



# Northumberland

## County Council

CABINET

DATE: 13 OCTOBER 2020

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### **COVID-19: Response and Recovery Update**

**Report of: Kelly Angus, Interim Acting Chief Executive**

**Cabinet Member:** Cllr Glen Sanderson, Leader of Council

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### **Purpose of report**

This paper follows a report to Cabinet on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2020 and provides members with the latest update on the impact of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic on the work of the Council. It provides an overview of the Council's ongoing response and recovery initiatives since June.

### **Recommendations**

Cabinet is recommended to:

- € Note the ongoing impact of the Coronavirus emergency on the County Council;
- € Acknowledge the continued work undertaken to date by the Council;
- € Agree to receive further reports on the work being undertaken by the Council, particularly in light of new local and national restrictions introduced recently; and,
- € Invite the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to examine updates on response and recovery plans.

### **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to the following priorities in the Corporate Plan:

- We want you to feel safe, healthy, and cared for; 'living'.
- We want you to love where you live; 'enjoying'.
- We want you to have access to the things you need; 'connecting'.
- We want you to achieve and realise your potential; 'learning'.

- We want to attract more and better jobs; ‘thriving’.

## **Key issues**

### **Background**

#### **1. Coronavirus latest position and our ongoing response**

- 1.1. At the time of writing (September 2020), Covid-19 infection rates have risen significantly in all areas across the North East as well as nationally. This has led to more community transmission across region. While rates of infections varied across different areas, initially our rapid increase focused in the south east of the county although, this is now spreading to other areas across Northumberland. This also applies to the age range of positive cases which started in 20+ years but, extended to wider and older age groups.
- 1.2. Based on our data and intelligence from NHS Test and Trace and other partners, the Council took the decision to act with other the other LA7 authorities (Newcastle, Sunderland, Gateshead, South Tyneside, North Tyneside, Durham) to request the introduction of additional local restrictions to prevent the spread and pace of rising infections. The aim is to protect our residents without having stricter measures imposed by Government which would have potentially greater impact on communities, businesses and services.
- 1.3. Following, the request to Government from the LA7 authorities, the Secretary of State for Health announced on 18<sup>th</sup> September, regulations lawfully banning the following activities:
  - Residents must not socialise with other people outside of their own households in private homes and gardens.
  - All hospitality for food and drink will be restricted to table service only.
  - Late night restriction of operating hours will be introduced, with venues required to close between 10pm to 5am.
- 1.4. In addition, residents were also advised to adhere to the following guidance:
  - Residents should not socialise with other people outside of their own households in all public venues.

- Residents are advised to only use public transport for essential purposes, such as travelling to school or work (rather than car sharing etc).
  - Holidays should be taken within your own household or support bubble/
  - Residents are advised against attending amateur and semi-professional sporting events as spectators.
- 1.5. These local measures were updated from September 30 and, now regulations also lawfully ban residents socialising with other people outside of their own households or support bubble indoors, such as pubs and restaurants.
- 1.6. Initially, under the new local measures, visiting another household for childcare purposes (where they are not a childminder or registered provider, or part of your support bubble), was no longer allowed. This was not something the LA7 authorities asked for but rather was announced by Government as part of the overall package of local measures. The LA7 authorities argued to remove this restriction and welcomed the announcement by Government that 'Informal' childcare, for example grandparents looking after children, is to be allowed for children under 14 or, vulnerable adults where that is necessary for caring purposes. This exemption does not allow for play-dates or parties. For more detail on the guidance for informal childcare, please refer to the Council's Covid pages and 'frequently asked questions' which can be accessed at the link in paragraph 1.9 (below).
- 1.7. Overall, these measures aim to contain and reduce the rate of Covid infection. We know there is an increased risk of transmission the more people gather together. Our data shows an increased rate of transmission in homes, with information from NHS Test and Trace showing around 80% of contacts of positive test cases have been with people within their household, household visits or visits to friends or relatives. Other evidence suggests transmissions are taking place in a small number of hospitality venues where Covid-19 secure environments and social distancing is not being applied properly.
- 1.8. Following the introduction of these local restrictions, the Prime Minister announced a series of new, national restrictions to stop the rate of infection across England. These national measures are likely to remain in place for the next six months and include:
- Pubs, bars and restaurants to close at 10pm and they will also be restricted to table service.
  - People should work from home wherever possible.

- Face masks have been made compulsory for bar staff, non-seated customers, shop workers and waiters.
- The limit on guests at weddings reduced from 30 to 15.
- Plans to allow fans to return to sporting events have been placed on hold.
- 'Rule of six' now applies to indoor team sports.
- Fines for not wearing masks or following rules has been increased to £200 for a first offence.

1.9. Given regulations and advice are regularly updated by Government, this report sets out the position at the time of writing. It is not intended to provide up-to-date guidance for residents, businesses or partners and should not be relied upon for this purpose. For the most up-to-date position on lawful regulations and advice, we strongly advise people to refer to Government's published guidance. Also, the Council publishes updates to guidance and 'frequently asked questions' which can be accessed at:

<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Home.aspx>

1.10. As a result of the new local and national restrictions, we are actively reviewing our services, particularly in enforcement. This is to further support and strengthen capacity to meet our obligations. This may mean redeploying staff from some functions to support this activity.

1.11. Council staff will continue to be supported to work from home wherever possible. For those that are required to attend the workplace, all our premises are Covid-19 secure, and full risk assessments are in place. Inevitably, the evolving situation could have an impact on other service areas, and we are looking to re-start some activities to support and protect our most vulnerable residents, including through our Northumberland Communities Together team.

## 2. **Public Health Update**

2.1. Naturally, the Covid-19 pandemic is the main priority for the NCC Public Health Team and all other non-urgent work has been put on hold. At the time of writing we are currently experiencing a second wave of COVID-19 infection nationally and locally, and we have seen a number of recent additional national measures to control the spread of COVID-19, including both the [rule of six](#) measures that came into force on 14th September 2020 and the most recent measures announced on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2020, as well as [North East of England](#) restrictions that came into force on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2020 and were updated on 30<sup>th</sup> September.

