

Report To:	CABINET	Date:	30 JUNE 2020
Heading:	COVID-19 RESPONSE UPDATE AND INITIAL RECOVERY PLANS		
Portfolio Holder:	THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, COUNCILLOR JASON ZADROZNY		
Ward/s:	ALL		
Key Decision:	YES		
Subject to Call-In:	YES		

Purpose of Report

This note provides the Cabinet with a summary of what the Council has done to respond to COVID-19, provides a comprehensive update of the COVID-19 decisions taken to date and also starts to explore arrangements for the recovery stage of this Major Incident.

Multi-Agency response arrangements through the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Local Resilience Forum (LRF) had already commenced during late February 2020. However, in light of the growing national and international public health emergency, the LRF declared a Major Incident on 20 March 2020. The Prime Minister's unprecedented announcement on the evening of Monday, 23rd March 2020 reinforced the seriousness of the situation and led to the first phase of lockdown for residents, businesses and public services.

Over the following weeks various legislation has been passed in response to COVID-19 and numerous guidance notes have been issued, amended and reissued to local authorities which have informed our actions and response and continue to do so.

As we enter into a new phase of the pandemic with some lockdown restrictions being removed or relaxed, the LRF and the Council locally must start to consider what needs to be done in order to recover and adapt to a "new normal".

Recommendation(s)

Cabinet is asked to :

1. Note the way the Council has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic to date, in particular the fact that the Council has delivered all essential Council services in full, along with other priority services and additional COVID-19 responsibilities;
2. Note and endorse the COVID-19 related Executive decisions taken to date as set out in Appendix C;
3. Approve the extension of free Town Centre parking until 7 September 2020;
4. Approve the initial approach to the recovery phase of the pandemic;
5. Approve the Recovery Strategy as set out in Appendix D;
6. Recommend to Council:
 - a) The establishment of a new COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel made up of 7 Members including a Chair and Vice-Chair (to be reviewed at the AGM in May 2021);
 - b) The Terms of Reference for the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel as set out in the report at Appendix E;
 - c) To make appointments to the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel in accordance with political balance;
 - d) To confirm the positions of Chair and Vice-Chair of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel are to receive the same Special Responsibility Allowance as the Scrutiny Panel Chairs and Vice-Chairs (£5,956 and £1,687 respectively), subject to having consulted with the Independent Remuneration Panel.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

It is important to recognise the efforts of the Council in respect of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the delivery of critical and additional services during this difficult time.

It is best practice to note and endorse governance and decision-making processes utilised during the COVID-19 crisis.

As we enter into a new phase of the pandemic with some lockdown restrictions being removed or relaxed, the Council locally must start to consider how it will support its communities, businesses and employees in order to recover and adapt to a "new normal".

Creating a focussed Scrutiny Panel in relation to the Council's response and recovery to COVID-19 ensures dedicated and robust arrangements are in place for this unprecedented situation when the Council must ensure it performs a leading role in supporting its communities, businesses and its employees.

Alternative Options Considered

Cabinet may consider alternative arrangements in relation to the recovery approach of the Council.

Detailed Information

1. RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Response Structures

Ashfield District Council as a statutory Category One Responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 works with multi agency partners through the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire LRF (LRF) when dealing with Major Incidents.

The Covid-19 Pandemic was declared a Major Incident on 20 March 2020 by the LRF.

The Strategic Coordinating Group's (SCG) aim is to ensure the effective co-ordination of the multi-agency response and recovery in the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire LRF area to the Covid-19 outbreak. The Director of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer) has attended the SCG meetings for the Council.

The overarching principles for the LRF's response and recovery is to:

- Save and protect human life
- Contain the emergency – limit its escalation or spread, and mitigate its impacts
- Provide the public with proportionate advice and information, in line with national advice and guidance
- Restore life to a new normality, for as many people as possible, as fast and as fairly as possible
- Ensure plans are in place to maintain normal services at an appropriate level should the situation escalate
- Reduce harm
- Protect the health and safety of all staff

As a consequence of the complexity of the Major Incident, an extensive LRF structure was put in place underneath the SCG to manage and monitor the crisis across the County and City. The operational structure beneath the SCG was made up of numerous cells covering health, humanitarian support, economy, finance, communications and a dedicated Local Authority cell was also established; a number of these groups had sub-groups to deal with specific issues. As an early action, the SCG agreed a list of Tier 1, Tier 2 and support services which members confirmed were the minimum essential for delivery by all Local Authorities. **This list is at Appendix A.** Ashfield District Council prioritised these services and also delivered other services which were deemed a priority by Members and the Community. It should be noted at the outset, that Ashfield was the only Council within Nottinghamshire which consistently delivered all the Tier 1 and Tier 2 services in full.

The Council has been (and continues to be) represented on all these LRF cells. Within the Council, each Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) member under the leadership of the Chief Executive, took on responsibility for the range of Tiers 1 and 2 and support service essential service delivery issues and membership of the LRF cells.

