

## **Title of report: Herefordshire council's response to the covid pandemic**

**Meeting: General scrutiny committee**

**Meeting date: Friday 11 June 2021**

**Report by: Solicitor to the council**

### **Classification**

Open

### **Decision type**

This is not an executive decision

### **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

### **Purpose**

To advise scrutiny on the work undertaken and the lessons learned from the response to the pandemic

### **Recommendation(s)**

That:

- a) **The Committee reflects upon the council's work in responding to the pandemic**

### **Alternative options**

1. There are no alternative options, this is a report for scrutiny to consider the council's response to the pandemic in order to identify lessons learnt and identify how future emergency responses could be strengthened.

### **Key considerations**

2. There is a huge amount of which everyone in local government can be extremely proud when we reflect on the role councils up and down the country have played in responding to the covid-19 pandemic and supporting communities. As the country emerges from restrictions and the work of the council shifts from emergency to reset and recover it is important to capture learning from the unprecedented situation.

## Staffing

3. To manage the demands of the covid-19 emergency, the council redeployed over 200 staff from their usual jobs. This was into a variety of roles from staffing a help line for vulnerable residents to supporting the police to enforce social distancing and providing additional staffing at the crematorium to manage any anticipated increase in deaths.
4. Many more staff adapted their workload to support the covid-19 response whilst conducting their usual role. There was an increase in workload for many staff for a prolonged period.
5. The council was well placed for this redeployment exercise because in 2018 a redeployment policy was endorsed by employment panel and this enabled the council to make redeployment, without additional pay, a normal expectation for staff in such situations. Staff also embraced the virtual world and in a very short space of time we moved from limited use of virtual collaboration technology to almost everything being on these platforms. It was fortunately that the council had adopted a flexible working approach with IT in place, particularly the use of lap-tops.
6. Not only was redeployment effective in terms of staff key roles for without our existing resources, it was also effective in terms of preventing the council having to 'furlough' staff. When the government's job retention scheme (furlough) opened on 20 April 2020 the council did not make applications to furlough workers as staff who would have been displaced have been redeployed onto the covid-19 response work.
7. Such was the response to the pandemic that the chief executive at the time felt it necessary to appoint interim deputy chief executives to assist with running the council, whilst he addressed responding to the emergency situation.
8. One of the key engagement tasks the chief executive undertook was to share significant amounts of data and information. This regular reporting was beneficial and kept members engaged in knowledge of the current position, however changing a picture it was. This was supported by the Intelligence Unit of the council creating a range of data sources
9. It is no surprise that the Public Health Team has been hugely impacted by the covid-19 pandemic. There has been an ever-changing demand of the team throughout the course of the pandemic, from early on advice, support and information through to the current situation of a significant operation managing outbreaks, testing and contact tracing. The detailed activity has been planned and captured through the local outbreak management plan.
10. There has been significant pressure on the outbreak hub throughout the year. The hub was supported by officers from Environmental Health and Public Health. Whilst there was an understanding that additional funds would be forthcoming from government, this money arrived late into the pandemic which impacted on the way it has been used and ultimately has led to staff in the hub being under significant pressure for a long period of time. Recruitment of trained staff to work on the outbreak hub has been difficult not least due to demand across the country for such skills.

11. In recognition for all officers work last year an extra day's holiday was provided for 2021.
12. As a category one responder, Herefordshire Council has a responsibility to warn and inform the public during times of emergency. The covid-19 pandemic required clear messaging on what to do to stay safe and well, what to do if you need help, and where to get support. Doing this in a way that is clear, effective and trusted, helped everyone in Herefordshire prevent the spread of the virus, to contain outbreaks, encourage community participation, provide support during lockdown and ultimately help save lives. For details of the digital campaign see appendix 1.

### Decision Making

13. The Leader and the Monitoring Officer agreed to implement the emergency powers in accordance with the chief executive's scheme of delegation as set out in paragraph 3.7.9 of the constitution on 23 March 2020.
14. Between the period of 20 March 2020 to 31 March 2021 a total of 99 emergency decisions were taken by officers in relation to covid19. The table below shows the number of decisions (for detail see appendix 2) taken per directorate in terms of the number of services stopped/ changed and additional resources procured during this period.