- 2.2. This is an evolving situation, such that any current data on COVID-19 infections in Northumberland is being updated regularly. We therefore invite Cabinet to view the [public dashboard](#) where members will be able to see the up-to-date picture for Northumberland and their communities. Small area numbers are also available [here](#), although there is a time-lag of a few days.
- 2.3. As of 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020 (unless otherwise stated):
- A total of 275 Northumberland residents have died with a record of COVID-19 on the death certificate.
  - In the 7 days to 25th September 2020, a total of 296 people residents in Northumberland have tested positive for COVID-19: a rate of 92.4 per 100,000 population. We have seen very steep increases (around 200%) in a week, with cases predominantly in the South East Northumberland and Ponteland wards but there have been cases across Northumberland, including in Haltwhistle, Rothbury, Wooler, and Berwick.
  - We have also seen an increasing number of hospital admissions and admissions to HDU/ITU and, regrettably, two further deaths last week after a long period without any deaths.
  - Northumberland care homes have experienced 16 outbreaks since a log was put in place on 10th July. Five outbreaks have occurred during the past week. In all these outbreaks except one, they have consisted of two staff members or residents without symptoms detected on regular whole care home testing. However, one care home has four staff and four residents who have tested positive, several of whom have had symptoms and one who has been admitted to hospital. We are providing intensive IPC support and the home is currently close to admissions.
  - **Schools.** There have been 66 positive cases in pupils or staff in 37 schools, including 27 cases in 16 schools in the past 7 days.
- 2.4. A Health Protection Board meets weekly, including the Director of Public Health, other senior Public Health staff, leads of each of the outbreak prevention and control wraparound subgroups, representatives from NCC Comms, Northumberland CCG, NHCT, CNTW and the Local Medical Committee. The subgroups include:
- Care homes and the care sector: nursing and residential homes and domiciliary care providers.
  - Educational settings: early years, schools, colleges.

- High-risk individuals and communities: supported living, homeless people, drug and alcohol service users, people with learning disabilities.
- Complex settings: hostels, refuges, HMP Northumberland, secure YP unit.
- Workplaces and businesses.

2.5. Recent additional activities to control increases include:

- We have written to care home providers to advise them to cease all non-essential visits to care homes. This is a difficult decision and will be upsetting for residents and their relatives alike, but necessary to protect some of our most vulnerable residents and many care homes were already planning to adopt this policy.
- A Communication and Engagement sub-group meets fortnightly to inform the local communications plan to influence behaviour within our local population. Our Communications team has worked with the outbreak control and prevention subgroups, Elected Members and others to develop a comprehensive communications and engagement plan. Numerous proactive messages have been developed for direct mailing, signage, advertising on Council vehicles, social media and other platforms for specific age groups, geographical areas with higher rates, businesses, workplaces, and schools. The Local Resilience Forum communications group has reconvened to ensure consistent messages are relayed.
- We are using intelligence to identify areas of concern. Issues around specific businesses are being recorded and businesses are being contacted either by phone or through a visit based on an individual risk assessment. Public Protection colleagues are following up on all covid cases identified in workplaces and complaints and reports received from the general public. They have launched a new Covid reporting form, which is accessible on the council's website and are building capacity to increase inspection and monitoring of businesses. Enforcement, in partnership with the Police, will be pursued where appropriate, including use of the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations to close events or venues where they pose an imminent threat to public health and prohibitions are needed to control the spread of COVID-19.
- Owing to significant demand on the Public Health England Health Protection Team from schools, the local Public Health team has been supporting them by undertaking risk assessment and school-based contact tracing of confirmed cases of COVID in Northumberland. We have also responded to numerous enquiries about pupils who are unwell.

- We are currently undertaking targeted 'backwards tracing'. This provides a better understanding of the types of activities which could then be used as the basis to target messaging and interventions. It also helps to identify specific premises that require additional support and intervention.
- 2.6. Covid has brought into sharp focus existing inequalities in our communities, related to socio-economic conditions and other risk factors. These inequalities impact on: the risk of exposure; experiences of the measures introduced to reduce transmission; risk of developing complications; and, longer-term economic, health and social impact. To address this, we are focusing on:
- Reducing inequalities by taking a whole-system approach across all departments, with a particular emphasis on economic regeneration, employability, housing conditions and access to green spaces. The delivery of the Council's *Health in All Policies Action Plan* will continue to build the capacity of the organisation to consider the impact on health in delivery and decision-making. The Plan is currently being refreshed to have a renewed focus on inequalities reflecting our learning from COVID-19.
  - Working in partnership to provide additional public health interventions for those unable to access services. Examples include: distributing oral health packs; delivering specialist stop-smoking support; putting in new arrangements for food distribution; online access; and, distributing medicines for people affected by substance misuse. For all Public Health Commissioned Services, we are learning from our experience of responding to Covid and developing new ways of working.
  - Working hard to prevent the anticipated mental health impacts of the pandemic. We are doing this through our ongoing partnership work with the NHS and voluntary sector partners to deliver the *Prevention Concordat for Better Mental Health Work*. And, we are re-aligning our *Suicide Prevention / Mental Health Action Plan*, including working with partners to develop a *North East Suicide Prevention Hub* and disseminating suicide prevention training.
  - Supporting Northumberland Communities Together by providing data on the shielding population and redeploying staff including Locality Coordinators and Health Trainers into the Hub.
- 2.7. Given increased risks of Covid for individuals with a higher Body Mass Index (BMI), we are restarting our *Whole-System Approach to Healthy Weight*. This involves partners prioritising actions to support our healthy weight approach and our commissioned *Exercise on Referral and Weight Management Services* have restarted online.

### **3. Civil Contingencies Response: Regional, County-wide and Council**

- 3.1. Our multi-agency command and control structures have been reinstated due to the increased infection rate and the introduction of new, local restrictions. The Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) has been reinstated (from 17<sup>th</sup> September) and is being chaired by the Chief Executive of North Tyneside Council. This meets weekly. The Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG) has also been reinstated and will pick up on any actions and policy decisions from the SCG.
- 3.2. These groups will ensure consistency across the Local Resilience Forum partners in terms of response to Covid issues, community engagement and communications. The Council and Fire and Rescue Service are represented at both SCG and TCG levels.
- 3.3. Internally, the Council has reconvened the Business Interruption Management Team (BIMT) from 21st September. BIMT will meet on a weekly basis and this group represents our 'Tactical Command'. There will be a regular flow of information, intelligence and actions between BIMT and the TCG at regional level. The Council's Executive Team are the 'Strategic Command' and are meeting daily as 'Gold Command'. Actions and decisions from 'Gold Command' will cascade to the BIMT. Again, there will be a regular, two-way flow of information and actions between the Council's Gold Command and the SCG at a regional level.

