EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT COVER SHEET

Title of Report:	**COVID-19 Emergency Planning Update (May 2020)**	To be marked with an 'X' by Democratic Services after report has been presented
Meeting of:	Corporate Management Team:	
	Leader and Deputy Leaders: **11th May 2020**	
	Leader's / Leader of the Opposition's Advisory Group / Independent Alliance Advisory Group:	
	Cabinet: **18th May 2020**	
	Scrutiny Audit and Value for Money Council Services Committee Scrutiny Community Regeneration, Environment and Health and Well Being Committee	

Is this an Executive Decision:	NO	**Is this a Key Decision:**	NO
Is this in the Forward Plan:	NO	**Is the Report Confidential:**	NO
If so, please state relevant paragraph from Schedule 12A LGA 1972:			

Essential Signatories:

ALL REPORTS MUST BE IN THE NAME OF A HEAD OF SERVICE

Monitoring Officer: **Angela Wakefield**

Date ………………….   Signature ………………………..

Chief Finance Officer: **Sal Khan**

Date ………………….   Signature ………………………..

EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Cabinet

Date: 18th May 2020

REPORT TITLE:	**COVID-19 Emergency Planning Update (May 2020)**
PORTFOLIO:	**Leader of the Council**
HEAD OF SERVICE:	**Sal Khan**
CONTACT OFFICER:	**James Abbott (Corporate & Commercial Manager) Ext. No. x1244**
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	**Non-Specific**

1. **Purpose of the Report**

1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide senior officers and Members an update on the latest situation and associated response in East Staffordshire by the Council and its partners to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

1.2. The report includes a backwards looking review of the response to date along with anticipated activities moving forward as the situation develops, considering all relevant aspects of the response including considerations regarding: Finance; People / HR; Community; and Partners / Stakeholders.

2. **Executive Summary**

2.1. The Council and its partners acted quickly and effectively to respond to the emerging and ongoing COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

2.2. The response has been summarised in this report by considering the themes of: People and Processes; Service Changes and Communications; Community and Partners; and Finances.

2.3. It has been necessary for the Council to plan for and react to a range of challenges and pressures that have arisen as a result of the pandemic, however **throughout the response to the COVID-19 situation critical services have continued.**

3.   Background

3.1.   A vast range of announcements have been made from relevant organisations following an outbreak of a new coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Significant announcements to provide appropriate background and an associated timeline are listed below:

   3.1.1. The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the outbreak of coronavirus disease COVID-19 as a pandemic on 11th March 2020.

   3.1.2. On 18th March 2020 the Government announced that schools, colleges and early years setting would be closed until further notice, except for the children of key workers and vulnerable children, with effect from 23rd March 2020.

   3.1.3. To delay the spread of the virus the Government announced further measures on social distancing including instructing some businesses and venues, such as hospitality and indoor leisure premises, to close on 20th March 2020.

   3.1.4. On 23rd March 2020 the Government announced further social distancing instruction i.e. that all residents must stay at home with the exception of the following limited purposes:

   - Shopping for basic necessities, as infrequently as possible
   - One form of exercise a day
   - Any medical need or to provide care or help to a vulnerable person
   - Travelling to and from work, but only where this is absolutely necessary and cannot be done from home.

3.2.   East Staffordshire Borough Council has a range of resilience plans in place to mitigate the impact of any emergency incident, for example service specific business continuity plans. It is also part of the Staffordshire Resilience Forum (SRF) which is made up of multiple agencies who work together to plan and prepare for localised incidents and civil emergencies.

3.3.   The SRF has facilitated a Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) with effect from 10th March 2020 including senior representatives of all relevant responders and partners, for example local authorities, the emergency "blue-light" services, Public Health England, MHCLG, the military, the NHS, local hospitals and Clinical Commissioning Groups.

3.4.   At the meeting of the SCG held on 24th March 2020 it was agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic be declared as a Major Incident.

4.   Contribution to Corporate Priorities

4.1.   This report contributes to all three Corporate Priorities as it is relevant to all Council services.

5. COVID-19 Emergency Planning Update (May 2020)

5.1. Overview

5.1.1. By law, category one responders (which includes all local authorities) have duties to plan and prepare for emergencies. Planning for civil emergencies and ensuring continuity of its own services is therefore a fundamental and ongoing element of the Council's normal operation. The Council has Major Business Continuity Plans covering the three overarching areas of Human Resources, ICT and Facilities, with all individual functions within the Council having its own bespoke Business Continuity Plans. These documents are used to assist recovery of operations and continuation of work following an incident.

5.1.2. The Council also has a Major Incident Plan in place, in addition to access to multi-agency incident plans facilitated by the SRF. For example there is a Strategic Framework and Multi-agency Response Plan relating to Pandemic Influenza.