	<b>Adults and Communities</b>	<b>Children and Families</b>	<b>Economy &amp; Place</b>	<b>Corporate Support Centre</b>
Additional Resources	5	10	5	11
Services Stopped to include services such as the Household Recycling Plants and Museums and Libraries etc	N/A	N/A	15	N/A
Services Changed Such as Relaxation to use of bus passes during fixed times	1	3	30	1
Grants Spend	10			
Other decisions in relation to Covid19	8			

15. The Talk Community covid-19 response provided a centrally coordinated support offer for vulnerable residents across Herefordshire. An unprecedented collaboration across the council and partners to ensure people had the help they needed to stay safe. With no previous infrastructure in place the response worked with the voluntary and community sector to identify support for those more vulnerable residents in the county who were unable to source support from family, friends or their local community with food supplies, medication delivery, befriending and pet care.

16. On 23 March 2020 the Talk Community single point of co-ordination commenced with telephone, online and community support and over 200 council staff deployed for various roles including community link workers, telephony support, food distribution, shielding support and coordination of the response. The response had to initially react in a rapid and flexible way pulling on skills from a number of teams and trained people as well as setting up an IT portal, dedicated call centre, referral routes to support and welfare support in a very short time. The telephony support acted as the coordinators for requests for support coming into the council and signposted them to the community link workers to identify local groups or volunteers who could provide the help and support.
17. The council worked closely with a large number of community organisations across the county and also trained volunteers and volunteer buddies to support residents to stay at home and provide them with the help and support they required.
18. For the first lockdown starting in March 2020 the council operated an emergency level hub first for food and then for PPE. Based on Hereford Leisure Centre food requests came through the council's helpline, which also included help with on-line shopping and enrolling on the Government's food parcel scheme. The council through the Library Delivery Service also support with medicine distribution when pharmacies did not have delivery service or where that service was under pressure.
19. During the first lockdown the government also announced the identification of the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) cohort who were required to shield as they were at higher risk from the virus. The council worked in partnership with health colleagues to identify this list of individuals and then develop a process to proactively contact each one individually over a six week period as a welfare call to offer support and a volunteer trained buddy. The buddies were specifically identified and trained to reduce down the risk of transmitting the virus but to also provide the support required.
20. During the later stages of the pandemic Talk Community developed a number of projects to support the demand in our communities. Talk Community Kitchen was launched at Hillside Care Home which provides nutritious and cost effective meals for the community 7 days a week and a Christmas offer was also introduced. In addition, whilst working with our partners it was recognised that there were increased numbers of calls into the support line from people experiencing anxiety and distress especially with the reintroduction of lockdown restrictions. Concerned about the mental wellbeing of residents a project to train and upskill the community has been agreed to provide Mental Health Community Champions across the county.
21. Organisations have worked together to support the care sector which has been particularly affected by the pandemic due to the vulnerable nature of the clients being supported; affecting both staff and residents. Several care homes have been devastated with high numbers of both staff and residents positive with covid-19 at any one time and unfortunately this has resulted in high deaths at times. Work has been ongoing to minimise risk and support them through this crisis with an incredible response from the system and teams who have gone above and beyond to support Providers, the NHS and the vulnerable client group.
22. A dedicated Provider Support Hub was established for partners from across the system including local authority commissioners, quality assurance, operations, public health, Wye Valley Trust, CCG and Taurus (local GP covid hub response) to meet. Initially this

was daily and then twice a week to co-ordinate the support for care homes/home care/supported living and day services to prevent and respond to outbreaks.