At a local level, CLT has had weekly discussions as part of its usual meeting structure with interim information and updates being cascaded on a daily basis through ad hoc meetings, telephone calls, e-mails, all staff messages and blogs. The Leadership Group has received weekly updates and Members have received regular briefings/FAQs. An internal COVID-19 Incident Management Team (IMT)

made up of the Chief Executive, Directors, Service Managers and relevant officers has been meeting on a weekly basis, although this will now move to a fortnightly meeting schedule as we transition into the recovery phase. The objectives of the IMT are:

- Meeting our duty of care to staff, Members, partners, visitors and the community to provide for their safety and health (as far as is reasonably practicable)
- Securing continued service delivery for customers with a focus on critical services
- Securing delivery of the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire LRF's response

The Chief Executive has taken part in a plethora of conference calls with Nottinghamshire Chief Executives, East Midlands Councils, Local Government Association, Ministerial webinars, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, District Councils Network.

Arrangements both locally and across the LRF have recently been reviewed to take account of the dynamic nature of the response and to start to focus on the work required to support the recovery phase (set out in more detail below).

Coronavirus Act 2020

The Coronavirus Act 2020 received Royal Assent on 25 March 2020. The Act has extensive schedules setting out a wide range of powers giving a framework to life under lockdown. Some of the schedules to the Act include emergency financial support measures, staffing numbers for health care, registration of social workers, enforcement powers for social distancing, the operation of the Courts, registrar and coronial services, the holding of virtual council meetings and the postponement of elections. Regulations have underpinned the details of the framework.

National and Local Data

Members will be aware of the national figures for diagnosed COVID-19 cases and the number of COVID-19 related deaths which are reported on a daily basis. At the time of writing, COVID-19 related deaths stood at 42,632 [21 June 2020].

As of 17 June, measured by a 7-day rolling average, the UK daily death rate stood at below 150 for the first time since March, down from 300 three weeks ago, and down from a peak of 943 on 14 April.

Public Health England published a report relating to "*Disparities in the Risks and Outcomes of COVID-19*" on 2 June 2020. This report is a detailed analysis of the disparities in risks and deaths in relation to age and sex, geography, deprivation, ethnicity and occupation. The largest disparity is in relation to age with over 80s being seventy times more likely to die if diagnosed with COVID-19 than those under 40. The risk of dying from COVID-19 is higher for males than females. Those in deprived areas are more likely to be diagnosed and die from COVID-19 than those in the least deprived areas. Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) Groups are more likely to be diagnosed and die from COVID-19 than those from white ethnic groups.

Office for National Statistics (ONS) data up to 8 May 2020 is showing that deaths in care homes account for 27% of COVID-19 deaths. In care homes, between 20 March and 7 May it is estimated there were 20,457 excess deaths.

ONS data by Local Authority is showing that up to 5 June 2020 there were 136 COVID-19 related deaths in Ashfield compared to 871 deaths for the same period in total.

It should be noted here that we lost the then Chairman, Councillor Anthony Brewer to Coronavirus in April.

Current Government Guidance

Following Government guidance and legislation in the initial stages of the pandemic and as a consequence of the lockdown restrictions put in place on 23 March, the Council took a series of decisions (further detailed below and in **Appendix B**) including:

- Cancel Council and Committee meetings and other non-essential meetings
- Close its buildings to the public (the DWP appointment only at Urban Road)
- Close Community Centres
- Close public areas in sheltered courts
- Cancel planned community events
- Suspend evictions from social housing accommodations
- Council Leisure Centres were closed
- Cease all non-priority housing and asset work/repairs
- Close indoor and outdoor markets (except for those selling food)
- Close play grounds
- Provide free Town Centre parking
- Meetings were moved on to digital platforms, eg Zoom, Teams, Webex, once the legislation permitted virtual meetings
- Staff who could work from home, were asked to work from home. Those staff with underlying health conditions were sent home immediately.

Members will be aware that the government updated their guidance on 10 May to **Stay Alert**.

This means you must:

- stay at home as much as possible
- work from home if you can
- limit contact with other people
- keep your distance if you go out (2 metres apart where possible)
- wash your hands regularly
- Self-isolate if you or anyone in your household has symptoms.

From 1 June:

- we can spend time outdoors, including private gardens and other outdoor spaces, in groups of up to six people from different households, following social distancing guidelines
- those who are shielding may spend time outdoors once a day. This can be with members of their own household or, for those shielding alone, with one person from another household following social distancing guidelines

You cannot:

- visit friends and family inside their homes
- stay overnight away from your own home, except for in a limited set of circumstances, such as for work purposes
- exercise in an indoor sports court, gym or leisure centre, or go swimming in a public pool
- use an outdoor gym or playground

- gather outdoors in a group of more than six (excluding members of your own household)

From 1 June, some schools began to reopen as did outdoor markets and car showrooms.

At his Press Conference on 10 June 2020, the Prime Minister announced that from the 13 June adults living alone or single parents with children under 18 could form a “support bubble” with one other household. This change is not available for those who are shielding.