5.1.3. In order to respond effectively to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic it was essential that the Council acted swiftly and proactively to ensure business continuity and to facilitate the necessary additional support to residents and businesses within the Borough.

5.1.4. Prior to the incident being declared a pandemic, the Council closely monitored the emerging COVID-19 situation, and all Business Continuity Plan owners were asked to review and update their plans in light of the potential for future disruption. Officers were also reminded of the Pandemic Influenza Response Plan as a document containing principles relevant to the emerging COVID-19 situation.

5.1.5. This proactive approach was instrumental in delivering the response that became necessary as the incident developed.

5.2. Multi-Agency Response

5.2.1. The SRF has facilitated a multi-agency response to the COVID-19 emergency. The response is strategically led by the SCG made up of representatives with decision making authority from the relevant responding organisations.

5.2.2. Reporting to the SCG are 6 subgroups co-ordinating the tactical response, each with a focus on a specific area as below:

5.2.2.1. **Mortality Management:** The aim of this subgroup is to monitor the estimated additional number of deaths that COVID-19 may present, plus the anticipated rate of deaths from non COVID-19 issues. It also oversees the development and process of temporary mortuary sites.

5.2.2.2. **Health and Social Care:** The aim of this subgroup is to support the Health and Social Care providers in Staffordshire and Stoke and Trent, working together in a streamlined way.

5.2.2.3. **Intelligence and Communications:** The aim of this subgroup is to outline the communications responsibilities of partners, the associated action plan and strategy, along with ensuring clear, timely and accurate data is provided to the community.

5.2.2.4. **Resources and Mutual Aid:** The aim of this subgroup is to establish an agreed pathway for SRF responders to request multi-agency support for the resolution of issues which impact on the delivery of critical services across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

5.2.2.5. **Safeguarding, Vulnerability and Partnerships:** The aim of this subgroup is to support partners to manage risk relating to vulnerability in communities across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

5.2.2.6. **Vulnerable and Voluntary Support:** The aim of this subgroup is to coordinate the collective resources of the public, private and voluntary sector to deliver essential food, medicines and other supplies to those people self-isolating from COVID-19.

5.3. East Staffordshire Borough Council's Response

5.3.1. It has been necessary for the Council to plan for and react to a range of challenges and pressures that have arisen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, however **throughout the response to the COVID-19 situation critical services have continued.**

5.3.2. The incident is having a strategically significant impact with "normal" business being affected. However the response is being managed at this time through the activation of local contingency plans and coordinated corrective action. Requests for mutual aid have not been necessary.

5.3.3. The response can be summarised by considering the following themes:

People and Processes	Service Changes and Communications
Community and Partners	Finances

5.3.4. The following table provides a summary overview of the Council's direct response to these challenges, with full detail on this response, along with an outlook moving forward, provided in the subsequent sections of this report.

Response Summary

People and Processes

- Council acted quickly to move to homeworking wherever possible.
- To facilitate a shift to homeworking, Council policies have been updated to reflect the current Council working arrangements and guidance issued.
- A list of staff potentially suitable for redeployment has been collated.
- The Council has had a total of 20 absences for a duration of 7-14 days due to employees or their family members reporting COVID-19 symptoms. All of these have now returned to work. The Council has another 15 people off work and not able to homework **(as of 11th May 2020)**
- Non-essential committee meetings scheduled for March / April were deferred where possible.
- A significant process change has been the move to electronic or "virtual" decision making.
- The public Cabinet meeting was successfully held electronically via Zoom in April, and Licensing General Sub-Committee hearings and Licensing Act Sub-Committee meetings held virtually in May.
- A number of other processes have also required review and adaptation by the relevant departmental manager in order to respond to additional responsibilities arising directly as a result of the Government restrictions or requirements arising from the Coronavirus Act 2020.

Service Changes and Communications

- A number of facilities are currently closed as a direct response to the ongoing situation.
- The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Election, a local Neighbourhood Plan referendum and the Eton park ward by-elections expected to be held this year have been postponed.
- Garden waste collections have resumed following a temporary suspension.
- Bulky Waste collections have been suspended.
- Burials at Cemeteries restricted to a maximum of 12 mourners.
- After an initial realignment of Grounds Maintenance contractor work to focus on high priority areas, there has been an increase in the works that are now being undertaken whilst complying with social distancing guidelines.
- The Council has paused its proposed Selective Licensing Scheme.
- The Council adopted a proactive approach to communications that ensured maximum focus on the emergency response, and other non-essential media was de-prioritised.
- Communication of service updates and guidance to help nudge positive behaviour within the Borough.
- Social media messaging undertaken has shown a significant reach.