### **4. Support for vulnerable adults**

- 4.1. The client groups supported by the Council's adult social care services include the population most at risk of death or very serious illness as a result of the pandemic. There are particularly high risks to older people living in care homes and during the first peak of the pandemic between April and mid-June, 118 residents died in care homes for older people in Northumberland following a diagnosis of Covid-19, and an estimated 20-25 residents from these homes died in hospital following a Covid diagnosis.
- 4.2. In total, we estimate that, compared to the average over the previous five years, about 200 more residents in care homes for older people than would be expected died during that period. This total is likely to include some residents who died with Covid at a time when testing was not available. Some 31 of the 69 care homes for older people in Northumberland had at least one resident death associated with Covid-19 and 17 homes had four or more deaths.
- 4.3. In the period since mid-June, in Northumberland as in most parts of the country, the position became less serious. While a small number of deaths in care homes were recorded as having a possible connection with an earlier Covid infection, there were no further significant outbreaks before mid-September. During this period, many of the day services which had suspended operation in March were able to reopen, though not necessarily



providing the full level of service that was possible before social distancing and other infection prevention requirements were introduced. This includes most of the Council's directly provided day services, though it has not so far been possible to reopen the Council's dementia day service.

- 4.4. During this period, it was also possible for care homes to begin resuming visits to residents from family members. The cessation of visits in most care homes during the first peak of the pandemic is widely thought to have been one of the most damaging consequences of Covid. Nationally, there have been legal challenges to guidance restricting visits, because of its impact on the quality of life and mental health of residents. The recent introduction of local restrictions in the North East has reversed previous progress on this issue. The advice is once more that visits should not be permitted other than in exceptional circumstances, usually when a resident is near the end of life.
- 4.5. In the early months of the pandemic, there was limited evidence about factors affecting the risk of an outbreak in a care home. In mid-May, Government announced an Infection Control Fund, primarily to support care homes, and focused on a list of measures to address what research had suggested were among the significant factors leading to outbreaks. In particular, the funding was directed at eliminating the movement of care staff between settings, which had been identified as one of the ways in which the disease had spread, and ensuring that care staff are paid in full during any period when they are required to self-isolate because of Covid-19. This was to avoid penalising low-paid staff for taking action to reduce infection risks. Funding could also be used for other specified purposes, including improving arrangements for separating Covid positive residents from others.
- 4.6. The allocation from the Fund to Northumberland was £4.39m. The Council was required to allocate three quarters of the available grant between all registered care homes in Northumberland, in proportion to the number of registered beds in each home. This was to be used for a limited list of measures, although there was discretion over the use of the remaining 25%. Because of the clear severity of the risk to care homes for older people, the 25% element of the fund was allocated as an additional sum to those care homes.
- 4.7. Sums allocated from the Infection Control Fund had to be spent by 23 September. An unfortunate consequence of this is the highest level of funding so far received by care homes has largely coincided with the period between the first peak of the pandemic and the beginning of what appears to be a potential second peak. However the Government has now announced there will be further infection-control funding for the following six months, though details of the conditions attached to this funding have not yet been published.
- 4.8. Since late April, the Council has been distributing face masks to all providers of care services commissioned by the Council, without charge.

The Council has also ensured care providers get other PPE that they need if they have problems with supply arrangements. The Government has now announced the intention of supplying all registered care services with free PPE across all of the categories recommended in national guidance. The Council will also be expected to distribute PPE to non-registered providers, and Government's announced intention is this too will be supplied to local authorities nationally, without charge.

- 4.9. On 18 September, the Government published a "Winter Plan" for adult social care. This included confirmation of the extension of the Infection Control Grant and the national distribution of free PPE.
- 4.10. Local authorities are required to prepare their own local winter plans by 31 October and, write to the Department of Health and Social Care to confirm they have done so. We have begun discussion with local NHS bodies about whether the winter plan for social care should be part of a broader plan across the health and social care system for what is likely to be a challenging period.

## **5. Support for children, families and schools**

### **Education**

- 5.1. At the outset of the pandemic, Government announced schools would close from the 23rd March 2020, whilst continuing to provide places for vulnerable children or children whose parents or guardians are key workers. As previously reported to Cabinet in June, schools across the County maintained high rates of provision throughout this period.
- 5.2. Many schools developed new online learning portals alongside well-established online learning materials and were supported by the DFE initiative 'The Oak Academy'. Our *School Improvement Team* supported schools and parents through a range of learning opportunities and wider support packages including mental health, wellbeing and bereavement support.
- 5.3. During the summer, some 28 'pop-up' services offered fun activities and engagement for young people across the county, including archery, cooking and reading. *Newcastle United Foundation* supported these pop-ups with a kick start programme. In addition, the *Virtual School* continued to engage with Looked After Children across the summer period, keeping in touch and supporting continued learning. The Council made a 'transition offer' to all schools to support reception children who missed out on the transition into school in the summer term and, pupils moving into years 11 and 13. This targeted work was designed to bridge the transition back into full time education and prepare our children for their new experiences. Some 13 schools took up this offer.
- 5.4. Digital devices were provided to adult learners for whom English is not their first language. Additional devices were provided to children who were

identified as more vulnerable without laptop or connectivity in year 10. The digital investment continues with adult learning supported by the Combined Authority and more digital devices are being made available to children in schools in the autumn term.

- 5.5. The Secretary of State issued a clear direction in July 2020 that all schools and settings would open to all children, pupils and students in September 2020 for the new academic year. Significant work to prepare schools, risk assess staff and plans as well as provide clear information to parents and carers was undertaken prior to the end of term. In many instances, this work continued across the summer break to ensure spaces were considered, prepared and ready for the September return to learning.
- 5.6. Staff from the Education teams have supported Headteachers throughout the end of term in 2020, across the summer and into the start of the new term. This has helped ensure schools were ready, had planned their 'bubbles', classrooms, corridors and playgrounds. In addition the Health and Safety team, Schools HR and Home to School Transport team have worked with the Education Team and Headteachers to ensure consistency in approach, that the guidelines have been followed and that the settings are well placed for pupils to return. Attendance rates were consistently high (+95%) in the first two weeks of return to school.
- 5.7. Northumberland College has reopened to all students and is actively recruiting students. The Learning and Skills Service at the Council is fully prepared for reopening with a blended learning approach and minimal face-to-face learning for students initially. The *Careers Guidance Team* have employed a wide range of approaches working with some of our most challenging young adults and students with special educational needs to maintain contact and support post-16 and progression within skills courses.

### **Children's Services**

- 5.8. Many schools developed their practice in order to support vulnerable families. This included delivering free school meals and regularly contacting or visiting children they consider most vulnerable. In July, the Department for Education (DfE) announced support for free school meals across the summer holiday period following a high-profile campaign. Vouchers were issued to parents and carers. The issue and redemption of vouchers was much smoother than the initial voucher phase as systems were in place and had been tested, therefore reducing challenges experienced in the early lockdown period.
- 5.9. Some £5.4m of funding from the Council was allocated to Ofsted-registered Early Years settings to enable them to continue to provide free childcare for critical workers who currently access a funded place. As at 29th April, approximately 202 early years settings were open, providing childcare to 418 children of key workers and 69 vulnerable children.