23. The discharge from the acute hospital had to be designed to enable a 2 hour discharge process.
24. The council took a bold step to proactively source, supply and deliver Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to all Providers right from the start of the pandemic when it was clear that they could not access or source urgently needed PPE. The council also made sure that the requirements at the height of the pandemic for PPE was at level 4 (protection level) for Herefordshire, a step not all other councils took.
25. The council financially supported the market, including paying on planned, enhanced rates to support swift discharge, distributed IPC (infection prevention control) workforce and rapid flow testing grant funds.
26. Contracting discharge to assess provision and designated site provision, including a hotel during the first wave to support swift, safe hospital discharge.
27. Supporting all providers with information, advice, guidance and education to manage the covid-19 response through weekly provider calls and a dedicated email address where all communications were sent.
28. Early in the covid-19 outbreaks in managing out-breaks, we found going on site was invaluable to get eyes and ears on the ground to support the Providers in a more practical way. This was risk assessed and a site visit was completed only if it was felt appropriate, with subsequent actions sent to the Provider to focus them on specific IPC related concerns which were picked up. The IPC visits focused on offering practical outbreak advice to reduce transmission and therefore risk of harm. Being on site and observing practices as well as seeing the environmental conditions supported a bespoke response.
29. IPC and quality assurance officers also did covid prevention IPC visits to day services prior to opening to offer tailored advice on resuming services to a vulnerable client group that meet national requirements.
30. Resilience checklists on lessons learnt to support the sector were complete with the sector to help inform practice.
31. Using workforce funding we have commissioned counselling support for the sector and are also now developing a comprehensive recruitment campaign including a rebranding of care heroes.
32. Supported specifically two care homes to sustain service with a high proportion of staff and their management being off work ill with covid, this included taking over their rotas and sourcing care and nursing staff to keep people safe.
33. The reopening of Hillside was accelerated and opened in record time to support the care sector and timely discharge from hospital and we continue to operate as a dis-charge to assess care facility at the present time.
34. Home first has continued to be provide responsive care support and reablement throughout the year and have been a core provider for those returning home needing

such services via discharge to assess route. During the second wave unfortunately a proportion of staff contracted covid 19. The outbreak was isolated quickly and essential front line delivery of services continues.

35. The Coronavirus Act 2020 set out the framework for Local Authorities to adopt an 'easement of Care Act 2014 duties'. This Easement guidance and measures operated alongside the covid 19 discharge service requirements provided Local authorities and NHS CCG's and providers the parameters in which it could legal alter assessment processes and provision of services. Crucial to the operations of Adult social care the NHS were enabled to redeploy staff, meaning that the completion of continuing health care assessments would cease during the covid emergency. This provided the context for the new discharge to assess process which again as set out in national guidance was led by Adults and communities operations and commissioning departments.
36. The framework setting out how Herefordshire Council would comply with the Coronavirus Act and decide on any adoption of the easements was prepared in consultation with stakeholders and duly signed off as a Record or officer decision. The substantial documentation prepared for the decision included:
  - Overview of care act easement
  - Prioritisation tool
  - Summary of evidence for recommendations
  - Equality Impact assessment.
  - Ethical framework
37. The Council during the covid period followed the easement guidance and ethical framework as set out above. Statutory work continued, such as requirements within the Mental Capacity Act 2005, the adherence to Human Rights Act 1998, Mental Health Act 2007, assessments and assessments under the Care Act 2014 and safeguarding continued.
38. Additional government funding via the NHS became available to source additional social work staff to support the discharge to assess 2 hour response. With national demand on an already capacity limited workforce there was a delay in recruiting the staff we were funded for. The approach however was taken to realign our social care and social work operation workforce to ensure that they always concentrated on those with greatest need first. Due to this careful realignment of staff as well as changing our processes for discharge to assess and the increased capacity that working from home released we were able to adapt and effectively respond to the significant 33% additional assessment work through the covid period.
39. Social workers and social care assessors continued to operate a full service throughout the covid-period including emergency social work response out of hours service. Safeguarding and court work continued (the latter virtually) as did leading on the social care response in supporting care facilities and individuals and families in crisis during covid. Face to face work continued where it was judged as necessary for the immediate safeguarding and lawful assessment of an individual but with the full and early adoption of PPE and rigorous application of risk assessments for our staff regarding vulnerability to infection as set out by Human Resources department was successfully minimised.