Community and Partners

- Played an active role within the "Vulnerable and Voluntary Support" and the "Safeguarding, Vulnerability and Partnerships" SCG subgroups.
- Teamed up with Central England Co-op and Burton Albion Community Trust to launch a project aimed at getting vital food and essentials to vulnerable members of the local community.
- Call Centre set up to ensure that residents identified as "shielding" have registered for and are receiving NHS food / essentials parcels.
- COVID-19 testing site implemented in Burton.
- Process implemented for the cascade of PPE to eligible local groups.
- The Council succeeded under the 'Everyone In' program. 28 homeless singles and couples have been accommodated under the 'Everyone In' program, with 7 having been resettled in the community **(as of 5th May 2020)**
- The Council updated its Councillors Community Fund (CCF) Terms and Conditions so Members can make use of the CCF to support local groups.
- The Council has used its reach to share partners' key messages.

Finances

- The Council's allocation is £1,244,057 from the additional government funding of £3.2billion.
- Offered to spread Council Tax payments over 12 months rather than 10.
- The Council has just received new software which should enable it to automatically applied reductions of up to £150 off Council Tax bills for over 3,800 eligible residents on low income utilising the Council Tax Hardship Fund. However there is an issue with the software which has been flagged up nationally and with MHCLG.
- Issued 1,695 Small Business and Retail, Hospitality & Leisure grants totalling £19.8m to local ratepayers **(as of 12th May 2020)**
- Awarded £18 million worth of Retail Discount Relief to 635 businesses and £232,000 worth of Nursery Discount Relief to 21 Nurseries **(as of 4th May 2020)**
- Working closely with partner authorities and organisations across Staffordshire, the GBSLEP area, and the WMCA area to share intelligence and align operational responses to business support and economic recovery.
- Supported the promotion of Staffordshire County Council's emergency fund of £500,000 for micro-businesses.
- Temporarily suspended car parking charges in Council operated car parks.
- Promoted national support schemes such as Self-employment Income Support Scheme, Bounce Back Loans and Business Interruption Loan Schemes.

5.3.5. <u>People and Processes</u>

5.3.5.1.   As mentioned above the Council closely monitored the emerging COVID-19 situation. As it became clear that measures were necessary to protect staff, Members and customers, and in anticipation of likely social distancing measures to be implemented by Government the Council acted quickly to move to homeworking wherever possible.

5.3.5.2.   On Monday 16th March 2020, all managers met to consider business continuity and specifically any additional ICT requirements necessary for homeworking. The majority of Council staff were homeworking as of Wednesday 18th March 2020, with only a very few individuals now attending the office occasionally to undertake specific essential duties by prior arrangement and with senior management approval.

5.3.5.3.   To facilitate this shift to homeworking a number of Council policies have been updated to reflect the current Council working arrangements and the impact of national social distancing measures, including:

Policy	Update
Homeworking Policy	Updated to allow more flexibility especially for those with children
Family Leave Provisions	Some staff may not be able to work as many hours as normal because of caring for children, or require additional leave particularly with school closures. The Council have extended the dependent care leave provisions to support these colleagues.

5.3.5.4.   Guidance in the form of FAQs has been issued regarding annual leave provisions to provide information on a range of questions including:

- Clarification on requests for carry-over of unused leave entitlement
- Limitation of leave during this response period
- Change of annual leave requests due to holiday booking cancellations
- Expectations for annual leave during expected 12 week period for vulnerable staff where the nature of their work is not being suitable for homeworking

5.3.5.5.   Where staff are unable to work from home or they are working from home but have additional capacity due to the amendments to services, a list has been collated and staff redeployed where and when appropriate to support other Council teams or the wider multi-agency response.

5.3.5.6. As of 4th May 2020 the Council has 295 (directly employed) employees including casual staff. The Council has had a total of 20 absences for a duration of 7-14 days due to employees or their family members reporting COVID-19 symptoms. All but 2 of these have now returned to work. The Council has another 15 people off work and not able to homework, due to their having an underlying health condition or being over 70 years old, including 4 casual workers. A weekly breakdown of absences can be seen in the table below:

COVID-19 Related Absence Breakdown				
Date	Headcount (incl. casuals)	No. absences due to COVID-19 sickness (self or household)	No. still absent on date	No. not working due to underlying health & nature of work
01.04.2020	295	15	6	14
08.04.2020	295	16	2	15
14.04.2020	294	16	2	15
20.04.2020	293	17	2	15
28.04.2020	293	20	3	16
04.05.2020	295	20	2	15
11.05.2020	295	20	0	15

5.3.5.7. Mitigation for the impacts of staff absence are considered in the Section 5.3.6 of this report "Service Changes".