From 15 June all non-essential retailers - from department stores to small independent shops – were able to reopen in England if they put in place social distancing measures. From 15 June outdoor attractions could open up including where people can stay in their cars, such as safari parks and drive-in cinemas. Places of worship were also able open from 13 June for individual prayer.

On 22 June, the Government announced that people who have been shielding can meet outside with up to 6 people following social distancing guidelines and if they live alone they can create a bubble with another household. It was also announced that people will no longer be advised to shield from 1 August.

As set out in Government’s roadmap, the next set of changes will not begin until 4 July at the earliest, as the evidence allows. The next phase would include plans to allow pubs, restaurants, hairdressers, hotels and cinemas to open, as long as they can meet social distancing measures. However, indoor public spaces such as beauty salons, where social distancing may be difficult, could reopen "significantly later", depending on the rate of infection.

Council Services

Council employees have worked tirelessly through these tough few months. As stated above, Ashfield is the only Council within Nottinghamshire which has delivered **all essential Council services** in full, along with other priority services; as well as this, employees have volunteered for roles outside of their normal duties, for example, Humanitarian work, Environmental work including cemeteries and Waste Collection. Councillors have continued to undertake their community role with enormous enthusiasm to support the residents and businesses of Ashfield.

Government has placed additional responsibilities and duties on the Council to undertaken new, specific COVID-19 related work in order to support the District such as undertaking thousands of welfare calls and visits to vulnerable people, advising businesses on social distancing requirements, paying grant monies to businesses. Some of this work is set out below in more detail.

Appendix B provides a visual summary of some of the work of the Council during the COVID-19 crisis to date.

Business Grants and Support

At the start of the pandemic, Government published a range of support measures on its dedicated website: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus/business-support>. These were a combination of finance and other types of support.

Council officers have worked hard to help support our local businesses who are facing financial difficulties as a result of COVID-19.

Based on the guidance issued by the Government the Council has issued revised business rates demands of zero for the financial year 2020/21 for those businesses who are eligible for business rates relief due to coronavirus. The Government will meet the full cost of this relief which for Ashfield is estimated to be circa **£10m**.

Small Business Rates and Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant funding

Guidance for the Small Business Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Fund was published in March and the Council was allocated **£22.284m** based on the number of Ashfield businesses the Government believed to be eligible for grant payments in March. The Leader wrote to all 1,800 businesses which were eligible (according to ADC's Business Rates database) for the grant and invited them to apply. Businesses who qualify for these grants have received (or will receive) grant payments of either £10k or £25k dependent upon the type of business and the rateable value of their premises. As at 22 June the Council has paid out **£17.855m to 1,598 eligible businesses**, we continue to process further applications. We believe there are now 102 remaining eligible businesses who are yet to apply and Members have been undertaking visits to premises to encourage application.

Discretionary Grants Fund

Guidance for the Discretionary Grants Fund was published in May. The Council was allocated **£1.078m** to help fund local businesses with fixed property costs who were not eligible to apply for grants from the Small Business Grant Fund or the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Fund.

A Nottinghamshire-wide scheme has been designed and went live on our website on 2 June. The closing date for applications is 19 June. An Officer Panel will meet to confirm the businesses whose applications meet the criteria and those eligible will be contacted for bank details and payments will be processed in June. At the closing date of 19 June the Council had received 120 applications.

Reopening High Streets Safely Fund

Guidance for the above fund was issued in June. The Council received **£114,527** in capacity funding that can be spent on:

- Support to develop an action plan for how the local authority may begin to safely reopen their local economies
- Communications and public information activity to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely
- Business-facing awareness raising activities to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely
- Temporary public realm changes to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely

A Cross Council working group was immediately set up and a detailed action plan for the short, medium and long term has been developed. The Council will need to record details of eligible costs incurred and submit claims and following validation, payment will be received.

Hardship Funding

The Council has received grant funding of **£1,383,514** to support economically vulnerable people and households with the expectation that the majority of the hardship fund will be used to provide council tax relief, alongside existing local council tax support schemes.

In accordance with the guidance the Council has provided all recipients of working age local council tax support ('LCTS') during the financial year 2020-21 with a further reduction in their annual council tax bill of up to £150 and revised council tax demands have been issued. As the pandemic continues more and more people are seeing changes to their financial circumstances and as a consequence may become eligible for this support and will receive revised council tax demands with this loss of council tax income being met from this funding allocation.

Covid-19 Funding

The Council has received two tranches of funding with a total value of **£1,351,127** to meet additional costs and lost income pressures arising as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. Details of additional costs and lost income are being collated weekly and these are reported through to Government on a monthly basis. It is still unclear whether the Government will be providing further funding to mitigate any permanent loss of Council Tax, Business Rates and Housing Rents or whether the Government will meet any COVID-related costs and lost income in excess of the amount of funding already allocated.