40. The recovery period from the work last year continues for adult social care. We have successfully completed all the retrospective assessments working alongside where appropriate the CCG's Continuing health care specialist nurses to reassess all people funded with the covid-19 fund. (Initially 320 individuals) and did this before the March 31 2021 deadline. We continue to have a successful discharge to assess process funded via the NHS, this funding is scheduled to cease on September 31 2021. The early set up of the Operational covid integrated response hub for the discharge to assess process worked as a pilot and this will now will continue as an integrated hub routing professional referrals for the right response to facilitate a fast response to a patients needs and thus enabling where appropriate to do a patient's health and social care needs to be met at home.
41. Targeted research was undertaken by Lead Social Workers to understand the isolation of people in care facilities. This supported a decision for every care home being offered a tablet to share with residents to maintain contact with loved ones. A review of how MCA, and respect assessments was undertaken to establish the support and learning required by the system to undertake such work safely while complying with human rights and best practice during the covid emergency period and beyond.
42. An exercise was undertaken to ensure that carers who had because of the covid period became full carers without the cared for being able to access usual services due to isolating that they were contacted and offered access to alternative support from a range of options should it be required including informal support through Talk community or formal support. The same exercise was delivered for those living alone. Adults and communities operations additionally supported Talk Community in the offering of vital additional support by linking those who had formal support with talk communities – this exercise was undertaken 3 times during 2020/21.
43. In additional to general assessment work during 20/21 operations achieved the completion of 72% of our statutory reviews of people receiving formal Care Act 2014 care and support services from Adult social care. This is something many authorities in an ordinary year do not achieve according to SALT returns.
44. Seven houses in Hereford were established and furnished as dispersed accommodation for domestic abuse victims, supported by a dedicated worker within West Mercia Women's Aid.
45. Rapid expansion of community equipment service to increase key stock available by up to 50%, along with 7 day working and extended 24 hour delivery and installation.
46. Commissioning and implementing a new model of winter accommodation and support for rough sleepers and vulnerable homeless people. Including a new homelessness hub in Hereford with transitional accommodation for 12 vulnerable people and drop-in support and advice.
47. During the first lockdown period the council made key worker accommodation available at short notice in our Gardner Hall building in Hereford. This helped recruit key workers required in the county (particularly social workers) during the first lockdown, while no other accommodation was available.
48. A unit on the council's Three Elms Trading Estate was identified as a suitable location for the PPE Hub as well as a temporary mortuary.

49. Merton Meadow overflow and No.4. Blackfriars Street (welfare facility) were made available as a drive through Covid-19 testing site.
50. Additional care capacity was established at the Three Counties Hotel to ensure the required facilities and access to services were in place during the first phase of the pandemic.
51. The council successfully applied to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to both directly provide Kickstart placements, and to be a gateway organisation for other local employers. Kickstart provides fully paid for work experience placements (min 25 hours per week) for 6 months for 16 to 24 year olds in receipt of universal credit. To date 178 placements have been approved, and the council is currently working with employers who have also offered additional places.
52. Significant changes were required to public transport. Following introduction of covid restrictions, the transport team worked closely with providers to review and develop service provision to reduce to a core public transport network with relaxations for concessionary travel for key workers and vulnerable users. The council removed school transport services where not required and to consolidate services for children of key workers attending school sites.
53. The council redeployed school transport including taxi companies (engaged for school transport) to support council covid support service, NHS patient discharge from health facilities and delivery of food and medicines from food banks.
54. As lockdown restrictions were lifted and pupils returned to school in September 2020 the transport team worked with schools and colleges to plan the required service in line with covid social distancing requirements using funding for Herefordshire from DfT and DfE. The team provided travel messaging and clear information across a range of modes and journey purposes to schools in advance of reopening, bringing together public transport information, active travel messages and any local network issues.
55. The environmental health team continued to support Public Health colleagues on contact tracing following the implementation of a national NHS recruitment process. A team of environmental health officers were trained up on contact tracing and were redeployed to our own public health team with some remaining there.
56. The Environmental Health Commercial team joined forces with the Public Health team to share a duty rota for any incoming notifications from Public Health England about new cases linked to premises or outbreaks.
57. Provision of a rota by environmental health officers assisted by our Public health team to support the national Track & Trace programme for covid-19, which investigates clusters of infection and outbreaks as soon as they are reported to the council.
58. The environmental health team formed part of a task force to respond to outbreaks of covid-19 and undertake proactive inspections of high-risk premises such as seasonal worker encampments on farms and other labour intensive workplaces where workers are required to closely operate side by side or reside in caravans of HMOs.
59. Officers across Environment Health & Trading Standards ((EHTS) paired up with a police officer from March 2020 onwards to deliver reassurance patrols, which operate in



