

SOUTH HOLLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of: Gary Porter, Leader of the Council

To: Cabinet, 16th June 2020

Author: Christine Marshall, Executive Director Commercialisation
Matthew Hogan, Executive Manager Growth
Emily Spicer, Place Manager
Richard Hodgson, Executive Manager, Property and Development

Subject: COVID-19 Briefing

Purpose: This report sets out a summary of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Recommendation(s):

1. It is RECOMMENDED that the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic be noted.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report presents a high level summary of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Council's services and the way that we have operated.
- 1.2 The summary is intended to demonstrate the most significant implications on the way that the Council operates and the changes that have been made to services and to command structures in an emergency response.
- 1.3 In the weeks leading up to 23 March 2020, when Lockdown commenced, South Hollands's incident response structures were set-up. A Gold Command group was established under to leadership of Christine Marshall (Executive Director Commercialisation), Matthew Hogan (Executive Manager Growth), Emily Spicer (Place Manager) and Richard Hodgson (Executive Manager Property and Development). This group has overseen the emergency operation of the Council and provides the Council's coordination within the context of the work of the Lincolnshire Local Resilience Forum (LRF), which is using well established and rehearsed emergency planning governance arrangements to coordinate the multi-agency approach across Lincolnshire.
- 1.4 The LRF stood up a Strategic Coordinating Group, meeting at daily at times which has been attended by the Chief Executive and Gold Lead for the week, a Tactical Coordinating Group meeting on the same frequency (attended by a Silver representative) and various cells.
- 1.5 The Gold lead and Chief Executive/Executive Director meet with the Leader and Deputy Leaders of the Council at least two times per week to brief on the latest position, to take a Member steer on the Council's response and operation, and to make 'emergency' Executive decisions as required.

- 1.6 In order to maintain regular contact across the Council, the internal communication function has been stepped up alongside our public messaging. At least weekly members briefings have been issued and the Chief Executive has frequently communicated with all staff.
- 1.7 In addition, the Leader meets regularly with the other Lincs Leaders and the local MP and briefings are provided each week by MHCLG and the DCN (amongst others).

Note: It should be noted that the figures quoted in this report were accurate at the time of drafting but may have changed between drafting and the Cabinet meeting on 16 June 2020.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Critical Services and Staffing

- 1.8 The immediate priority for the Gold Command [at the outset] was to seek to maintain all critical services, deploy staff accordingly, and to ensure the safety of our staff and Members.
- 1.9 There has been an impact on all of the Council's services, with some having to stop (e.g. leisure, South Holland Centre, Ayscoughfee Hall), and some having a very different scope (e.g. Customer Services). These changes have been brought about to comply with government restrictions, and to ensure social distancing objectives, and we have had to focus our resource on core services.
- 1.10 It should be noted that all South Holland Council's critical services have remained fully operational during the response to the COVID19 pandemic albeit being provided in a different manner in response to the pandemic.
- 1.11 Throughout the response to the COVID19 pandemic, we have had up to 61% of SHDC staff being able to work remotely from home. A further 24% have been working on site or on refuse rounds. Only 10% of staff have been unable to work due to sickness, caring responsibilities, vulnerabilities, etc and due to closure of services. There has been only 2 confirmed cases of COVID19 affecting SHDC officers. Over 40 officers have been redeployed from their substantive duties for the Council to be employed in the provision of community, environmental services and business support.
- 1.12 Attached in **Appendix A** to this report is an infographic, which displays some of the key outcomes from our core critical services and the two work streams detailed below. In addition to enhancing existing services, the Council has been given additional responsibilities to enforce new regulations to keep the public safe, including requiring businesses to close, and supporting them to re-open safely when the government allows.
- 1.13 Government tasked local authorities with two core objectives during the emergency response phase. One was to support Vulnerable and Shielded people within our community by ensuring they had food and medicine supplies. The second was to support our businesses through the distribution of Business Rate Support and grants distribution. Its worthy of note that both support to the Vulnerable and to the Business Community continues to date.

Economy

- 1.14 On 17 March 2020, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a broad range of financial support for the whole economy and a number of these measures included further business

rate reliefs, grants, and funding arrangements with implications for local authorities. Some of the key measures announced to date include:

- Business Rates Relief: Businesses in the retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors will pay no business rates in 2020/21. This “business rates holiday” applies to all businesses in these sectors regardless of rateable value.
- Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Grants Fund (RHLBGF): Businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors with rateable values of less than £51,000 will also receive a cash grant of up to £25,000.
- Small Business Grants Fund (SBGF): All businesses in receipt of small business rates relief (SBRR), regardless of sector, will be eligible for a cash payment of £10,000. It will not be available to some recipients of SBRR such as beach hut owners.