- 5.10. All families open to social work and the 'early help' *Family Work Teams* continue to be risk assessed. Within Social Work, the face-to-face visiting pattern is much as it was pre-Covid and data shows statutory child protection and Looked After Children visits were at their highest in August for the last twelve months. Early Help family workers are conducting socially distanced visiting and, where risk assessed, if required, are visiting within family homes even if social distancing cannot be maintained.
- 5.11. Staff continue to work flexibly with rotas in place for some services and a combination of virtual and face-to-face delivery in place for services such as the *Youth Service* and *Family Time*. Most staff are still working from home and sickness absence remains relatively low. Work is ongoing to look at a mixed model of meetings which involve families and some children's centre buildings are starting to reopen to support this. All professional meetings continue to be held virtually and this will be the case going forward.
- 5.12. Contacts into *First Contact (MASH)* continue to be about at the same level as last year but the number of social work referrals has dropped significantly with August seeing the lowest number of referrals for many years. This has been mirrored in other statutory Social Work processes. Child Protection Plan numbers have dropped and the number of children who are Looked After has stabilized, albeit at a higher number than pre-Covid. Court proceedings are starting to conclude in some cases and, this has seen an increase in the children leaving care in the last month.
- 5.13. The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 came into force on 24th April. The Regulations temporarily amend ten sets of secondary legislation relating to Children's Social Care to support services to manage the pandemic. The changes are intended to support services to manage the increased pressure on Children's Social Care and cases of staff and carer shortages arising from illness due to Covid. The *Children Services Teams* have not enacted the available easements. Instead, the expectation is that it is "business as usual" and the easements will be considered as required, dependent on service capacity and levels of risk experienced within services.
- 5.14. One area where there is potential for easements to be considered is the need to increase the number of available foster carers. This relates to the significant prospect of hidden harm being uncovered and therefore more children potentially needing local authority care. The amendments to the *Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010)* remove the requirement for temporary foster carers to be a 'connected person' to a child i.e. a relative, friend or other person connected to the child, therefore permitting the recruitment of "non-connected" volunteer temporary foster carers. Should the Department conclude this easement is required, this decision will be taken by the Executive Director for Adults and Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People. We have used this easement on one occasion to accommodate a child with particular needs and this worked well.

## 6. Northumberland Communities Together

- 6.1. Northumberland Communities Together went live on 18th March operating a seven day a week service from 9.00am - 6.00pm. Contact by phone is via the Council Contact Centre Mon-Fri and via OneCall at weekends. Enquiries can also be sent through the website or by email: NCT@northumberland.gov.uk. Information is also shared across our social media platforms @NlandTogether
- 6.2. From the 1st August 2020 the Northumberland Communities Together operating model moved from a temporary COVID-19 Community Response service to a more formal and sustainable service. The *Northumberland Communities Together Service* now operates as a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency team. *Northumberland Communities Together* exists to support, engage and enrich our communities through the development and delivery of sustainable and collaborative relationships with all our residents and across private, public and voluntary sectors.
- 6.3. *Communities Together* responds to the specific and emerging needs of our residents and communities by making the most of knowledge, capability and capacity that exists within our communities. This is achieved through capture of information and triaging resident's needs to determine the most appropriate support and assistance. NCT provides a real-time online database, accessible to all partners, which enable residents in need of support to input their postcode and requirements and be 'served up' with a list of local groups and organisations able to meet those needs. The aim is that those with less complex needs can 'self-serve', and find their own support, without the need for further help.
- 6.4. Since launching the service over 17,000 calls have been dealt with by Northumberland Communities Together, connecting people to support with access to food, medicines and other essential services along with wellbeing support. Where matches for help cannot be made, the request is passed onto community and voluntary group partners who use their knowledge to find support. Where a solution does not exist regionally, *Communities Together* engages with regional and national partners on local solutions. An example is the development of a pathway to provide access to emergency fuel and energy provision in partnership with *Citizen Advice Bureau*.
- 6.5. Current activity is as follows:
  - 17,604 shielded residents supported with 9,323 accessing Government support;
  - 3,751 bridging food provisions delivered by our team and volunteers;

- 2,196 home visits to carry out wellbeing checks on shielded residents who had not accessed Government support or who the *National Shielding Hub* had been unable to contact;
- 3,814 people supported through NCT referrals;
- 1,872 unique households have contacted NCT for assistance;
- 208 residents connected to financial support and advice;
- 940 people connected to GoodSam- the NHS volunteer network to help with things like prescriptions;
- £14K+ in small grants distributed to 31 community organisations;
- £5K+ in individual hardship grants given to residents;
- 1.93 million face masks have been distributed;
- 119,344 disposal aprons distributed;
- 16,029 litres of Hand Sanitizer provided;
- 2,092 boxes of gloves provided; and,
- Over 100 community enrichment 'pop up' events delivered to over 3,000 residents.

6.6. The Council has been allocated over £367k in Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies. Building on the locality-based working, five leads across the county have been identified from the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and are being supported to work with one another to provide food at 'points of crisis' and to explore more sustainable and innovative community food solutions across the county.

6.7. Community enrichment events have been co-delivered county-wide with support from partners. The 'pop-up' event provided the opportunity to target and engage with some of our most vulnerable communities addressing issues of social isolation, psychological wellbeing whilst also providing fun and engaging multi-generational activities. Northumberland Communities Together is currently conducting an evaluation project to examine the learning from those events. It is hoped the findings will help to shape the future model and approach towards future community outreach and enrichment programmes.

6.8. To ensure the most efficient and joined-up approach possible, Northumberland Communities Together continues to review its core

processes ensuring accessible referral pathways are in place, along with safe and secure information sharing protocols and procedures. Through greater collaboration and shared working with strategic partners, Northumberland Communities Together have started to reduce the level of duplication in referrals, assessment and provision of services to meet the needs of residents.

- 6.9. The Community and Voluntary Sector are a crucial partner in responding to the Covid crisis and will continue to play a vital role in the recovery phase. Many community organisations will have been adversely affected by the crisis and we are assessing the financial resilience of the Community and Voluntary Sector moving forward.
- 6.10. As part of the longer-term plans, Northumberland Communities Together are starting to identify and consider a number of Community Hubs that could further strengthen and develop our 'empowering communities' agenda. These hubs will be shared spaces for public, private and VCS sectors to come together to support co-production and delivery of services that will improve the health, educational and life chances of residents within those communities. The empowering communities work and Community Hubs will help to build new relationships between the Council, communities, volunteers and the voluntary/community sector.