the daytime and on Friday and Saturday nights for the licensed trade. This will continue until 21 June 2021, or later if restrictions are not then lifted.

60. The EHTS intelligence officer has been embedded with the police at the police station since summer 2020, assisting joint working and coordination between the council and police.
61. In order to reinforce advice to minimise non-essential travel all car-parking charges countywide were suspended and the bus station car park in Hereford was allocated exclusively for key workers needing to access to hospital. This was quickly put in place and welcomed by the NHS in supporting their staff. This has been well received by communities and the level of compliance across Herefordshire continues to be generally good.
62. This allowed our regulatory officers and parking enforcement officers, working with the police, to patrol known hotspot areas in the city and market towns where there are known to be social gatherings or non-compliant retail, restaurant and hospitality businesses disregarding the government's closure guidance. This took the form of a council enforcement officer paired with a police officer wearing hi-vi tabards. Our officers were observing strict government guidance in relation to social distancing and did not share a vehicle with the police or other council workers.
63. The council introduced a period of free parking, to help give retailers and the hospitality trade a much-needed boost at this critical time.
64. Car parks at Merton Meadow, Hereford; St Martins, Hereford; Broad Street, Leominster and Wilton Road, Ross have all been used as Covid test sites, with the parking team supporting those operations. Spaces allocated at Lawnside Road car park to support Vaccine roll out. On Street parking spaces being used to support EATMs.
65. The RingGo car park payment App now has an alert with information around social distancing focused at those who arrive to town to shop.
66. At the request of West Mercia Police, the CCTV service continued to support enforcement activity and help identify emerging issues at the earliest opportunity as people's behaviour change and different crime types emerged. Late night operation was reintroduced in July to provide support with the re-opening of the hospitality trade.
67. The council have continued to liaise with both businesses and the HSE over factories and other workplaces, where complaints have been received about social distancing.
68. Trading standards officers have been advising on the standards required for hand gel, face masks and respirators and pursued complaints concerning rogue traders who tried to exploit the situation to sell unsuitable goods or services.
69. Decisions at the end of March 2020 to suspend street trading activity and Hereford High Town street markets. Following the removal of the suspension of markets and street trading, a number of street and layby traders started to operate again. The service worked with all traders to ensure appropriate measures and signage were put in place to reinforce the requirement to maintain social distancing. The decision to suspend non-essential market trading in November and again in January 2021 proved challenging