Humanitarian Assistance - Ashfield Hub

During the first few weeks, Council officers contacted over 55 Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations, plus foodbanks, supermarkets and local shops to establish what support was available in Ashfield. All organisations were encouraged to sign up to the community hub. They have played a very important role in supporting Ashfield residents. The support includes food parcels, shopping, medicine collection and befriending services.

Officers made links between supermarkets and foodbanks, to ensure no food went to waste, and was distributed fairly across the foodbanks in Ashfield. Food from the Nottinghamshire Hub has been distributed across all food banks. Officers promoted the NCC Covid-19 Community Fund, and where appropriate, supported organisations to apply. To date, over £70,000 has been awarded to organisations who either work solely in Ashfield or have Ashfield as a priority area.

The Council awarded £10,000 to help continue the efforts of organisations who very quickly adapted their offer to ensure the needs of vulnerable residents in Ashfield were met.

Activity packs and Little Bags of Sunshine have been distributed through schools and foodbanks in Ashfield's priority places. Love Leamington packs were developed and distributed in the Leamington area, in partnership with First Art, and families were encouraged to stay active together through Feel Good Families.

190 cases to the Nottinghamshire hub have been resolved by our Housing staff e.g. provided with advice/support/signposted, whilst Ashfield's cross-Council Humanitarian Team have delivered 105 emergency food parcels to Extremely Vulnerable Persons (EVPs).

150 food parcels received from the Red Cross have been distributed to Food Banks and homeless persons across the District. In addition to this, there have been further supplies from NCC which we have passed onto food banks including fresh vegetables (grown and donated by Nottingham Trent) salad stuff, nappies, personal items e.g. deodorants, shampoo, bread.

100 Easter Eggs donated by ALDI were delivered to Food Banks and to vulnerable families with young children.

15,147 letters have been sent out to vulnerable residents across the District by the Council advising of the support available. This includes the 3,190 letters sent to tenants aged 50-70 advising of NCC telephone number, 334 to sheltered courts and 11,623 letters to the elderly where we held dates of birth on our various computer systems.

We have telephoned 1,396 Lifeline customers to offer support and assistance.

Housing and Community Protection Officers have also carried out 7 physical welfare checks. These are undertaken as and when NCC have not been able to make contact.

Action is underway by the ADC Humanitarian volunteers, to call 2,600 vulnerable residents based on health and national data, in order to confirm if they need help or support or are managing under their own means. This will involve door knocking if the resident cannot be contacted by phone after several attempts.

Housing Options

Since 'lockdown' the Housing Options Team has carried out 90 assessments placing 44 households under the relief duty and 22 under prevention.

Of those under the relief duty, the Council has accommodated 37 households since 23 March. This includes 10 families and 27 single applicants. Sadly, 6 households in temporary accommodation were fleeing domestic violence

The catalyst for accommodating many of the single applicants was The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government direction 'everybody in'. All rough sleepers from the original cohort have either been accommodated or have had an offer of accommodation.

On a further very positive note there have been considerable successes and positive outcomes for applicants. 19 of the single households have been moved onto longer term accommodation such as supported accommodation with the YMCA. In addition, despite restrictions, an additional 8 households have been assisted into privately rented accommodation with financial assistance from the Council through the bond guarantee scheme and homelessness prevention fund. Casework such as family negotiation has also enabled a number of households to remain in their existing accommodation.

Housing Repairs

There has been a 33% reduction in repair calls compared to the equivalent months last year, but a 54% reduction in physical repairs due to Government restrictions on the service.

The repair teams have shown tremendous resilience in still going in to people's homes throughout the lockdown period, and have undertaken just over 2,700 repairs over the last 11 weeks.

The completion of gas servicing was the department's most significant risk due to both health and safety concerns for residents as well as the need to remain legally compliant. Amazingly, 1,159 gas services have been carried out over the period with only 11 households exceeding their anniversary date.

The team are almost up to full service as of 8 June and are currently focussed on the backlog of repairs.

Waste Services (including Bag It)

Waste Services has consistently delivered services through Covid-19, and the only local authority in the County to do so. With some reductions in staff numbers due to self-isolation or sickness, support has been provided by Environmental Services and agency resource; service adaptations have enabled crews to social distance. Crews collect an average of 1,200 bins per round.

The service delivered a 'Bag It' campaign to support residents. The campaign collected additional bagged waste at the kerbside totalling 388 tonnes from across the District.

The crews received a great deal of support and thanks from residents, including an excellent poem from Martha Kirk, a year 10 student from Ashfield School. The crew met with Martha to thank her for her poem and presented her with a voucher for free swim and skate at the Lammas Leisure Centre when it reopens after COVID.

These important Waste initiatives have been instrumental in reducing the level of fly tipping in the District.

Environment Green Spaces/Town Centre Operations

Environmental Services have provided resource to waste and burial services, and have continued to deliver all aspects of street cleansing, emptying over 1,000 litter bins, keeping town centres and parks clean, litter picking on estates and carrying out weed control to keep the District looking tidy. Grass cutting on highways, housing estates and parks is taking place.