5.3.5.8. Going hand in hand with the shift to homeworking and the associated policy amendments required to facilitate this, is a necessary change to working practices and processes for officers and Members. Relevant processes that have previously required an in person "wet" signature have been revised to allow electronic signature, in particular the Executive Decision Record procedure.

5.3.5.9. Another significant process change has been the move to electronic or "virtual" decision making. The Council meeting scheduled for 23rd March 2020, went ahead with social distancing measures implemented. The meeting allowed the Council to update its policy framework to enable it to continue for the duration of the pandemic.

5.3.5.10. Other non-essential committee meetings scheduled for March / April were deferred where possible, and measures were then undertaken for an online solution to be sourced and implemented following the government's temporary removal of the legal requirement for local authorities to hold public meetings in person detailed in the Coronavirus Act 2020.

5.3.5.11. Following a period of product testing and user familiarisation the public meeting of the Cabinet was successfully held electronically via Zoom on Monday 20th April 2020. This allowed members of the public to view the proceedings while Members debated the agenda items with relevant officer support, all undertaken remotely. Furthermore a training and familiarisation process for relevant Licensing Committee officers and committee members has also been completed. The Council successfully held Licensing General Sub-Committee hearings and its Licensing Act Sub-Committee virtually in early May. Training and familiarisation is underway ahead for officers and Members ahead of the Planning Committee meeting scheduled for 27th May 2020. This programme will continue to be further rolled out to Members and officers in relation to other Council Committees and Full Council moving forward.

5.3.5.12. A number of other processes have also required review and adaptation by the relevant departmental manager in order to respond to additional responsibilities arising directly as a result of the Government restrictions or requirements arising from the Coronavirus Act 2020. For example, the Council has amended its procedures for the enforcement of housing standards to ensure inspections can still be carried out in accordance with social distancing guidelines.

5.3.5.13. Furthermore, the Environmental Health team has amended its procedures to include the enforcement of social distancing in businesses. It has also worked with internal teams and external partners to enforce business closures where necessary, and worked with partners to develop a Staffordshire Enforcement Protocol to ensure consistent and effective enforcement of the business closure regulations.

5.3.6. Service Changes and Communications

5.3.6.1. Individual service managers have reviewed their own processes and revised where necessary in order to avoid unnecessary face to face office contact to protect staff and members of the public.

5.3.6.2. Significant service impacts are detailed in the following section, however throughout the response to the COVID-19 situation, critical services have continued.

5.3.6.3. However a number of enforced changes following direct instruction issued by Government have been necessary, as well as the Council also implementing a number of service changes to effectively respond to the emergency at a local level.

5.3.6.4. A number of facilities are currently closed as a direct response to the ongoing situation:

Facility	Date of Closure
Customer Service Centres in Burton and Uttoxeter	24th March 2020
Burton Market Hall	23rd March 2020
Brewhouse Arts Centre and Civic Function Suite*	20th March 2020
Public Toilets	24th March 2020
Play areas, tennis courts and outdoor gyms**	24th March 2020
The Council's leisure facilities (Meadowside Leisure Centre, Uttoxeter Leisure Centre and Shobnall Leisure Complex), run by Everyone Active	20th March 2020

*The Civic Function Suite is supporting essential services to continue to be delivered such as Blood Donation
** Parks and open spaces are open for exercise

5.3.6.5. The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner election due to be held on 7th May 2020 was postponed and a local Neighbourhood Plan Notice of Referendum, which was to go live on 31st March 2020, has been withdrawn until further notice. The by-election in Eton Park ward due to take place on Thursday 26th March has also been suspended.

5.3.6.6. As of Monday 23rd March, the Council temporarily suspended its garden waste (brown bin) collection service and its Bulky Waste Collection Service. The garden waste service was subsequently resumed as of Monday 20th April, however the Bulky Waste service remains suspended.

5.3.6.7. The Stapenhill Cemetery office is only receiving queries via telephone and email. All burials will now be restricted to a maximum of 12 mourners. On the day of the funeral, only the funeral cortege will be allowed in to the cemetery.

5.3.6.8. The range of activities undertaken by the Council's Grounds Maintenance Contractor had been realigned in order to allow an additional focus on high priority areas, such as the Cemetery. However, there has now been an increase in the works that are being undertaken whilst complying with social distancing guidelines.

5.3.6.9. The Council has also announced that it has paused its proposed Selective Licensing Scheme extension.

5.3.6.10. With a significant number of service changes affecting residents, businesses and service-users, effective communication has been fundamental to the response. A COVID-19 response section was immediately developed on the Council website collating all guidance, messaging and service disruption.

5.3.6.11. The Council adopted a proactive approach to communications that ensured maximum focus on the emergency response, and other non-essential media was de-prioritised. This allowed for effective messaging around service impacts, sharing of all relevant Government guidance and partners' messages.

