

SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Meeting date: 22 May 020

From: John Readman - Executive Director People

Covid-19 Briefing – The Council’s Response to Date

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Scrutiny Management Board with an overview of the Council’s activity to date in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.0 Issues for Scrutiny

2.1 Scrutiny are asked to note the information below which provides an overview of the Council’s response to Covid-19 to date.

3.0 Background

3.1 **Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG):** As a category 1 responder as defined by the Civil Contingencies Act the County Council has been a standing and active participant in the SCG since its formation on 4th March. For the period 4th March to 20th March the County Council, through Colin Cox (Director of Public Health) chaired the SCG, since that date the SCG has been chaired by Assistant Chief Constable Andy Slattery of Cumbria Constabulary. The Director of Public Health has been a participant in the SCG throughout as has the Councils duty Assistant Director. The SCG declared Covid-19 as a Major Incident in Cumbria on 11th March 2020. Council officers also lead a number of sub-groups to the SCG, these are: Care Homes, PPE, Waste, Logistics, Multi-Agency Information Cell, Strategic Media Advisory Cell and Education.

3.2 **Changing How the Council Works to Prepare for Covid-19:** To prepare for the impacts of Covid-19 and to respond as the epidemic has developed in the UK the Council has needed to adopt significantly changes ways of working in a very short period of time. These changes have affected both how we provide our services, how our staff work and in cases which of our services we continue to provide during this challenging time.

Very significant changes and upgrades were made across a short period of time during March and early April to the Councils technology and

communications systems in order to enable home working for all staff for whom this could be accommodated and to support members to work from home. With greatly increased home working a number of council offices were closed for use and that those that have remained open have been operating with radically reduced staff working from them. Ensuring that all staff who can work from home are positively enabled to do so has enabled the Council to play its part in responding to the national strategy to “Stay at Home”.

In line with the national strategy to stay at home, the need to protect our staff and in many cases in line with sector specific guidance the way the Council delivers its services has changed in a number of areas. In some cases this has resulted in services being temporarily suspended. Decisions to change services or temporarily suspend have been subject to robust decision making and recording of decisions.

- 3.3 **Education & Vulnerable Children:** In early March Cumbria County Council and leaders across the education system established the Education Tactical Co-ordination Group (ETCG) as a sub-group of the SCG. Chaired and led by Dan Barton (Assistant Director Education and Skills) this group has overseen the temporary closure of schools and the establishment of a network school hubs to provide education and childcare to the children of key workers and vulnerable children. Disadvantaged and vulnerable children have been a priority throughout. On 31 March the DfE introduced a national voucher system, and where possible head teachers have been ensuring children entitled to Free School Meals pupils are getting vouchers. Work is currently underway to provide free laptops and IT equipment for disadvantaged and vulnerable children in year 10.

The council has provided regular updates to families, schools and childcare settings throughout the period which are available on the Councils website. The information made available has been extremely broad and includes things like guidance on Covid-19 testing for school staff, guidance on social distancing, guidance on personal protective equipment and updates on national policy developments. A key area of focus has also been on ensuring that between schools and social work teams the needs and circumstances of vulnerable children have been regularly monitored through regular teacher and social worker contact with the family / child, reporting and responding to concerns and maintaining access to education in the hubs or at SEN schools for vulnerable children. Our social work teams have adopted a clear risk based approach to ensure that the wellbeing of those Children about whom the Council has the greatest level of concern is regularly monitored.

- 3.4 **Health and Social Care:** The Councils response across health and social care has been characterised by strong partnership work and system leadership with health including both the Clinical Commissioning Groups in Cumbria and both the Hospital Trusts in the County along with NHS England and wider partners. Significant work has been undertaken to support hospital discharge which has made a significant contribution to ensuring that hospitals in Cumbria have maintained sufficient capacity to care for covid-19 positive patients. Adult social care teams have been providing a 7-day per

week services on extended hours during the incident and have continued to review changes to care packages arising from Covid-19 to ensure people are safe and in receipt of care and support proportionate to their needs.

The Council has also worked to support increases in the availability of testing in Cumbria. This has involved close partnership with NHS England, hospital trusts, Public Health England, military planners and district councils.

- 3.5 **Care Homes and Home Care:** The Council has and continues to undertake, in partnership with agencies across the NHS and public sector, a great deal of work in support of care homes. This includes daily monitoring of infection rates of both residents and staff across care homes and of domiciliary care, supporting infection control, provision of personal protective equipment, testing, additional staffing support and supporting the management of hospital discharge. The work of the Council has been related to both our own directly delivered services in Cumbria Care and in support of organisations in the independent sector providing care homes and home care services.
- 3.6 **Waste Management:** The 14 household waste recycling centres (HWRCs) were closed to the public from 25th March 2020 following the receipt of Government Guidelines. The HWRC's were re-opened on 12th May. Through leadership of the Waste Sub-Group the Council has worked to support the maintenance of critical waste collection and disposal services through measures such as redeployment of HGV drivers, vehicles and welfare facilities into the services. The Waste sub-group closely monitored incidents of fly tipping and worked to implement measures to address this.
- 3.7 **Shielding Hubs:** On Monday 30 March 2020 Cumbria County Council and partners launched an emergency support service comprising 6 welfare coordination hubs and a call centre. Established in just 5 days the hubs have been vital in helping thousands of vulnerable people across County. Receiving on average 200 contacts a day via telephone, online or email the most common requests have been for help with medication and prescription collections, food supplies and from family members who are isolating or live far away and are worried about elderly loved ones who they would normally care for.
- 3.8 **Personal Protective Equipment:** Local Resilience Forum's (LRF) across England have been to receiving stocks of PPE from the UK Government with Cumbria's first delivery was made on 5th April. The Council has led the management and distribution of this PPE providing management, storage, logistics, distribution and call centre. The LRF PPE is supplied to a wide range of organisations where they cannot obtain PPE from other sources. The management of the LRF PPE is overseen by the PPE sub-group which is chaired by the County Council. The Council has also undertaken significant procurement of PPE to ensure the necessary volumes are available to Council staff and to independent organisations in the social care and education sectors upon whose services the Council relies to discharge its statutory duties.

- 3.9 **Highways and Construction:** In order to ensure social distancing and to respond to the guidance during the lockdown period the Council temporarily suspended the majority of highways maintenance and construction activity. As further national guidance has been developed and safe working methods developed the Council has gradually and in a carefully planned manor begun to bring this activity back on stream.

Stephen Hall
Assistant Director Economy and Environment
14.05.2020

Appendices

No appendices

Previous Relevant Council or Executive Decisions

Review of the Temporary Closure of Libraries and Archives 03.04.2020
Temporary Closure of Libraries and Archives 20.03.2020
Allocation of Covid-19 Emergency Funding for Local Government 07.04.2020
Establishment of the Local Committee Covid-19 Response Fund 02.04.2020

Background Papers

No background papers

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