The team have developed a garden area at Kings Mill Reservoir which accompanies their 'Thank You' message to the NHS. At this site the team have carried out a significant amount of tree work and maintenance and have worked collaboratively with the Mill Waters project.

Cemeteries

The Council has been able to maintain full service provision with support from the Environment Team as sickness and self-isolation of employees in the service reduced capacity. Following a 62% increase in burials in Ashfield in April, service demands have now reduced to a more stable position that reflects similar numbers compared to last year.

Ashfield has collaborated with colleagues and partners from the bereavement sector across the County, including NHS, Funeral Directors, Registrars and Councils to scale up services to support residents. From supporting the development of the Crown Farm Site, to adjusting booking and administration processes and increasing capacity in operations, Ashfield has played its part in managing these sensitive services through extremely challenging times.

Markets/Free Car Parking

The Council suspended all parking charges for town centre car parks during lockdown to date.

The Idlewells Indoor Market has remained open for food supplies, with stallholders selling fresh fruit, vegetables, fish and meat. The stallholders have provided a delivery service which has been invaluable for many older customers who have been shielding. The indoor market reopened for non-essential traders from 15 June with all but three stalls trading in some form.

The outdoor markets reopened from 1 June with social distancing measures in place, for example some stalls have been relocated to create space for queues for shops. This has been in consultation with traders and has been generally well received.

Community Safety

The Council's Community Protection Officer (CPO) team have provided a visible presence in undertaking patrols in hotspot locations in collaboration with Nottinghamshire Police, Environment, Housing and direct reports made to the Council in our parks, estates, town centres and cemeteries. They have undertaken a range of activities to support our communities and ensure the safety of our residents, including engaging and educating groups that may not be complying with social distancing, addressing bonfires and waste on land, supporting the Environment Team in problem solving activities to maintain distances, secure play equipment gates, deliver food parcels and undertaking welfare checks.

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) caseworkers have maintained contact and continued to visit residents to ensure residents are supported, evidence is gathered and case work maintained. During the last three months 192 new ASB cases have been created following triage assessment and 124 cases closed.

The Complex Case Team has continued to support complex, vulnerable residents throughout the pandemic and supported 29 complex cases that has contributed to homeless prevention, drug/alcohol support, benefit support, domestic abuse and safeguarding. This has taken the form of ongoing casework for live cases and supporting transactional demands for vulnerable residents such as delivering food parcels and welfare checks and providing mental health support to complex residents via our seconded Community Psychiatric Nurse.

Environmental Health

The Council's Environmental Health team has been heavily involved in ensuring the safety of residents and businesses through proactively engaging with businesses prior to clarification on emerging regulations and also compliance with regulations during the pandemic. The team called over 800 businesses to provide advice and guidance on business closures and social distancing and safe practices.

The team is now involved in the County's Local Outbreak Control Plan development. Local Directors of Public Health are responsible for producing the plans by the end of June.

Support Services

Our support services continue to provide key support to the critical services across the Council to ensure critical and COVID related services have been delivered. Briefly, some of the support provided includes:

- Finance – supporting the delivery of grant funding whilst ensuring the Annual Statement of Accounts is ready on time
- Corporate Communications – have played a vital role in ensuring employees, Members and the public are kept informed of up to date information and guidance in relation to COVID-19
- Democratic and Scrutiny Services – have provided ongoing support to Members and successfully introduced virtual Council and Committee meetings
- IT – have enabled employees to work effectively from home and have assisted in introducing virtual Council and Committee meetings

- Legal Services – continued to provide advice in relation to new COVID-19 related legislation and also in respect of the legal implications of COVID-19, for instance in respect of contractual relationships and data protection
- Risk and Emergency Planning – have provided health and safety advice as teams revised safe systems of work, they have introduced PPE Guidance and are currently working on the 'COVID-19 Secure' workplace risk assessment to ensure the working environment remains safe in preparation for more people returning to the workplace
- Assets – have made sure the offices have remained clean and safe for staff and are currently working on introducing building safety measures such as signage and one-way systems
- Shared HR Service – has provided ongoing advice and support to employees including COVID-19 testing arrangements and wellbeing support

What Went Well?

The Pandemic and subsequent lockdown meant that Council Members, management and all staff had to immediately mobilise along a heightened set of priorities and new LRF regional infrastructure requirements.