5.3.6.12. The tables below demonstrate the effectiveness of the social media messaging undertaken during the main period of service change showing a significant reach. The top 10 posts in terms of reach are highlighted to show the effectiveness of these specific messages.

Top Posts by reach (number of users)			
ID	Date	Reach	Text
1	17/04/2020	56,843	Garden Waste Collections resumed **(Facebook)**
2	21/03/2020	32,557	Suspension of garden waste collections
3	31/03/2020	22,788	Message regarding residents cleaning their bin handles.
4	26/03/2020	17,312	Message regarding people continuing to use playgrounds, outside gyms and tennis courts.
5	27/03/2020	15,308	Temporary suspension of car parking charges.
6	17/04/2020	9,740	Garden Waste Collections resumed **(Twitter)**
7	08/04/2020	9,341	Information regarding double bagging of tissues before disposing of them.
8	07/04/2020	9,294	Information for vulnerable people who need help from volunteers.
9	05/04/2020	9,221	Parks still open for exercise once a day.
10	04/04/2020	7,929	Information regarding hand washing
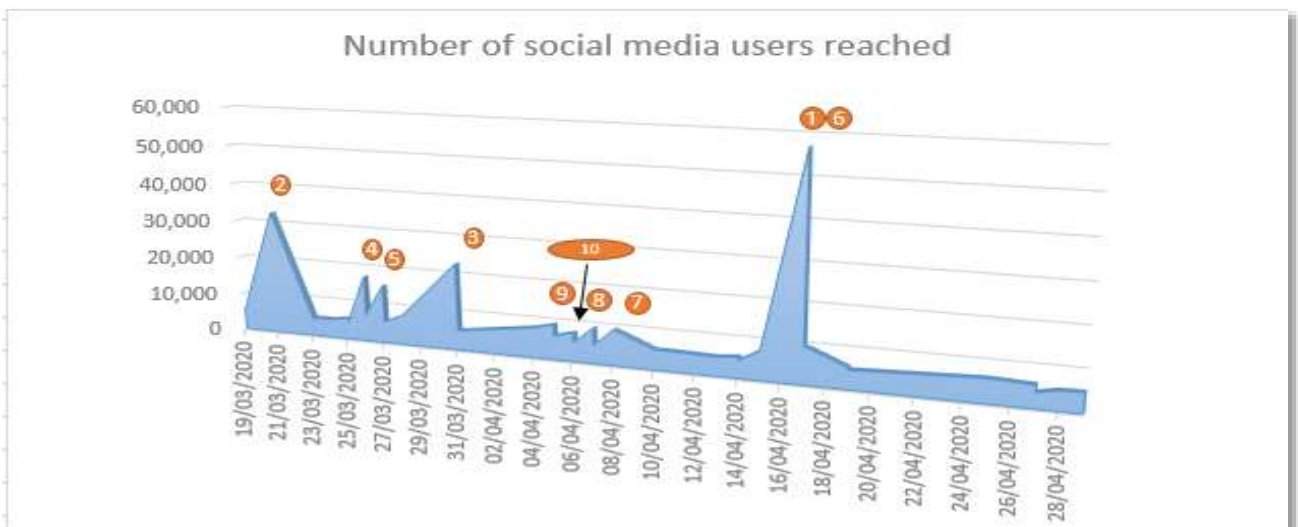
5.3.6.13. In the period between 9th March and 3rd May 2020 the Council has had 800 new Facebook followers, from 2,269 to 3,069 further highlighting the importance of an effective social media presence.

5.3.6.14. The Council has also responded to a large number of social media enquiries, for example queries, comments, compliments and complaints regarding service changes. Social media sentiment has been generally positive.

5.3.6.15. A new policy line was developed by the Council regarding complaints, reserving the right to exercise its discretion in identifying and prioritising reasonable complaints. This may include it not being able to provide an individual response to comments received which relate directly to the local or national response to the pandemic, where relevant information had previously been publicly communicated.

5.3.6.16. The communication approach provided a scheduled plan for the sharing of key messages, but also allowed campaigns to be issued in response to specific emerging issues. This includes communicating service updates and guidance to help nudge positive behaviour within the Borough. For example: waste collection crews reported an increase in bin contamination from tissues being bagged but placed in blue recycling bins; the Environmental Health team received an increased number of complaints about bonfires and noise; and the Open Spaces team were made aware of people accessing closed play areas by climbing over the fences. Associated advice was issued accordingly through the Council's media channels.

5.3.7. Community and Partners

5.3.7.1. The Council has worked closely with a range of partners across the East Staffordshire community to effectively respond to the COVID-19 situation, including supporting the most vulnerable within the Borough. Contributing to this Community and Partners theme, the Council has played an active role within the "Vulnerable and Voluntary Support" and the "Safeguarding, Vulnerability and Partnerships" SCG subgroups.