## **7. Economic Response and Recovery**

### **Business Hub and links to regional recovery**

- 7.1. During the COVID period, key aspects of the local and national economy have been significantly affected. Northumberland has already identified the key sectors which have been most impacted including culture, tourism, small businesses and retail.
- 7.2. Work is being undertaken by the North East Local Enterprise Partnership and the North of Tyne Combined Authority and the Council to understand the full impact on local businesses and the economy.
- 7.3. Within Northumberland, the number of unemployment claimants continues to rise from 10,945 reported on 23rd June to 11,595 people claiming unemployment benefits at the time of writing. That is an increase of 4,830 since March, and almost double the figure of this time last year. We anticipate further, challenging data to emerge in the coming months before we can start to report more positive trends.
- 7.4. Northumberland is leading on economic recovery locally as part of a wider partnership created across the Northumbria Local Resilience Forum area led by North of Tyne Combined Authority and the Local Enterprise Partnership to support ongoing recovery on a regional basis. This work is being led through the LRF RCG (Recovery Coordination Group) and the

Council's *Regeneration Team* are ensuring the county is well positioned to benefit from key recovery initiatives.

- 7.5. The distribution of the Government Small Business Grants Fund (SBGF,) Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Grants Fund (RHLGF,) and the Local Authority Discretionary Grant Fund has been the responsibility of the County Council. As of 2nd September, the Council has paid grants to over 7,800 businesses across Northumberland (approx. £93m to date). Since the outbreak, advisors working for the Northumberland Business Hub have engaged with a total of 1,164 businesses.
- 7.6. Some £1.5m has also been secured from the North of Tyne Combined Authority to support business and resilience activities, including additional business support and grants targeted at the most affected sectors. This includes: support packages to move businesses online; employability and skills programmes to support individuals who have been impacted by Covid-19 restrictions to move back into work; and, a tourism stimulus package to support a sector which has seen considerable impact in recent months.
- 7.7. The Business Support element (Northumberland Covid 19 Business Response Programme,) which delivers consultancy support to SMEs and large business and fully funded digital tools such as websites, e-marketing campaigns and Mobile Apps to SMEs has been launched and has been received positively. A dedicated website has been set up to handle registrations and is fully accessible through NCC's website via the Business Hub <https://northumberlandbusinessresponse.co.uk/> The programme was launched on the 24th July and 91 businesses have joined the programme so far.
- 7.8. Despite the economic uncertainties, the Council remains focused on the county's economic strengths and assets and we continue to develop and progress our ambitious investment programme together with our partners in the Combined Authority, Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Borderlands Partnership. A key milestone for our economic investment pipeline will be the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) due for later in the Autumn. This will set out national investment and spending plans for the next three years. We have ensured Northumberland's priorities for investment, growth, jobs and skills are well reflected in the Combined Authority's detailed CSR submission as well as the LEP's multi-billion pound Regional Recovery plan submitted to Government.
- 7.9. Whilst underway, we are clear economic recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 for Northumberland will continue to be both complex and long-term. It will involve many agencies and participants. This is particularly true given the uncertainty around what response will be required as and when the number of cases in the community fluctuates over the coming months.



## **8. Climate Change**

8.1. During the initial phases of the lockdown, there was a significant reduction in car journeys with a likely reduction in carbon emissions more generally although it will be some time before accurate data can confirm this. Before and during the lockdown, officers have continued to move ahead with delivery of the Council's *Climate Action Plan*. Since June, we have reviewed the Action Plan and our overall ambition to reflect new ways of working and opportunities for a green economic recovery. This revised plan is the subject of a separate report to Cabinet.

## **9. Culture, Arts, Leisure, Heritage and Tourism**

9.1. A successful application was made for a Visitor Economy Stimulus package within the Council-wide programme of support funded by the Combined Authority. This funding allows the County Council and Northumberland Tourism to work together on four key work streams to revitalise the tourism sector:

- Creation of five industry-led sector forums (Accommodation; Attractions; Outdoor, Recreation & Environment; Hospitality; People & Place) to ensure a coherent approach to recovery and future destination planning.
- Promotion of best practice and guidance measures to support Covid compliance for both visitors and employees within the sector.
- Subsidies to boost industry partnership and presence on a new [visitnorthumberland.com](http://visitnorthumberland.com) digital tourism platform.
- 'Seed funding' to initiate national and international marketing activity and opportunities.

9.2. Meetings of the 'Outdoor Recreation & Environment', 'Attractions' and 'Accommodation' sector groups are scheduled for weeks commencing 5th and 12th October respectively. The focus of the agenda will be a SWOT analysis discussion linked to the development of the new Destination Management Plan, as well as the continued support of the sector throughout COVID-19.

9.3. A 'Business Barometer' has been initiated to understand how the tourism sector is recovering. There has been a marked shift in business confidence since reopening, from a base line of 75% of businesses reporting general demand and enquiries for bookings were down on where they would normally be for the time of year. In the most recent two weeks to 10th September, 69% of accommodation business report revenues the same, or higher than the corresponding period in 2019, with 66% achieving occupancy levels of over 90%. Forward bookings into October also look buoyant, with 50% of business expecting occupancy between 75-100%.

However, consumer confidence and behaviours remain a concern moving forward.

- 9.4. A regular 'e-newsletter' is distributed to businesses providing a broad industry update, including information on the most recent guidance around COVID-19 and the available support.
- 9.5. A webinar was held in July to introduce our new, Toursim Digital Platform. This included keynote presentations from the national leads of Visit Britain, the Tourism Alliance and the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions, which has stimulated awareness and interest in the new platform.
- 9.6. The Tourism Team directly assisted businesses through the Business Hub with access and applications to the Local Authority Discretionary Grant Fund schemes for guest accommodation, larger hotels and pubs, and leisure attractions. This provided support and advice for over 150 businesses.
- 9.7. The Tourism and Hospitality Hub, established in July to provide specialist help and advice to visitor economy businesses, has handled 144 enquiries. Following an initial high volume of enquiries on accessing grants, requests have reduced, although these are generally more complex in relation to guidance compliance and interpretation of rules and restrictions.
- 9.8. Cultural Development provided three areas of activity to support the creative sector during Lockdown and into recovery:
  - 'Frontloading' grants to building-based organisations';
  - Support of a sector-led Culture Northumberland website [www.culturenorthumberland.co.uk](http://www.culturenorthumberland.co.uk) to provide information on funding, training and commissioning opportunities. It provides a valuable forum for the sector to collaborate whilst also signposting to advice and support. A series of topic related video meetings are scheduled for autumn.
  - Allocation of £40,000 to support a small grants scheme. The Northumberland Culture Fund supports online creative activity and socially distanced and compliant events across the County as part of a Great Northumberland Winter Festival (Nov – March 2021).
- 9.9. All the cultural and creative organisations the Council supports are charities. Their role is to provide quality cultural experiences through live performances, exhibitions, projects and programmes for the benefit of the public. Therefore the lockdown and social distancing regulations have significantly impacted on income generation.
- 9.10. The Maltings, Berwick, Alnwick Playhouse, Queen's Hall, Hexham and The Phoenix Theatre closed in March and due to social distancing measures have not been able to open to date. The average loss of income for our