As the Council transitions into the recovery phase of this Major Incident, the Council has started to reflect on how it has responded to the crisis so far. The following highlights some of the successful ways the Council has responded to the pandemic:

- Provision of all essential services throughout Tier 1 and 2, along with support services. Staff mobilised to deliver new COVID Services: for example, Humanitarian support and business grants.
- CLT leadership established a management structure to deliver. Cross Council groups were set up and were quick to mobilise. Volunteer call out led to 100 staff coming forward. We made active use of redeployment, for example, environment staff to waste, CPOs to environment and cemeteries.
- IT Support for 200 staff working from home remotely, as well as the need to establish virtual meetings for all staff and Members.
- People continued to work from the office where needed in a safe environment
- Customer focused approach and a shift to IT based customer service. Customers have either been very understanding and/or have embraced the new approach
- Strong Member roles and their community leadership
- Communications to staff were regular and consistent with no mixed messages
- We held a virtual AGM, one of the first Councils in the country to do so
- Voluntary sector stepped up and managed the front line of humanitarian support
- Excellent team working, working together as One Council
- Full ADC engagement in LRF process and its plethora of cells and groups
- Full staff engagement in delivery; lower sickness levels than usual
- “Business as usual” - Covid plus day job - major projects still being delivered; for example, Leisure Transformation, green spaces projects
- Tier 1 and 2 gave us greater clarity of purpose and decision making
- Data gathering and collection of detailed information and intelligence
 - Decision making processes
 - Finance/ Delta returns to the MHCLG
 - Homelessness intelligence - “everyone in” policy
 - Staffing: daily statistics of attendance, sickness, COVID-19 and self-isolation
 - Businesses and support offered
- Proactive Communications to Members, staff and to the public through a variety of means: email, internet, intranet, social media

2. EXECUTIVE DECISIONS TAKEN AS A RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The legal requirements for good governance and decision-making have not changed as a result of COVID-19. Normal delegations to Committees, Portfolio Holders and Officers remain in place as detailed in Part 3 of the Council's Constitution. The Leader of the Council can exercise ALL Executive powers. The Leader of the Council has delegated ALL Executive Functions to the Chief Executive. In circumstances where an emergency threatens to take critical systems or services off line or out of action, the Chief Executive can exercise all necessary powers to ensure the continuity of operations and core Council business.

During the initial stages of the pandemic when the pace of Government direction was rapid and ever changing, decisions were often taken urgently and with immediate effect as a direct consequence of this Government direction/legislation. As such, some decisions at the outbreak of the pandemic were taken without full written reports being prepared in order to comply fully with the legal position or guidance. These decisions were taken by the Leader or the Chief Executive or by the relevant Chief Officer under the direction of the Chief Executive pursuant to their delegated powers.

While Portfolio Holders have not been able to visit the offices, discussions relating to decision making have been made electronically / over the phone and electronic signatures / e-mail confirmation to decisions has been utilised.

A log of COVID-19 related Executive Decisions taken to date is attached as **Appendix B** for noting and endorsement by Cabinet. The log will be maintained going forward to ensure a corporate record is maintained.

On 25 March, the Leader of the Council took the decision to provide free car parking in Town Centres in order to support businesses and key workers. Cabinet is asked to approve the extension of free car parking in town centres until 7 September 2020. A report elsewhere on the Cabinet agenda will consider car parking further.

As referenced above, the Coronavirus Act 2020 and associated Regulations have made it possible to hold virtual Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings since 5 April 2020. The normal rules relating to the publication of the agenda 5 clear days in advance of the meeting still apply. The public still has to be able to see or hear the meeting taking place live. The Council held its first virtual meeting (the AGM) on 23 April. The Council's virtual meetings have been streamed live on our YouTube channel and the public has been able to participate in planning meetings. The rules relating to publication of key decisions and the call in procedures for Executive decisions remain in place as does the ability to take and implement urgent decisions under the Access to Information Procedure Rules 15 and 16 and Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 13 (Part 4 of the Constitution).

3. RECOVERY – INITIAL PLANS AND DRAFT STRATEGY

The COVID-19 crisis has had a significant impact nationally and across the District. The focus to date has been on the immediate coordinated response to support the District during the lockdown period as detailed above. Although this work will continue for some time, preparations are now underway to manage the relaxation of lockdown in accordance with the government phased approach and guidance, and to start looking ahead to the longer term issues and challenges that the District will face.

The recovery phase will see the Council support and coordinate the process of rebuilding, restoring and rehabilitating the emotional, social, economic and physical wellbeing of the community, businesses and the Council's employees.

The Draft Recovery Strategy is attached as Appendix D for consideration and approval by Cabinet. It is recognising this is a dynamic and evolving process and the Strategy may therefore require amendment during the course of the recovery phase.

The Council's recovery plan will cover two main strands:

- **Ashfield as a Place – Community and Economic Recovery**

Supporting the community and businesses in achieving stability and a new normality following COVID-19, assisting in rebuilding, restoring and rehabilitating the community's emotional, social, economic and physical wellbeing; and

- **The Council – Organisational Recovery**

Assessing the impact of COVID-19 on Council services, finances and employees and planning for its future financial resilience and how it will need to operate differently.

This work will be undertaken in a way which fully involves all stakeholders in order to develop the best possible forward plans, including our employees, residents, businesses and the voluntary sector.

