavirus testing from 9 April 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 (as of 19.4.21).
- WSCC have a £10m "Contained Outbreak Management" (COMF) 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.
- The Communities Secretary has announced a new £56 million Welcome Back Fund to boost tourism, improve green spaces and provide more outdoor seating areas, markets and food stall pop-ups. Part of this funding will be allocated specifically to support coastal areas, with funding going to all coastal resorts across England to safely welcome holiday makers in the coming months. Arun District Council has been allocated £208,718 from this fund. Officers will be working to prioritise how this money is allocated to various projects and will liaise with Town and Parish Councils as well to seek their potential requirements.
- The Government has announced the [allocation of £100 million to 266 local authorities to support the recovery of publicly-owned leisure centres and gyms](#). The National Leisure Recovery Fund, which opened in December 2020 and is managed by Sport England, was established to provide funding for the leisure sector to successfully reopen. Arun District Council has been allocated £331,690 from this fund and officers are working with Freedom Leisure to address the ongoing financial implications of the pandemic. With the leisure centres reopening from 12 April 2021 (in a limited capacity), it is hoped that the financial situation will start to improve in the coming months.
- 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 19.4.21, 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	277	162	200,835.00
Additional Restrictions Discretionary Grant - Businesses with RV or property costs up to £15K pa R3	453	237	807,620.00
Additional Restrictions Discretionary Grant - Business-RV or property costs over £15k to £51k pa	52	29	50,340.00
Additional Restrictions Discretionary Grant - Business-RV or property costs over £15k to £51k pa R3	66	17	100,000.00
Additional Restrictions Discretionary Grant - Eligible market trader	12	7	3,500.00
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	17	7	19,334.00
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	330	249	894,325.00
Discretionary Grant - Business-RV or property costs over £15k to £51k pa R4	46	22	130,000.00
Discretionary Grant - market trader / taxi driver R4	24	21	20,700.00
Discretionary Grant - RV or Property costs of over £51K pa R4	5	1	9,000.00
Discretionary Grant R5- market trader / taxi driver	25	21	40,850.00
Discretionary R5 & Discretionary Restart Grant - Businesses with RV or property costs up to £15K pa	314	204	1,002,167.00
Discretionary R5 & Discretionary Restart Grant - RV or property costs over £15k to £51k pa	27	9	74,000.00
Discretionary R5 & Discretionary Restart Grant - RV or Property costs over £51K pa	7	2	24,000.00

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	64	47,470.75
Local Restriction Support Grant Open Tier 2/3/4 Discretionary RV £15-£51K 2.12- 25.12.20	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	45	33	£19,763.50	0
Tier 4 Restrictions Grant for Closed Businesses	794	743	£419,622.50	2
Business Support Package for Lockdown from 05/01/21	969	890	£8,484,478.00	2
Christmas Support Payment for wet-led pubs (AAA) Fixed Value: £1,000	57	51	£51,000.00	0
Grant for Closed Businesses – 02/12/20 to 25/12/20	56	42	£34,508.00	0
National Restrictions Grant - November 2020	924	819	£1,291,394.00	0
LRSG (second Cycle) 16/02/21 – 31/03/21	13	5	£16,239.00	6
Restart Grant 1 – Non Essential Retail	170	141	£422,704.00	22
Restart Grant 2 – Hospitality, accommodation, Leisure, Personal Care & Gyms	403	331	£3,156,000.00	75

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:	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 limited funds to be able to make direct interventions to assist the public and businesses but continues to focus on good communication utilising the Government's Covid Outbreak Management Fund. Additionally, the Council continues to promote and manage Government grants to businesses and the public. In addition, through regular briefings, social media and videos, the Council also provide community leadership and guidance.</p> <p>6.2 The Government has continued to support the Council with grants, which covers a proportion (about 70%) of our losses, but there remains a shortfall of our income, particularly in relation to rents, leisure and car park shortfalls, which is concerning as we look to 2022/23. Although the 2021/21 budget was balanced, this has been partly due to grants and partly due to reduced spend.</p> <p>6.3 The second 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) until at least 21 June 2021. 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 has eased</p>		

fully. Despite the negative effect that the pandemic is having on normal officer duties, in the main, front line services remain fully operational.

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.

7. REASON FOR THE DECISION: For Cabinet to note the Council's response to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

8 EFFECTIVE DATE OF THE DECISION: 17 May 2021

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS: None