5.3.7.2. The Council has teamed up with Central England Co-op and Burton Albion Community Trust to launch a project aimed at getting vital food and essentials to vulnerable members of the local community. The retailer has linked up with the Council and trust staff to create a community hub at its Stapenhill Food Store.

5.3.7.3. Another significant example of community support work is the partnership between the Council, Staffordshire County Council and SRF, which has made efforts to ensure that residents identified as "shielding" have registered for and are receiving NHS food / essentials parcels. As part of this drive, the Council established a temporary telephone call centre at the Brewhouse which went live on 28th April in order to receive incoming calls to register residents. Staffordshire

County Council Call issued text messages detailing a dedicated telephone number set up by the Council encouraging them to make contact. The call centre operating hours mirrored those of the Customer Service Centre (Monday to Friday 9am-5pm and Saturday 9am-1pm). Volunteers operated the call centre in groups of three over four hour shifts, registering any callers via the Government website.

5.3.7.4.   The SRF have also assisted in the implementation of the COVID-19 testing sites in Burton (and Stoke). The Council has offered equipment (such as tables, fencing, gazebos etc) to support the site, and this equipment continues to be available should an additional need arise. These bases are up and running and the throughput / flow has been managed. It has been confirmed that the testing is available to all Council staff.

5.3.7.5.   The Council has implemented an application process with associated guidance and stock control approach to effectively manage any requests for PPE from local voluntary / community groups, Funeral Directors etc. As of 5th May 2020 2 local voluntary organisations have submitted applications and have been allocated PPE.

5.3.7.6.   The Council's Housing Options Team have worked hard to respond to the letter from Minister Hall to local authorities on plans to protect rough sleepers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The strategy is to focus on people who are, or are at risk of, sleeping rough, and those who are in accommodation where it is difficult to self-isolate, such as shelters and assessment centres, and make sure that these people have access to the facilities that enable them to adhere to public health guidance on hygiene or isolation, ideally single room facilities. This includes using alternative powers and funding to assist those with no recourse to public funds.

5.3.7.7.   The Council successfully implemented the strategy outlined above, known as the 'Everyone In' program, and continues to do so by offering all those who are found to be homeless with an offer of accommodation. As a result of this work the Night Shelter and a number of other rough sleeper provisions have been closed. This work is undertaken in addition to the performance of the existing legislative duties to families and others.

5.3.7.8.   As of 5th May, 28 homeless singles and couples have been accommodated under the 'Everyone In' program, with 7 having been resettled in the community. Efforts to resettle those that have been accommodated under this program have been stepped up, and will likely increase further as restrictions ease. A new government taskforce has been created to lead the next phase of the Government's support for rough sleepers during the pandemic, and the Council will continue to work in close collaboration with MHCLG specialist advisors and other relevant parties.

5.3.7.9.   In addition to the support work that the Council has directly contributed to, it has also been committed to supporting the valuable work undertaken in the community by other local groups.

5.3.7.10.   The Council has updated its Councillors Community Fund (CCF) Terms and Conditions so Members can make use of the CCF to support groups / organisations to provide assistance to their ward residents as a result of the pandemic.

5.3.7.11.   Furthermore, in addition to the communications programme mentioned previously the Council has used its reach to share other key messages, such as:

- Promotion of the Staffordshire County Council emergency COVID-19 hotline, supporting residents who are in isolation or are shielding and require urgent assistance.
- Promotion of the Salvation Army's campaign to encourage donations to the local foodbank. This a referral only food bank, which provides essential food for people who are experiencing crisis. They have reported a rise in the number referrals.
- Supporting the domestic abuse campaign launched by Staffordshire Police by sharing messages regarding "at home shouldn't mean at risk" and "don't suffer in silence".
- Promotion of the "GoodSam" app, which is used to request help from the NHS volunteer responders. Councillors are now able to make requests for help on behalf of their vulnerable residents (any councillors wishing to make a request will need to use their gov.uk email address).
- The Council has created a document that details a number of businesses and organisations that are providing support to vulnerable people which has been communicated to Members.

5.3.7.12.   In addition to its support for this local community support work, the Council has continued to promote national communications relevant to our communities, such as Public Health England messages and the NHS "Every Mind Matters" campaign suggesting steps to look after mental and physical health whilst staying at home.

5.3.8.   Finances

5.3.8.1.   A significant element of the COVID-19 pandemic to be considered is the financial impact on the Council, but also residents and businesses within East Staffordshire.