theatres and arts centres is £200,000 over the last six months. Smaller organisations have estimated a loss of between 40% -60% of income. The venues have furloughed staff where possible however, approximately 70% of theatre workforces are freelance practitioners.

- 9.11. Museums Northumberland reopened the Woodhorn site in September and plans are being considered to enable further reopening of the portfolio.
- 9.12. Many of the county-based cultural organisations continued to deliver to their communities through video conferencing and online programmes, providing employment for freelance practitioners and supporting the wellbeing of the people they worked with. Total participation in online activity from April - June was 42,946, significantly higher than total participation during the equivalent period in 2019.
- 9.13. In March 2020, the Arts Council announced a £160 million emergency response package to support individuals and organisations across the cultural sector in response to the Covid-19 crisis. This helped local cultural facilities and services. Also, Museums Northumberland successfully applied to the National Lottery Heritage Recovery Fund for support of £238,000.
- 9.14. Northumberland Archives Service reopened to the public from 17<sup>th</sup> September. Study centres at Berwick and Woodhorn opened for pre-booked appointments only. Bookings can be made online at [www.northumberlandarchives.com/covid](http://www.northumberlandarchives.com/covid) or by telephone.
- 9.15. From 23<sup>rd</sup> March, the Registration Service ceased to provide a face-to-face birth registration service and all weddings and civil partnerships were postponed, in line with government guidance at the time. Death registration continued, as required and as part of excess death management planning, and easements brought in by the Coronavirus Act 2020 enabled death registration to move to a telephone-based system. This allowed informants to register remotely, limiting the need to travel and interact with others. Further easements also brought in by the Act enabled key documents which are required to support death registration, such as Medical Certificates of Cause of Death (MCCD) to be transferred electronically. Despite death registration workloads doubling at times during April and May, the Registration Service was able to register over 90% of deaths which occurred within 5 calendar days of the event. Telephone death registration continues and is now business as usual for the service. Current death registration levels have returned to normal and compare favourably to the same period in 2019.
- 9.16. In June 2020, the service was chosen by the General Register Office (GRO) to participate in a virtual birth registration pilot. The pilot ran for a six-week period with positive feedback from new parents who used the scheme. By the end of July permission has been granted by Government to resume face-to-face birth registration and this commenced from sites at Morpeth Town Hall, Ashington Town Hall, Hexham House and Fenkle

Street at Alnwick. All sites have been assessed and are Covid safe. The birth registration backlog which presently sits at 230 unregistered births for Northumberland will be fully addressed by the end of October 2020, in line with a national GRO target.

- 9.17. Small wedding and civil partnerships were able to resume in the county from 4 July 2020, initially for groups of no more than 30 people. From 28 September 2020, this will change to a maximum of 15 (couple and 13 guests). Again, all premises from which marriage and civil partnerships are performed from are risk assessed and Covid safe. The Ceremony Team in the Registration Service has continued to support couples who needed to change arrangements and many have deferred their ceremony until 2021 or 2022. However, the service remains buoyant with a significant number of couples still choosing to have their special day in Northumberland.
- 9.18. From the initial announcement of restrictions on 23 March 2020, the Northumberland Coroner Service has worked remotely with staff based at home. In 2019 a replacement Coroner IT system was commissioned (Civica) and this went live early January 2020. As a fully digital case management system, this has enabled effective, remote working.
- 9.19. In mid-October, the new Coroner's Court in County Hall will be completed. From 1st October 2020, we also welcomed our new Senior Coroner, Andrew Hetherington into the Service.
- 9.20. Active Northumberland reopened the doors to the nine large wet and dry facilities in the County on Saturday 25th July, along with the Pegasus Centre and Blyth Beach Huts. Originally for members only, and for a very restricted programme of exercise classes, gym access and lane swimming, the Company has continued to expand opportunity and access to the wider community, whilst increasing the activities that are available (within the constraints of both central government and LA7 restrictions).
- 9.21. Throughout September, access to outdoor facilities at Hirst, Newbiggin, Northburn and Sporting Club Cramlington has been opened to club use on the approval of appropriate risk assessments, along with the continued introduction of indoor activities and sports clubs. Most notably, the Learn to Swim Scheme recommenced in early September with demand far greater than expected and higher than the national average.
- 9.22. In consultation with the Public Health Team, the 'Exercise on Referral Scheme' has recently relaunched, along with the 'Walking Scheme' and the 'Mams on the Move Scheme' (aimed at Postnatal customers). Each of these schemes provides appropriate health and wellbeing interventions.
- 9.23. To date, although limited by restrictions, maximum capacities within sessions, (some activities can only run at 30% capacity of Pre Covid-19 sessions) and enhanced cleaning requirements, Active continues to offer

indoor access to the wet and dry facilities and outdoor access to a further five facilities.

9.24. At the time of writing, both Rothbury Pool and Gym and Druridge Bay Gym remain closed due to risk assessments (although these are reviewed weekly) and school facilities at Prudhoe and Bedlington remain closed at the request of both schools.