70. Marches Growth Hub - A package of advice and guidance has been made available to existing and new businesses to improve economic resilience, provide start up support, and enhance general business practises.
71. Visitor Economy support - A £440k LEP funded marketing and PR campaign to raise the profile of Herefordshire as a visitor destination to support the recovery of the visitor and hospitality sectors. The project has established a countywide marketing plan (included re-branding) through extensive engagement with visitor economy businesses, developed a new modern web presence/ gateway, generated significant national PR coverage (including Herefordshire being identified in a number of 'top 10' staycation recommendations), and delivered a range of marketing activity.
72. The Fasteshire project introduced a Get Connected Grant provided funding for community groups and parish councils to acquire the equipment and skills the need to continue engage with their members and residents during the lock downs with 70 successful applications including 31 Parish Councils. The Faster Farmers project works with Herefordshire Rural Hub to support agricultural business to exploit the opportunities faster broadband brings. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the training workshops are currently delivered through live online webinars and recorded video tutorials. These include creating a marketing strategy, using videos for marketing, joining or hosting online meetings, and using online carbon farm toolkits. Also, Faster Business seminars moved on-line to enable them to continue and support business make the most of technologies.
73. A range of measures to support the initial re-opening of the market towns and Hereford centres in June/ July 2020. This included closing roads and some on street car parking spaces to provide more space for pedestrians to socially distance; information boards displayed reminding people to socially distance.
74. The council has funded holiday meals for children for every holiday since March 2020 and included several idiosyncratic offers (for example, getting the Co-op in Bromyard to honour school meal vouchers for FSM children when nationally the Co-op was not part of the scheme). This was also extended to include some newly impoverished families who were not technically FSM eligible as they lost income after the national census date. There was also a concerted effort to make sure the food available was of high quality leading to a 'like' by Marcus Rashford.
75. The council has also engaged with the offer to improve connectivity and on line access whilst pupils were working on line at home during lockdowns, providing laptops and other connectivity devices – specifically to allow families known to social care or disadvantaged to access on line provision. Similarly the council has purchased two annual licences (each worth £5k) to ensure all schools had at least access to one on line platform whilst they got more organised during subsequent lockdowns.
76. The council has offered over 1000 pieces of advice and guidance to schools during the pandemic – in partnership across directorates and agencies, especially with Public Health colleagues. In the event of an approach from schools for unusual help (such as transport for shielding pupils attending special schools) we have made available additional funds and resources. To date we think we have managed to successfully resolve all requests.

77. Efforts to ensure attendance of pupils who are known to be vulnerable and/ or who have parents or carers who are key workers have been successful. This has included the opening of two temporary new nurseries to accommodate key worker children close to NHS centres or hospitals and organising school hubs to ensure access to education (both pre-school and school age) was available where we needed it). As an example – usually we would have around 180 pre-school settings available across the county – this collapsed to 72 following the closure of private providers in early lockdowns. Despite this nurseries were kept open or expanded to meet demand across the county. We organised and offered support and as a result all nurseries eventually reopened successfully. As a consequence, attendance during lockdowns of such pupil cohorts has been well above national and frequently the best in the West Midlands region. We have also coordinated webinars for school leaders as a response to the pandemic.
78. The council also successfully managed the rebuilding of schools and settings during the pandemic. Although this could be considered business as usual – it wasn't, as it required frequent and detailed risk assessment activity to keep the work ongoing. We also sought and approved over 200 covid risk assessment procedures to ensure our schools were safe for adults and children.
79. It is still too early to be accurate in the detail but we know that the mental well-being of all pupils, the speech and language delay in young pupils and the rise in anxiety in 11-18 students will be with us for some time. Together with a delay in academic progress for some pupils this presents a long term problem. We are engaging in all of the national initiatives to help with this but are also now considering a local top up fund to target specific cohorts. There is also a growing concern about the employment opportunities for 16-24 year olds and we have engaged with 5 national funding initiatives / sources to help address this. At present these are not fully joined up nationally but we are looking to dovetail them locally via partnership working. For example, we have made a bid for significant Youth Employment funding via DWP and to help address the expected spike in the numbers of 16-24 age cohort who are not in employment, education or training.
80. The council was supportive of the vaccine programme providing venue support but also provide information for priority cohorts.
81. The council has lead on the local track and trace programme.

## **Corporate**

82. Business grants continue to be paid to all eligible business across the county, providing over £100m in funding to over 9,000 local businesses. We moved to daily payment runs to ensure the money reach businesses quickly. A team of staff worked on identifying businesses and validating local businesses was carried out by the fraud specialist.
83. Our payment terms were amended to immediate payment, rather than 30 days to support the cashflow of local businesses. Weekly social care payments were introduced to support local care homes with cashflow, and the chasing of debt was held to allow for business and individuals to make adjustments.
84. £26m in business rate relief was awarded and over £1m in new council tax relief to over 7,000 bills. In addition, £0.8m in supermarket vouchers have been awarded to 3,600 local families and £0.2m has been paid in isolation support payments to individuals.

