



RECORD OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The following is a record of the decisions taken at the meeting of **CABINET** held on **Friday 5 June 2020**. The decisions will come into force and may be implemented from **Wednesday 17 June 2020** unless the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or its Committees object to any such decision and call it in.

COVID-19 Planning and Response

Summary

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Management Team which provided a summary of the actions the council has taken working with partners to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and the framework for recovery planning.

A novel coronavirus - severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) – was identified in Wuhan, China at the end of last year. The virus is highly infectious and causes a respiratory illness called COVID-19. The virus has spread rapidly across the world, and was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation on 11 March 2020.

As at 27 May 2020, 213 countries/territories had been affected; there were 5,488,825 confirmed cases globally; and 349,095 confirmed deaths. In the UK, there were 267,240 confirmed cases and 37,460 confirmed deaths. Here in County Durham, as at 27 May 2020, there were 1,976 confirmed cases and 532 confirmed deaths.

The highly infectious nature of the virus and the serious illness it can cause has significantly affected how we live, work and play. It has resulted in global adjustments to normal ways of life, travel and commerce, to try to contain the spread of the virus, minimise deaths and ensure that COVID-19 cases do not overwhelm health and social care systems.

As such, the coronavirus pandemic is one of the most profound challenges society has faced in more than a generation and with effective vaccines yet to be produced, we have to anticipate that society will be affected by COVID-19 for some time to come.

The council and its partners had emergency and business continuity management planning frameworks in place, which enabled a prompt response to the threat as it emerged. However, the council has had to respond dynamically and innovatively revising its approach as the national coronavirus action plan and recovery strategy evolved.

The council has worked nationally, regionally and locally to protect communities and to support those affected by the pandemic, economically, socially and in relation to their own physical and mental health. County Durham communities themselves have been a major force in this and have made an immense contribution to the 'County Durham Together' response. County Durham residents have observed and cooperated with national guidance and while the lockdown restrictions are beginning to be relaxed for many, the council will continue to support the many thousands of residents who are still shielding and self-isolating.

Council employees also have risen to the challenge and demonstrated their willingness to work flexibly, adopt new ways of working and support each other, focussing on what needs to be done to maintain services and support local communities.

Locally, the council has worked with partner agencies via the County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum (LRF) to manage the multi-agency response to COVID-19. The council's Director of Public Health is a member of the regional Health Strategic Group which has worked with the three LRFs and other strategic planning groups across the region.

The council has played a key leadership role regionally, supporting the LRF and regional health partnerships. Locally the council has focused upon the following key aspects of its own response plan:

- (a) public health and overall planning and response to the pandemic;
- (b) population health management;
- (c) community support, action and welfare support;
- (d) social care and commissioning;
- (e) support to businesses;
- (f) education and children's services;
- (g) business continuity;
- (h) neighbourhood services;
- (i) on-line services;

- (j) workforce and human resource management;
- (k) testing;
- (l) recovery planning.

In responding to the pandemic, the council:

- (a) developed overall planning arrangements, translating WHO and government guidance into local action and support, underpinned by dedicated intelligence and data analysis, public health practitioner advice, communications and human resources (HR) management;
- (b) established a community support hub with the community and voluntary sector, to support vulnerable people affected by coronavirus including those advised to 'shield' themselves for an extended period;
- (c) offered assistance to 75,000 vulnerable people in the county, as well as to 13,271 people who said they needed help to shield from infection because they are at extreme risk of illness;
- (d) established a volunteer bureau to enable local people and groups who want to help;
- (e) invested an additional £1.5 million via Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) to support local and cross-county community responses and have enabled local Members to allocate Member budgets more flexibly, potentially providing a further £1.764 million of revenue support;
- (f) increased our Welfare Assistance Scheme by a further £1 million to provide emergency financial assistance for those in crisis, utilising funding from the Hardship Fund;
- (g) extended the benefits of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme, utilising the Hardship Fund to provide up to an additional £300 council tax relief and arranged individually with council tax payers in financial hardship for their payments to be deferred with instalments to recommence later in the year;
- (h) supported commissioned social care providers through over 13,600 telephone calls and the provision of advice and support;
- (i) agreed 10 percent funding increases for social care providers in addition to their annual inflationary uplift to help meet additional costs of dealing with the pandemic and made £13 million of payments upfront, as opposed to in arrears in order to help with funding and cashflow issues;

- (j) supplied over 815,000 items of PPE through to 27 May, including over 480,000 items to the social care sector and managed the provision of emergency PPE on behalf of the LRF;
- (k) established an infection inspection team and comprehensive multi-agency support package to support care homes to prevent and tackle infection outbreaks;
- (l) supported over 8,000 businesses with total grant payments of over £94 million;
- (m) recalculated the business rates bills of just under 2,300 businesses, applying business rate reductions and discounts totalling over £49 million;
- (n) introduced immediate supplier payments, supplier relief for important vulnerable suppliers and rent deferrals for commercial tenants;
- (o) provided advice and assistance to schools across the county and assisted over 240 schools to remain open to provide childcare for key workers;
- (p) maintained all child protection, safeguarding and social care services, maintaining contact with children and their families;
- (q) prioritised and maintained service delivery wherever possible, which has involved facilitating home working for approximately 60 percent of our workforce and the redeployment, training and development of 500 staff;
- (r) maintained essential services such as refuse collection, social care and community support;
- (s) rapidly expanded on-line service delivery, communications and online and telephone customer support, including the development of digital and video alternatives to face-to-face service delivery;
- (t) developed access to rapid local testing for council and social care staff, and is continuing to support and challenge the roll-out of testing via the National Testing Programme and development of regional and local contact tracing arrangements;
- (u) developed and communicated physical and mental health support packages for staff and maintained proactive employee communications and engagement and positive industrial relations with the trade unions.

The council's focus has now turned to restoring council services and laying the foundations for recovering from the pandemic.

While there is a possibility that we may experience further outbreaks and pandemic peaks, recovering from COVID-19 will set the context for future community and council planning and decision-making in the county as we develop and implement the new county vision and council plan, within the context of the significant financial pressures we can expect to face.

Decision

The Cabinet:

- a) noted the contents of the report;
- b) acknowledged the immense contribution local communities made to the response;
- c) acknowledged the cooperation of County Durham residents and that the council is continuing to support many people who are still shielding or self-isolating;
- d) reflected on the contribution the council's employees and strategic partners made to the response.

Helen Lynch
Head of Legal & Democratic Services
9 June 2020