9.25. There are currently 18 library sites operational. This includes a 'Select and Collect' service at: Alnwick; Ashington; Cramlington; Ponteland; Seaton Sluice; and, Wylam Libraries. Time-limited browsing has been introduced at the following sites: Amble; Bellingham; Bedlington; Berwick; Blyth; Guide Post; Haltwhistle; Hexham; Morpeth Prudhoe; Rothbury; and, Wooler. PC usage is available at all except Bellingham and Prudhoe. Online library issues have more than doubled from 6,000 in March to 13,000 in June. From 23 March, 25,467 people used mylibrary.co.uk, with 50,123 sessions taking place. The Service introduced *PressReader* on 10 June which offers over 6,000 magazines and newspapers from 100 countries in 60+ languages. From its introduction to 24th September, there have been 19,923 user sessions. In addition to the digital library resources, a range of activities and events have moved online, including:

- An online book chat group and creative writing group.
- Family history chat group and access to 'Ancestry and Find My Past' extended to home use.
- Story time and craft sessions for pre-schoolers.
- Curated websites to give access to a wide range of information and activities to support reading, culture, education, health and wellbeing.
- The Summer Reading Challenge for primary age children went digital.
- A Series of live streamed events to support national, regional and local initiatives e.g. Libraries Week.
- A digital helpline which provides help by phone with computers, websites, tablets and phones.
- A befriending service was introduced throughout the county whereby the library branch staff made 4,000 calls to local customers over the age of 70. The befriending service also facilitated 400 doorstep deliveries throughout June, July and August.

## **10. Corporate Resilience**

### **Information and Communication Technology (ICT)**

10.1. The Council's ICT Service continues to deliver an effective range of systems and services to support new ways of working. And, despite the additional demands and pressures placed on the Council's ICT as a result of Covid, the planned roll-out of the Microsoft Office 365 applications continues to be delivered successfully.

## **Human Resources (HR)**

- 10.2. The Council's HR Team continues to provide a range of advice, support and training packages to ensure colleagues are well equipped to work remotely and undertake a range of different duties to assist in critical services. Since June, there has been even greater emphasis on developing a range of measures to support the health and wellbeing of our staff working remotely.
- 10.3. The Council's Covid Officer Recovery Board meets weekly and considers ongoing staff and HR issues, including support and guidance for new ways of working, staff and team risk assessments, wellbeing support and health & safety assurance.
- 10.4. Regular engagement and communication with the trade unions continues, with trade union colleagues providing constructive advice and support for new ways of working. The trade unions have nominated one colleague to represent all unions at the officer Recovery Board and a monthly 'living with Covid' session is held with trade union colleagues.
- 10.5. Managers and teams have embraced new ways to keep in touch and managers and colleagues continue to support each other, particularly for colleagues who may be more isolated. Since June, the Chief Executive and, more recently the Acting, Interim CX continue to communicate regularly with all staff through a wide range of channels, providing updates and reassurance to staff. The Council has a wide-ranging staff support package in place and actively engages with staff about their welfare through a range of staff networks.

## **Communications**

- 10.6. The *Communications Team* continues to ensure the Council's residents, employees, members and partners are kept fully informed about services and changes that affect them and their families directly through the full range of channels. More recently, this has involved communicating the new, local restrictions with bespoke Frequently Asked Questions published for both residents and businesses.

## **11. Finance and budget**

- 11.1. The finance functions have continued to operate throughout the COVID-19 emergency, with staff moving to home working as far as possible. Key financial services (such as payment of staff, suppliers and benefit claimants) have all continued to operate, with minimal disruption to service provision.
- 11.2. In addition, a number of extra measures have been implemented (at pace) in order to support the COVID-19 response. Support packages to businesses have been provided, through the application of additional

business rates reliefs (over £38m) and payment of business grants (approx. £93m to date). Through the Council Tax Hardship fund, reductions of up to £150 have been made to the bills of Local Council Tax Support claimants, reducing the bills for over 17,000 households and moving over 12,843 households out of Council Tax entirely. The Council has just recently been asked to administer a new local lockdown grant and the test and trace self-isolation payments to individuals.

- 11.3. To support the liquidity of suppliers, the Council also moved to immediate payment terms, so that supplier invoices were paid immediately once approved (rather than the usual 30-day payment terms). This came to an end on 1<sup>st</sup> September although immediate payments can still be made if requested by the supplier.
- 11.4. The Council continues to assess and closely monitor the impact of COVID-19 on its own financial position, with regular, detailed updates provided through normal budgetary control and reporting measures. So far, the Council has received 3 tranches of additional financial support from Government, totalling £21.8m. And, further support may be received for lost income from Government's Sales, Fees and Charges compensation scheme. The Council will continue to review its financial plans and the level of savings required to ensure delivery of a balanced budget position.

## **12. Democracy, meetings and decision making**

- 12.1. The Coronavirus Act contains provisions conferring powers on the Secretary of State to make Regulations in relation to Local Authority meetings. These powers were brought into effect from 4 April.
- 12.2. The Regulations permit "virtual" meetings to take place, where members can attend and vote remotely by electronic means. The Regulations also require that both public and press are able to hear any virtual meetings and, if practicable, to see them. Where members of the public are permitted to attend and speak at meetings, then facilities must be available for them to hear the meeting and to contribute.
- 12.3. An amended delegation scheme was introduced for planning applications and powers were given to the Strategic Planning Committee to consider applications which would normally be considered by the Local Area Councils. These powers have now been transferred back to the Local Area Councils to allow the planning element of these meetings to be reintroduced from September. An amended public speaking protocol was also introduced for meetings which allows the public who would normally attend a meeting to speak, the opportunity to submit a written statement to be read out at the Committee.
- 12.4. Virtual meetings using a variety of platforms have now been held including two meetings of Full Council which have been livestreamed on the Council's YouTube Channel, allowing the public to hear and view the

meetings. The meetings are resource intensive with support being provided by IT staff to ensure Members are connected throughout.

- 12.5. Scrutiny meetings include Covid-19 updates to provide Members assurance on the Council's response to the pandemic.

### **13. Council Services and openings**

- 13.1. Since the last Cabinet report in June we have continued to operate all key frontline services to communities without breaks in continuity over the busy summer period. We have reopened play areas to the public and, also opened country park cafes to provide takeaway services to visitors.
- 13.2. The county has seen unprecedented visitor numbers this summer, particularly along the Northumberland Coast, which has placed additional pressures on some of the Council's services, such as litter bin emptying, public toilet provision, country parks and parking services. Our services have responded well to meet these pressures, ensuring standards were maintained. This has included the provision of additional, temporary toilet facilities at some of the main tourist destinations and enhanced street cleansing arrangements.
- 13.3. Our *Bulky Waste Collection Service* has been able to restart the collection of larger items and the restrictions on waste types accepted at *Household Waste Recovery Centres* have been progressively removed, and are now able to accept the full range of waste materials, including soils and rubble. Traffic management arrangements at the Bebside and Morpeth waste facilities remain. This is to safely manage the high visitor numbers. This is kept under review and will be removed once safe to do so.
- 13.4. Highway maintenance and delivery of the Council's Local Transport Plan capital programme and enhanced programme for 'U' and 'C' roads has continued. The road surface dressing and micro-surfacing programmes are now nearing completion and excellent progress has been made on resurfacing and structural patching works. Preparations are also well underway for the winter maintenance service, with gritting rotas being populated, salt stocks being replenished and grit bins and heaps starting to be restocked.
- 13.5. Work to repair the Union Chain Bridge has reached a major milestone, with the main contractor having been appointed and now establishing the works compounds on site. Works on the bridge are due to commence in early October.
- 13.6. The *Home to School Transport Service* has performed particularly well in adapting to rapidly changing guidance and very challenging conditions, to develop and implement the home to school transport arrangements for the start of the new term. Uptake for home to school travel has been broadly



at normal levels and the travel arrangements and operators are performing well.