- 1.15 As at 2 June 2020, SHDC had made grants to 1,366 local businesses totalling £15.865m and making up 82% of the original funding allocation.
- 1.16 A further 5% or £0.990m has subsequently been made available by government to provide support to local businesses that were not eligible under the first scheme (described above). SHDC will be opening its’ local discretionary and means-tested scheme w/c 8 June 2020.
- 1.17 The Council is also working with the GLLEP to lobby on behalf of the horticulture sector. A signed letter to government has gone from the Leader of the Council and the Chairman of the GLLEP to seek support for the horticultural sector in a number of key areas, including support with funding and access to workforce.

Vulnerable

- 1.18 As part of a countywide effort to support the most vulnerable members of our community and those ‘extremely clinically vulnerable’ residents on the “shielded” list, South Holland District Council worked together with partners including Wellbeing Lincs, Lincolnshire County Council and Lincolnshire Resilience Forum to ensure that access to food, medicine and wellbeing support was sufficient for vulnerable and isolated people. Local foodbanks were supported, local business offers of support were utilised and promoted and guidance for community groups and volunteers was shared. Demand, need and provision has been regularly monitored.
- 1.19 The internal Vulnerability and Community team have made over 3,000 check in calls to date to local residents to make sure they know what help is available and to offer support. This has included; help with shopping, supplies and prescriptions, help with finances and support for mental wellbeing.
- 1.20 Under guidance from MHCLG, referred to as ‘Everyone in’ 26 rough sleepers were provided with temporary accommodation, daily telephone support and access to a hot meal. Work has been undertaken to offer more formal support and provide more permanent accommodation solutions. The council continue to accommodate 8 rough sleepers under Covid19 arrangements.
- 1.21 An initial fund of £50,000 has been identified to support council tenants who are facing additional financial hardship as a result of Covid19. The fund is intended to be flexible in helping customers sustain their tenancy with the council. Subject to formal adoption this fund will help support customers who feel the continued impact of the pandemic. A hardship fund was also initiated to support those in crisis and most in need.

- 1.22 Our Landlord services have been adapted to ensure that our staff and customers remain safe during the pandemic. We have written to all customers issuing red and green cards to help them manage essential visitors to their properties. This has helped us to ensure all emergency repairs could be completed and key programmes such as gas servicing could continue. We have provided increased levels of telephone support to our customers on a range of issues to ensure they are able to manage their tenancy whilst broker additional support as required. We are beginning to adapt traditional services such as 'meet and greet' for our Sheltered Housing customers to 'Wave from your window' sessions to ensure we stay connected with our customers.

TRANSITION: RESPONSE TO RECOVERY

- 1.23 A draft COVID 19 Operational Recovery Plan is currently being developed. The Plan will focus on how the Council recovers as an organisation, how it reintroduces services, supports its staff and members, learns from the experience of dealing with COVID 19, benefits from its new community and business links, and more fundamentally how it ensures that residents can access the services they need. A Roadmap to Recovery based on known assumptions at this time has been developed and is attached in **Appendix B**.
- 1.24 From the beginning of June 2020 new arrangements will be put in place to enable a focussed approach to the Council's recovery. This will see a temporary place-based management arrangement for the duration of recovery (up to 10 months) and whilst some Senior Officers will continue to work across both authorities (South Holland and Breckland) the majority will be focused on one or other Council.
- 1.25 **Appendix C** shows the new Interim Management Arrangements.
- 1.26 A Ways of Working document has been created which sets out the 'ways of working' as a predominantly place based team, with some strategic oversight and shared corporate services supporting each council's tailored recovery plan. There will remain oversight and guidance across both councils, especially between senior management for peer support when needed. This document also looks at Staff Morale, Wellbeing, Staff Survey feedback and sets out the expectations on staff at this time.
- 1.27 A Shared Management Roadmap (**Appendix D**) has been created to show how the Interim Management Arrangements go through Response, Transition, Recovery, Normalisation and completion and return back to a Shared Management arrangement over a 10-month period.
- 1.28 As government signals its intent to unlock some of the current restrictions on individuals and businesses in the coming weeks and months the Council is working collaboratively with the LLEP partners, developers, builders and businesses to build confidence for our businesses, employees and residents. This will be a total council approach to supporting our place.
- 1.29 We continue to work remotely and Officers and Members of the Council have adapted and responded really positively to this new way of working. The organisation that 'recovers' from the emergency will look different and we should maximise and reflect the learning from the emergency and the opportunities it now presents us.