Recovery Structure

In order to ensure the Recovery Phase of the incident is driven forward and monitored on a regular basis, an officer Recovery Group has been established as set out below:

- ❖ Chief Executive – Chair and Strategic Lead
- ❖ Director of Legal and Governance – ADC's Representative on LRF's RCG and Lead for Legal and Governance Sub-Group
- ❖ Director of Housing and Assets – Lead for Housing and Communities Sub-Group
- ❖ Director of Resources and Business Transformation – Lead for Council Services Sub-Group
- ❖ Director of Place and Communities – Lead for Economy Sub-Group
- ❖ Corporate Finance Manager (S151 Officer) – Lead for Finance Sub-Group
- ❖ Senior Communications Officer – Lead for Communications

Initially the Recovery Group will meet weekly as part of a dedicated item on the Corporate Leadership Team agenda. The frequency of meetings will be reviewed during the recovery process.

It is envisaged that each Sub-Group will adopt its own terms of reference or objectives in line with the corporate approach along with carrying out relevant impact assessment work and recovery plan each of which will feed into the overarching Council Recovery Plan.

Recovery Objectives

- ❖ Create a comprehensive overview of local impacts and opportunities by carrying out Impact Assessments for the community, businesses and Council Services.
- ❖ Develop a Recovery Action Plan to address all impacts set out within the Impact Assessments.
- ❖ Help to shape the future vision for the District.

- ❖ Identify potential funding sources to support recovery and ensure communities and businesses can access the support that is available.
- ❖ Establish close links with central government and maintain these throughout the recovery process.
- ❖ To contribute as an active partner in the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Local Resilience Partnership throughout the recovery process.
- ❖ Ensure the communities, businesses, partners and Council employees are fully involved in the recovery process.
- ❖ Establish a pro-active and integrated framework of support to businesses and others on the financial and commercial implications of the emergency.
- ❖ Ensure effective communications, building confidence and trust in recovery plans with stakeholders, communities, businesses and Council employees utilising collective channels and resources.
- ❖ Ensure effective protocols for political involvement and liaison (local and Parliamentary).
- ❖ Develop an exit strategy to ensure that recovery efforts can effectively become part of mainstream delivery.
- ❖ Identify best practice and lessons learned in order to support recovery and reduce the impact of similar incident scenarios occurring again where possible. This will involve engaging with Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Local Resilience Partners, other stakeholders and central government.

Approach to Recovery

Recovery needs to be done with businesses, the community and Council employees not to them.

- ❖ The Recovery Action Plan will be developed and delivered with full engagement with communities, businesses, the voluntary sector and Council employees, having conversations about the challenges ahead and ensuring that people are put first and that those most affected are not left behind.
- ❖ The Council will provide visible and strong leadership during the recovery phase.
- ❖ The Council will support and co-ordinate the process of recovery ensuring local communities, businesses and Council employees adjust to a new normality.

As part of the recovery phase, the Corporate Plan has been reviewed to take account of the impacts of COVID-19 and with a forward look to potential recovery plans. The refreshed Corporate Plan appears elsewhere on the Cabinet agenda for approval.

The Recovery Action Plan will be monitored by CLT, Cabinet, Scrutiny and Audit Committee (see below for details on the role of Scrutiny and Audit Committee).

The Council's Corporate Risk Register has been reviewed (and will be kept under review) to take account of impacts and increased risks as a result of COVID-19. The Corporate Risk Register appears elsewhere on the Cabinet agenda for noting and approval.

Role of Scrutiny in Recovery

Scrutiny is a strategic function of the Council, central to corporate governance, and an important part in the decision-making process. It provides Councillors not in decision-making roles with the opportunity to publicly hold to account Cabinet, and to investigate issues of interest and relevance to local people.

As with many of the Council's services, the role and approach of the scrutiny function will need to be appropriately altered alongside the COVID-19 crisis and during the recovery period.

Centre for Public Scrutiny Guidance

The Centre for Public Scrutiny is a national centre of expertise on governance and scrutiny, who work to promote the benefits and value of scrutiny and good governance. It has released a series of online guides designed to support councils on governance and scrutiny during COVID-19 and throughout the aftermath. The guides are intended to support councillors and officers on managing some of the challenges associated with the COVID-19 crisis.

The guides outline the importance of continued, robust member-led scrutiny during the COVID-19 crisis and sets out an approach to provide that scrutiny in a way that is proportionate and fits within the constrained resources that councils will have at their disposal.

The guides state that maintaining a form of scrutiny in the current crisis, and during the recovery process, is critical for several reasons:

- Substantial decisions will be being made which are likely to have an impact on the lives of residents and the places they live
 - The Council and its partners should be trying to draw on the perspective of as broad as possible a range of people as it responds to the crisis
 - Councillors have a vital role in feeding into and bolstering the COVID-19 response in the communities they serve, and the scrutiny function provides a mechanism for this work to feed into broader strategy
- The COVID-19 crisis will not be ending any time soon
- Scrutiny can consider how well partners are working together, overseeing the systems that contribute to smooth, effective decision-making, and bringing influence to bear on disagreements or blockages
 - There will be services in the local area exposed to unique pressures. Scrutiny can productively keep a watching brief on council and partner action on these matters
 - Scrutiny can act as a conduit for community experiences. Local people will feel isolated, and Members will be doing their best to provide support and assistance at ward level. Councils need a way of understanding how these trends are developing, and scrutiny can be a convenient way to draw those insights into the Council's corporate work.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny maintain that scrutiny can play a strong role in the debrief activity in the aftermath of the crisis.