5.3.8.2.   To support local Council Tax payers the Council has issued a range of communication regarding residents experiencing difficulties making payments to get in touch to discuss the support available. This could include potentially spreading their payments over 12 months rather than 10.

5.3.8.3.   The Council has just received new software which should enable it to automatically applied reductions of up to £150 off Council Tax bills for over 3,800 eligible residents on low income utilising the Council Tax Hardship Fund. However there is an issue with the software which has been flagged up nationally and with MHCLG. These eligible residents were identified by the Revenues Team in early April in anticipation of this. The reduction will utilise the Council's share of the Government's £500million Council Tax Hardship Fund. Once the software has been fully tested, the reductions will be applied and notices issued. A portion of the Government funding has been set aside by the Council for any new Council Tax support claims it may receive during the rest of the financial year.

5.3.8.4.   In addition to the community support work detailed in Section 5.3.7 a number of local organisations have implemented schemes with the intention of supporting residents regarding financial considerations which have been supported by the Council. For example the Council has supported campaigns by "Stop Loan Sharks", which is an agency with the power to investigate and prosecute loan sharks and illegal money lenders. The Council has also promoted the financial guidance available via Citizens Advice, and initiatives from supermarkets (for example alternatives to cash), banks and the post office (for example accessing money or appointing someone to manage your affairs).

5.3.8.5.   The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a significant impact on local businesses, however the Council has worked to support the economy throughout the response.

5.3.8.6.   The Council (as of 5pm on 12th May) has issued 1,695 Small Business and Retail, Hospitality & Leisure grants totalling £19.8m to local ratepayers. The Council has also proactively contacted businesses who are eligible to apply but had yet to do so through written communications and follow up telephone calls utilising redeployed staff from across the Council.

5.3.8.7.   The Council has also awarded Retail Discount Relief and Nursery Discount Relief to all relevant ratepayers in East Staffordshire. The reliefs. As of 5th May the Council has awarded £18 million worth of Retail Discount Relief to 635 businesses and £232,000 worth of Nursery Discount Relief to 21 Nurseries.

5.3.8.8.   The Council through its Enterprise Team is working closely with partner authorities and organisations across Staffordshire, the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP area, and the WMCA area to share intelligence and align operational responses to business support and economic recovery. The Team is providing direct advice to businesses on Government (and other) schemes wherever possible and directing officer resources to this to ensure quick responses and guidance.

5.3.8.9.   The Council has also supported the promotion of Staffordshire County Council's emergency fund of £500,000 for micro-businesses. This grant fund is targeted at small, micro and one person businesses that are not eligible for the grants and rate relief packages offered by the government.

5.3.8.10. In addition to the local support, the Council has continued to promote national support schemes relevant to our businesses such as:

Scheme	Information
Self-employment income support scheme	On Thursday 26th March 2020, the Chancellor announced a support package for the self-employed whereby self-employed people with trading profits of up to £50,000 will be able to access a taxable grant based on 80% of their average monthly profits over the last 3 years, up to £2,500 per month.
Bounce Back Loan	From Monday 4th May 2020, small and medium sized enterprises will be able to access further loan funding through the Government's Bounce Back Loan scheme. The loan will provide up to £50,000 in funding for up to 6 years, with no repayments during the first 12 months, and Government will guarantee 100% of the loan value.
Business Interruption Loan Schemes for both smaller and large businesses (CBILS* & CLBILS**)	The CBILS was launched on the 23rd March 2020, and the CLBILS on 20th April 2020. Provided by commercial lenders, backed by the British Business Bank, these allow eligible businesses to access the funding they need.
Commercial Tenant Protection	New measures put in place to protect the UK high street from aggressive rent collection and closure, whereby commercial tenants who cannot pay their rent because of the Pandemic will be protected from eviction for at least three months (announced 23rd March 2020)

*Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme
**Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme

5.3.8.11. It is also recognised that the Council has contracts with a range of partners delivering services on their behalf. The pandemic has the potential to impact on these partners' finances too. The Government has issued a number of Procurement Policy Notes which have been disseminated to relevant officers within the Council, providing guidance on a range of considerations for any discussions with these partners.

5.3.8.12. On 19th March 2020, the Government announced £1.6billion of additional funding for local government to help them respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. A further £1.6billion in additional funding was announced on 18th April 2020. This extra £1.6billion takes the total given to councils to help their communities through the crisis to over £3.2billion.

5.3.8.13. The Council's allocation from the additional government funding is £1,244,057.

5.3.8.14. This allocation is to be used to offset against the COVID-19 related financial pressures experienced by the Council. These pressures not only include additional costs but also more significantly a reduction to the income levels the Council receives that are used to ensure that funding is available to provide essential services to residents. The impact on the Medium Term Financial Strategy will be extensive and this is being monitored and updated on a regular basis to reflect the most recent information. The Council's underlying financial position is robust and this provides a strong foundation of financial resilience during these unprecedented circumstances.