- 13.7. Work to support the economic recovery of the county has also continued with a range of measures being put in place within town centres, including enhanced social distancing signage, pedestrian one-way systems and temporary changes to traffic flows. A new pavement licensing regime to support the recovery of the food and hospitality sector has also been successfully implemented, and staff have continued to support vulnerable residents through organising and delivering food parcels.

#### **14. Fire and Rescue Service**

- 14.1. Arrangements are in place for the Fire and Rescue Service to continue with PPE distribution and drop off for Northumberland care homes and care providers until March 2021. Scoping is underway between the Chief Fire Officer and the Council to explore Fire and Rescue Service support to Northumberland Communities Together Hub under the national FRS Tripartite Agreement.
- 14.2. Guidance has been issued by Public Health England regarding measures that Emergency Service Responders can take to mitigate staff being considered 'close contact' by Test and Trace. These include wider use of PPE i.e. wearing IIR masks on FRS vehicles.
- 14.3. To support NCC's Covid Safe Trading team being established by Public Protection, Fire Safety Inspecting officers are available to undertake premises inspections which could provide assurance of Covid security.
- 14.4. The Fire and Rescue Service will be subject to a virtual HMI inspection to determine how well the fire sector has responded to Covid and supported community response and resilience. Seven telephone interviews have been scheduled starting Tuesday 13th October and to include the Chief Fire Officer and Fire Authority Chair.

#### **15. Conclusion**

- 15.1. This is the second report on the Council's approach to Covid response and recovery. As we move forward, we will work in partnership with local and regional frameworks to coordinate, implement and adapt our plans to changing circumstances. This paper will be followed by further reports in the coming months. At the time of writing, it is clear we are entering a new phase of the Covid pandemic, with the introduction of new, local and national restrictions. This report provides the most up to date arrangements for responding to the emerging, new context.

## **16. Recommendations**

16.1. Cabinet is recommended to:

- € Note the ongoing impact of the coronavirus emergency on Northumberland County Council.
- € Acknowledge the continued work undertaken to date by the Council.
- € Agree to receive further reports on the work being undertaken by the County Council particularly in light of new local and national restrictions introduced recently
- € Invite the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to examine the updates on response and recovery plans.

## **17. Implications**

<b>Policy</b>	NCC's response and recovery plans impact on the full range of the Council's policies. Where specific changes to policy are required these will be subject to separate report(s) and decision(s).
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	<p>The S151 Officer is closely monitoring the financial impact of Covid response and recovery, including additional pressures of services and loss of income. Financial impacts and forecasts are being reported to the Government on a monthly basis in line with requirements placed on all councils.</p> <p>The financial implications of NCC's response and recovery plans will be set out in separate reports as projects and programmes of recovery are taken forward.</p>
<b>Legal</b>	The Council's Monitoring Officer has been consulted on this report. In line with other local authorities, NCC has numerous and wide-ranging legal duties and powers to respond to and recover from the Covid crisis. These include, but are not limited to the provisions of the Coronavirus Act 2020 and extant Civil Contingencies legislation. Moving forward, the Monitoring Officer will continue to be consulted on the detailed legal implications of our response and recovery plans.
<b>Procurement</b>	Our response to the Covid crisis has required our approach to procurement to be agile to respond to rapidly, changing circumstances. We will continue to evaluate lessons learned from the crisis and how these might inform future approaches to procurement. We will also take account of any ongoing national changes to procurement frameworks.

<b>Human Resources</b>	<p>The response to the Covid crisis has resulted in significant changes to the way staff work and deliver services. It is possible that some of these changes will remain long-term and may well become permanent. As part of the work outlined in this report we will consider what has changed due to Covid and how our services will need to adapt to reflect those changes and meet the needs of our residents and businesses. Any specific changes to services or HR policies to facilitate this, will be the subject of separate report(s) and decision(s).</p>
<b>Property</b>	<p>As we move further into this new phase, we will consider the best use of the property portfolio to support ongoing response and recovery and deliver services in a changing context. Any future changes to the use of the property portfolio will be the subject of separate report(s) and decision(s)</p>
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached)  Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	<p>This report sets out a wide range of policies, services, projects and initiatives to ensure Northumberland Council responds to and recovers from the Covid crisis. These will, of course, have implications for all our residents and communities and therefore are likely to have implications across the nine 'protected characteristics' under equalities legislation. Where there are specific changes to services or policies as part of our response and recovery planning, these will be assessed separately in Impact Assessments relevant to the specific change proposed.</p>
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	<p>In line with Council's overall policies and procedures, individual risk assessments are in place for the services, projects and other activities set out in this report.</p>
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	<p>We will continue to monitor and respond to ongoing changes in relation to community safety.</p>
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	<p>Our response and recovery plans will take a 'residents first' approach, taking account of the changing needs and requirements of our residents and communities as a result of Covid.</p>
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	<p>Before the Covid crisis, the Council was taking forward ambitious plans to address carbon emissions. The crisis and resultant restrictions have led to reductions in car journeys and emissions more generally as consumption has been impacted. As restrictions are gradually eased, we are reviewing our Climate Change plans, assessing changes in behaviour and, where possible, looking for opportunities to maintain reductions in carbon emissions. This is the subject of a separate report to Cabinet.</p>

<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	COVID-19, the measures to control the virus and the longer-term economic impacts has highlighted existing health inequalities. Many of the population groups affected are not covered by the 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act. This report emphasises the key role that many Council departments play in reducing inequalities by targeting those disproportionately affected such as younger people and those from lower socioeconomic groups. This support includes access to education, employability and skills programmes, employment, digital and financial support. Ongoing efforts to prevent and quickly respond to outbreaks will minimise the transmission of the virus. A key consideration will be our role with partners in supporting people whose mental health has been negatively impacted as a result of the crisis.
<b>Wards</b>	Covid crisis response and recovery planning impacts on all Wards.

**Background papers:**

**Report sign off.**

***Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:***

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