85. Systems were developed internally to deal with payments relating to track and trace isolation requirements.
86. Government made provision for local authority meetings to be held via video conferencing platforms with new regulations coming into force on 4 April 2020. The council held its first virtual public meeting on 30 April 2020 and has conducted all public meetings up to 7 May 2021 via an online meeting platform, including the Annual Meeting of Council on 11 September 2020.
87. Following expiry of the regulations, the council has returned to physical meetings with additional measures in place to ensure safety of those attending and is continuing to make remote attendance available where appropriate.

### **Service delays due to the pandemic**

88. Generally a number of services and projects were on hold due to the mass staff deployment and realignment of work to support the community during the pandemic.
89. In May 2020, 45 capital projects were paused, with only 29 capable of still progressing. This was monitored by management board and each project was assessed for risk. Incredibly in the end delays to the implementation timelines varied but the most has been no more than 4 weeks.
90. There was a delay to the retendering of care at home for 12 months as the market would have been too disrupted during the pandemic to respond to a large tender.
91. Some building or refurbishment projects related to service development or commissioning projects were delayed by a few weeks, as a result of Covid-19 affecting working practices or supply chains.
92. Land Charges has been effected based on initial guidance to conduct searches on behalf of agents until this was changed when searches could resume in person or paid for.

### **The effectiveness of the response**

93. Redeployment of staff was incredible. The council pulled together as a single organisation to address the emergency and employees across the council were adaptable learning new skills very quickly.
94. We have so far not had any Provider failures across the provider market.
95. We have one of the highest vaccination rates amongst care staff across the West Midlands.
96. Services were adaptable including library service extended its online offer, increasing its stock of ebooks and e-audio titles. Usage by customers increased almost threefold with the monthly average figure for downloads for 20-21 being over 7,750, up from just over 2,550 the year before. The service introduced access to the 'Press Reader' service in June 2020, allowing customers to access a range of newspapers and magazines online.

97. The Library service was able to reintroduce a non-contact Home Delivery Service in June 2020, which allowed it to once again bring the service to some 150 people in the county who were unable to leave home due to illness or other issues. As restrictions were relaxed the library service developed a click and collect system. Archives were able to continue to add items to their electronic catalogue and to carry out research for customers.
98. The Bereavement Service continued to provide essential services whilst having to adapt quickly to changes in both legislation and guidance. The service continued working hard to maintain the reverence and respect due to both the deceased and the bereaved.
99. Working with our contractor, the council's household waste collection services continued with social distance measures in place to protect frontline workers, providing daily crews throughout the pandemic.
100. The council formally adopted a covid Highway Maintenance Plan that enabled highways inspection and maintenance activities to continue in line with restrictions.
101. The environmental health teams observed an increase in domestic complaints arising mostly from neighbourhood nuisance, particularly bonfires during the first lockdown. Anti-social behaviour increased as the lockdowns continued, presumably as the public became less tolerant of the situation.
  - The on line offer by schools was evaluated by Ofsted and deemed to be of high quality – we see this as an opportunity to develop this for pupils with additional needs in the future now basic infrastructure is in place.
  - We reduced the impact on covid outbreaks within homes which we hope has helped to save lives.
102. No significant outbreaks among homeless people or those with multiple complex vulnerability.
103. Vaccination rates among people identified as carers above 90% and similarly for learning disabled people registered with GPs.
104. Numbers of people rough sleeping during the winter months considerable lower than in any previous years and no-one not offered or provided with housing
105. No hospital discharges delayed by lack of community equipment or community based support available.
106. Around 20 additional units of transitional/emergency housing available for homeless people.