Council Finances and Scrutiny

The final guide published by the Centre for Public Scrutiny covers the principal financial challenges for councils during and following the COVID-19 crisis, suggesting proportionate mechanisms by which scrutiny can work closely with the Council's Audit Committee to ensure that an understanding of finance and budget matters is built in to scrutiny work.

Scrutiny working in partnership with the Council's Audit Committee, will need to be able to:

- Know and understand the Council's method of financial reporting
- Understand how the Council is using financial information to inform decision-making
- Understand how financial information is being used to influence how risk is managed and mitigated

In order to ensure the Council's Scrutiny in relation to COVID-19 is robust and focussed, it is proposed to recommend the establishment of a new COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel to Council. A draft terms of reference for the Panel is attached as Appendix E for approval by Council. It is suggested that the Panel will review the Council's response to the pandemic and take an active role in respect of the Council's recovery plans as requested by the Cabinet or as agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the Scrutiny Workplan, including the Council's approach to the reform of local government services, including the future structure of local government in Nottinghamshire. It is recommended that the Panel be made up of 7 Members who are appointed in accordance with the requirements of political balance (**Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989**). The Council is asked to approve Special Responsibility Allowances for the roles of Chair and Vice-Chair which it is expected will be aligned with those of the existing Scrutiny Panels (£5,956 and £1,687 respectively), subject to having consulted with the Independent Remuneration Panel.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

Our Purpose

- The Council exists to serve the communities and residents of Ashfield District Council
- We will provide good quality, value for money services
- We will act strategically and plan for the future, working with others to bring about sustainable improvements in people's lives

Our Values

- People focussed – putting people at the heart of what we do
- Honest – being honest with people in an open and professional way
- Proud – being proud that Ashfield is a positive place to live, work and visit
- Ambitious – we are ambitious about Ashfield's future

Legal:

Ashfield District Council is a statutory Category One Responder under the **Civil Contingencies Act 2004** and works with multi agency partners through the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire LRF when dealing with Major Incidents.

Emergency and Urgent Decision powers are set out in the Council's Constitution as outlined above.

Emergency Financial Decisions:

- **Urgent Decisions outside the Budget or Policy Framework (Part 4 of the Constitution):**

The Executive, the Leader or Portfolio Holder or Chief Officers may take a decision which is contrary to the Council’s policy framework or contrary to or not wholly in accordance with the budget approved by Council if the decision is urgent. A decision is urgent if:

- a) It is not practical to convene a quorate meeting of the Council; and
- b) The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agrees that the decision is urgent.

- **Section 138 Local Government Act 1972**

Where an emergency or disaster involving destruction of or danger to life or property occurs, is imminent or there is reasonable ground for expecting such an emergency or disaster and it is likely to affect the whole or part of the District or its residents, the Council may:

- a) Incur such expenditure as they consider necessary in taking action themselves; and
- b) Make grants or loans to other persons or bodies on conditions determined by the Council in respect of any such action taken by those persons or bodies.

Coronavirus Act 2020 received Royal Assent on 25 March 2020. The Act has extensive schedules setting out a wide range of powers giving a framework to life under lockdown. Regulations have underpinned the details of the framework.

Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 requires that Committees of the Council are politically proportionate.

Finance:

Included in the body of the report.

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	Details of funding confirmed to date are included in the body of the report.
General Fund – Capital Programme	
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
The Council’s Corporate Risk Register has been reviewed to take account of impacts and increased risks as a result of COVID-19. The Corporate Risk Register appears elsewhere on the Cabinet agenda for noting and approval.	Monitoring and updating the COVID-19 related risks through the Council’s existing Corporate Risk Management processes and by additional scrutiny arrangements.

Human Resources:

Advice and guidance has been provided to employees throughout the pandemic based on government guidance.

Environmental/Sustainability

The COVID-19 lockdown period has undoubtedly led to an unprecedented reduction in CO2 emissions and a huge improvement in air quality. The challenge for the recovery phase is how to urgently restart the District's economy to protect the income and livelihoods of people whilst striving to capitalise on some of the positive environmental benefits enjoyed during the COVID-19 lockdown period and enable positive behaviour change that endures for the long term.

Equalities:

Equality impact assessment will be undertaken as part of the recovery phase when considering policy development/changes or service delivery changes.

The Disparities Report published by PHE referred to in the body of the report sets out some of the ways COVID-19 has impacted communities disproportionately. These inequalities of impact will need to be taken into account as part of the Council's ongoing response and its recovery plans.

Other Implications:

None.

Background Papers

None.

Report Author and Contact Officer

Carol Cooper-Smith
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Ruth Dennis
DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE
r.dennis@ashfield.gov.uk
01623 457009