COUNCIL GOVERNANCE AND DECISION MAKING

- 1.30 In light of the necessity to ensure compliance with the requirements relating to social distancing, the decision was made not to hold most of the planned meetings in April and May 2020. A number of meetings in June have also been cancelled.
- 1.31 New Regulations which permit remote local authority meetings, until 7 May 2021, came into force on 4 April 2020. A remote meeting of the Panel of the Committee of the Licensing Authority was held on 17 April and a remote meeting of the Council was held on 13 May. The Council meeting approved (amongst other things) changes to our Standing Orders to reflect new procedures needed for virtual meetings.
- 1.32 The Chairman's Panel has now started to meet and has held its first remote meeting to support the Place Team in dealing with delegated planning decisions.
- 1.33 A number of further meetings have been scheduled for June and July, to be held remotely, including this Cabinet meeting, Licensing Panel hearings, Performance Monitoring Panel, Policy Development Panel and Governance & Audit Committee.
- 1.34 All decisions have been taken in line with government guidance and South Holland Council's constitution.

2.0 OPTIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet note the contents of this report.
- 2.2 Do Nothing.

3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 3.1 To ensure that members of the Cabinet are kept informed of the way in which the Council is responding to the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.0 EXPECTED BENEFITS

- 4.1 As above, to ensure that members of the Cabinet are informed of the way which services are changing and continue to change in terms of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

In preparing this report, the report author has considered the likely implications of the decision - particularly in terms of Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues; Constitutional & Legal; Contracts; Corporate Priorities; Crime & Disorder; Data Protection; Equality & Diversity/Human Rights; Financial; Health & Wellbeing; Reputation; Risk Management; Safeguarding; Staffing; Stakeholders/Consultation/Timescales; Other. Where the report author considers that there may be implications under one or more of these headings, these are identified below.

5.1.1 **Constitution & Legal**

- 5.1.2 The Council has a memorandum of agreement with Breckland Council, which outlines our Ways of Working with the Senior Shared Management Team. This is important to ensure our Strategic Relationship remains strong through these challenging times and with several of our shared officers working placed based for a period through this crisis.
- 5.1.3 All decisions in the emergency response stage have been taken in line with the Council's constitution and government guidance.

5.2 **Contracts**

- 5.2.1 We have worked with and supported our main contractors. PSPS have remained fully operational. Parkwood, on government instruction have closed the leisure centre sites and furloughed the majority of their staff.

5.3 **Corporate Priorities**

- 5.3.1 We have needed to adapt our Corporate Priorities through this pandemic, whilst maintaining all core critical Council services. Our Priorities will be reviewed as part of our Recovery Plan.

5.5 **Financial**

- 5.5.1 The Financial impacts of COVID-19 have been provided in another report to this Cabinet meeting, which shows an overview of the current assessment of the emerging financial impact to the council from the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.6 **Health & Wellbeing**

- 5.6.1 As detailed above, we have managed the Health and Wellbeing of all of our staff throughout this Crisis and it continues to be a key focus. We have supported staff and allowed them to be home enabled.

The Health and Wellbeing of our residents is of key importance and the work being undertaken to support vulnerable residents across the district is supporting this.

5.7 **Reputation**

- 5.7.1 Communications have been key in all the work taken place through the pandemic to ensure we are managing the reputation of the Council. Internal communication has been increased to ensure our colleagues and members have the information and guidance they need to safely fulfil their duties, and to keep fully informed on the various changes that may affect their work. This is particularly important as a significant proportion of our colleagues are operating remotely during this period.

5.8 **Risk Management**

- 5.8.1 We have a strategic risk matrix for the Pandemic that covers all areas of Council services.

5.9 **Staffing**

5.9.1 All Staff and Councillors will have been affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic in one way or another. We have needed to be flexible and find new ways of working to ensure we are delivering the Council's critical services whilst protecting staff and Members. The majority of the Council's employees are working, and many are working enhanced hours to support our collective response.

6.0 **WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED**

6.1 All Wards and all Communities are affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic and, in turn, by South Holland District Council's response.

7.0 **ACRONYMS**

7.1 LRF - Lincolnshire Resilience Forum

Background papers: -

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Key Decision: No

Exempt Decision: No

This report refers to a Mandatory Service and Discretionary Service

Appendices attached to this report

Appendix A	Infographic on Delivery of Core Council Services and New Emerging Service provision.
Appendix B	South Holland Roadmap to Recovery
Appendix C	South Holland Interim Management Arrangements
Appendix D	Shared Management Roadmap