5.4. Forward Look

5.4.1. The pandemic situation and the associated response at a national and local level is an ever changing position. It is unclear when the "lockdown" will end and to what extent measures on individuals' movement will be eased. Moving forward there are a number of elements for the Council to consider in order to maintain an effective ongoing response, in addition to subsequently moving to a recovery phase.

5.4.2. In addition to the SCG and related subgroups detailed in Section 5.2.2, on 24th April 2020 an initial meeting of a Recovery Co-ordinating Group (RCG) was held. This group will work in parallel to the SCG, and will support partners, communities and stakeholders to deliver the recovery activity associated with COVID-19. It is envisaged that there will be thematic subgroups developed within Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent as the recovery phase progresses. At an agreed time moving forward the SCG will conclude the response phase and formally hand over to the RCG to continue multi-agency co-ordination throughout the recovery phase.

5.4.3. At a local level the Council has reviewed its Corporate Plan to identify the objectives contained within that are likely to be directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (in addition to those already initially agreed for amendment at the Full Council meeting on 23rd March 2020). These objectives and their associated targets are detailed in the attached *Appendix 1 "Corporate Plan Targets 2020/21 - Impacted by Covid-19"*.

5.4.4. Of the 103 targets in total contained in the Corporate Plan, 67 have been identified as being potentially impacted.

5.4.5. The impacts identified arise from a range of factors including:

- Facility closure or activity postponement arising from Government restrictions
- Postponement of activities by partners / stakeholders
- Social distancing measures
- Resource pressures arising from the pandemic response

5.4.6. As the emergency response develops the Council will continue to review its performance measures and targets.

5.4.7. A protocol / policy, which reflects the Council's own COVID-19 risk assessment measures, the latest Government-led guidance and the Council's key aims could also support the detailed planning required before workplaces reopen. As well as setting core principles to guide managers, such a protocol might include measures such as:

- Training employees on protective behaviours
- Undertaking regular Health & Safety inspections
- Health screening
- Distancing workstations
- Instituting regular cleaning and encouraging hand-washing
- Avoiding or limiting business travel and in-person meetings
- Limiting numbers in the workplace
- Guidance on the use of public transport
- Staggering commuting times
- Possibly considering arrangements for 'queuing' to enter premises
- Reviewing the use of staff common areas

6. Financial Considerations

This section has been approved by the following member of the Financial Management Unit: **Lisa Turner**

6.1. The main financial issues arising from this Report are as follows:

6.1.1. The financial position of the Council and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this position are not specifically considered within this report.

6.1.2. The Council, like all local authorities, is facing significant financial pressures due to COVID-19. These pressures not only include additional costs but also more significantly a reduction to the income levels the Council receives which are used to provide essential services to residents. The impact on the Medium Term Financial Strategy will be extensive and this is being monitored and updated on a regular basis to reflect the most recent information. The Council's underlying financial position is robust and this provides a strong foundation of financial resilience during these unprecedented circumstances.

6.1.3. The financial issues directly arising from this report are as detailed in Section 5.3.8.

7. Risk Assessment and Management

7.1. The main risks to this Report and the Council achieving its objectives are as follows:

7.2. **Positive** (Opportunities/Benefits):

   7.2.1. Sharing information across officer and Member portfolios on the current situation with Council facilities and services allows for a joined up overview of the response to challenges presented by the ongoing COVID-19 emergency.

7.3. **Negative** (Threats):

   7.3.1. The situation and data relating to the response is constantly developing. It should be noted that where data is presented the associated dates for the validity of that data will be provided in this report.

7.4. The risks do not need to be entered in the Risk Register. Any financial implications to mitigate against these risks are considered above.

8. Legal Considerations

This section has been approved by the following member of the Legal Team: **Angela Wakefield.**

8.1. There are no significant legal issues arising from this Report.

9. Equalities and Health

9.1. **Equality impacts:** The subject of this Report is not a policy, strategy, function or service that is new or being revised. An equality and health impact assessment is not required.

9.2. **Health impacts:** The outcome of the health screening question does not require a full Health Impact Assessment to be completed. An equality and health impact assessment is not required.

10. Human Rights

10.1. There are no Human Rights issues arising from this Report.

11. Sustainability (including climate change and change adaptation measures)

11.1. Does the proposal result in an overall positive effect in terms of sustainability (including climate change and change adaptation measures) **N/A**

12. Recommendation(s)

12.1. To note the update detailed within the report.

13. Background Papers

13.1. None

14. Appendices

14.1. **Appendix 1:** Corporate Plan Targets 2020/21 Impacted by COVID-19