### **Overarching Numbers**

- Total number of calls received – 5500
- Total number of requests for support – 4000 including out of hours and weekend support
- Over 1600 food and shopping requests supported
- The collection and delivery of 1100 medication supplies
- 1500 volunteers registered in the first lockdown period to provide support with 300 continuing this support for the past 14 months
- 300 shield buddies trained and providing support to the clinically extremely vulnerable
- Over 12,000 proactive contacts made to the clinically extremely vulnerable
- 280 support requests provided for reducing loneliness
- Over 9,800 hits on the Herefordshire Council website for Talk Community support
- Nearly 40,000 hits onto the Talk Community Directory with 12,000 on the coronavirus support pages
- Over £350,000 for grant funding for the community and voluntary sector

107. Quick change for decision making utilising emergency powers in the constitution which were tracked and reported to full council at each meeting.
108. We have learned that working from home can/is both effective and very deliverable for a large number of staff.
109. An established Talk Community offer, on the 1 June 2020 we launched the Talk Community website – [www.talkcommunity.org](http://www.talkcommunity.org).
110. The new WISH website address is - [www.talkcommunitydirectory.org](http://www.talkcommunitydirectory.org). WISH continues to be a successful and highly-valued resource to our communities – experiencing a record 59% increase in website visitors in 2020, compared to 2019.

### **Community impact**

111. There was not one resident in Herefordshire unaffected by the council's response to the pandemic.

## **Environmental Impact**

112. The response work sought to minimise any adverse environmental impacts and will actively seek opportunities to improve and enhance environmental performance as part of the vital recovery work.

## **Equality duty**

113. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
114. In considering the council's response to the pandemic and in developing new opportunities the council will undertake an equality assessment and have regard to its equality obligations.

## **Resource implications**

115. The council received government grants totalling over £160m to respond to the coronavirus crisis in 2020/21 see appendix. This funding allowed the council to provide direct financial support to a large number of local businesses and individuals, and also to manage outbreaks, administer community responses, redeploy staff, offset increased costs and lost income, and introduce new services to respond to the crisis. The funding unquestionably reduced hardship and assisted in Herefordshire's response to the crisis.
116. Whilst the total amount of financial support was very welcome, much of the grant funding was released piecemeal, often at short notice and often with the accompanying grant conditions delayed or not published at all. This forced a reactive response and made it difficult to plan for the best strategic use of the funding. Some of the grants were released with prohibitively short deadlines to use the funding, some had overly complicated or very restrictive conditions on their use, and many caused considerable additional administrative burden for the council.
117. Emergency grant funding insulated the council from many direct financial losses, however £0.75m in lost income from fees and charges and £0.7m of collection fund losses in respect of Council Tax and Business Rates cannot be recouped because the government compensation schemes fund only 75% of losses incurred. The crisis also led to considerable opportunity costs as response to the emergency necessarily took precedence over delivery of other plans; it is very difficult to put a financial value on such opportunity costs but they undoubtedly contribute to the council's need to make significant savings in 2021/22

<b>Revenue or Capital cost of project (indicate R or C)</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>Future Years</b>	<b>Total</b>
	£000	£000	£000	£000
<i>Grants (R)</i>	163,165			163,165
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>163,165</b>			<b>163,165</b>

118.

<b>Funding streams (indicate whether base budget / external / grant / capital borrowing)</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>Future Years</b>	<b>Total</b>
	£000	£000	£000	£000
<i>External grants</i>	163,165			163,165
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>163,165</b>			<b>163,165</b>

## Legal implications

118 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations.

## Risk management

119. Risk was regularly reviewed and considered as part of Gold calls. A (short form) Register was maintained, focussing on the overarching risks, and the council's current scoring. This was regularly shared with Cabinet alongside budget & performance reports, as well as Audit & Governance alongside the Corporate Risk Register. Covid has been one of the highest scoring risks on the Corporate Risk Register for 12 months, and a risk in relation to covid financial implications was originally scored highly, which was reduced following the updated funding received from central government. The current risk register is at appendix 4.



## **Consultees**

None

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Covid-19 digital campaigns

Appendix 2 – Covid-19 emergency decisions

Appendix 3 – Covid-19 related grant received

Appendix 4 – Covid-19 risk register

## **Background papers**

None