
Review of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic

Committee considering report:	Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission
Date of Committee:	12 th October 2021
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Lynne Doherty
Date Head of Service agreed report: (for Corporate Board)	16.9.2021
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	16.9.2021
Report Author:	Joseph Holmes (Executive Director – Resources)
Forward Plan Ref:	

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an overarching summary of West Berkshire Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic for the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission (OSMC) to consider.
- 1.2 The report highlights the key areas of the response to the pandemic based around the timeline of the pandemic and the various schemes, projects and response actions that took place across the Council. The report is structured to look at those actions across three areas; to residents as a whole across the district, to service users and to businesses. It should also be noted that the pandemic remains and at the time of writing rates in the district remain at above the national average.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 For the OSMC to note the report
- 2.2 For the OSMC to consider a wider more structured de-brief post pandemic to include the wider health based and community organisations

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary			
Financial:	The report itself does not have any financial implications; though the impact of the pandemic on the financial position of the Council is highlighted within the report.			
Human Resource:	None directly from this report; though the impact on staff is referenced			
Legal:	None			
Risk Management:	N/A as the paper is part of a review.			
Property:	None			
Policy:	None – no policy proposals in the paper			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		None – this is not a paper for decision
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		x		None – this is not a paper for decision

Environmental Impact:		X		None – the pandemic has seen an impact on the environment, but this paper is a review of actions taken with no proposed decisions
Health Impact:		X		None – the pandemic has seen a significant impact on the health of the district, but this paper is a review of actions taken with no proposed decisions
ICT Impact:		x		None – the pandemic has seen an impact on our ICT services, but this paper is a review of actions taken with no proposed decisions
Digital Services Impact:		X		None – the pandemic has seen an impact and enhancement to our digital offer to residents, but this paper is a review of actions taken with no proposed decisions
Council Strategy Priorities:		X		None
Core Business:		X		None – no proposals in this paper
Data Impact:		x		None – no proposals in this paper
Consultation and Engagement:	This paper has required the input from a wide range of officers involved in the Council's response to Covid-19, e.g. Executive Directors, Service Directors, Heads of Service and the TVLRF.			

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 This report is being considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Management Commission (OSMC) to provide an overview as to the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and to enable members to consider and scrutinise the Council's response to the pandemic. It is important to note that the Covid-19 numbers remain comparative high both locally and nationally at the time of writing and that the pandemic continues after 18 months since March 2020.

- 4.2 There are no particular recommendations to this report; it is for the OSMC to consider and highlight if it wishes further information or to consider some of the elements of the Council's response in any more detail.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

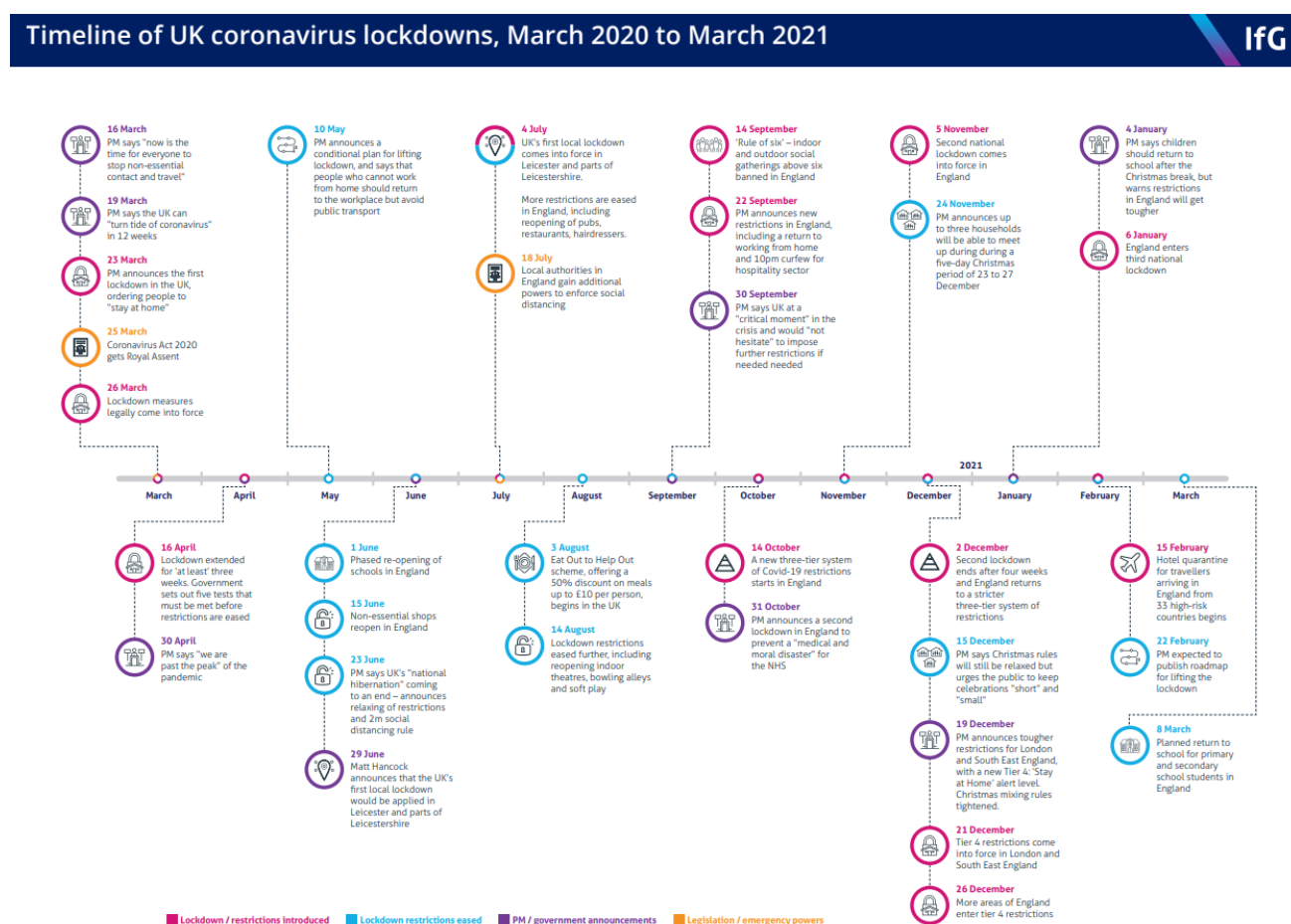
- 5.1 This report is seeking to set out the key timelines from the Covid-19 pandemic and West Berkshire Council's response to the pandemic and the various actions that took place.
- 5.2 The report is structured to enable members of the committee to consider the various impacts of the pandemic, and the Council's response to these, across the various stakeholders that the Council has, and primarily:
- (a) Residents
 - (b) Service Users
 - (c) Businesses

Background

- 5.3 The Covid-19 pandemic had an impact across all Council services. Though this paper is focused on the Council's response to the pandemic, and so does not go into detail of partners' responses, nor that of the community in depth, the Council does wish to recognise the tremendous efforts of the community and other organisations in responding to the pandemic as well as recognising, and expressing our sympathy for those who have died or who have seen such a significant change to their lives as a result of the pandemic.
- 5.4 A timeline, and the overall impacts of the pandemic, are described later in the report, however the below is an overview of the some of the impact by numbers. Over the past 18 months from March 2020 to September 2021:
- (a) Over 11,000 residents have had Covid-19 (as of 7th September 2021)
 - (b) 256 residents have died due to Covid-19 (i.e. within 28 days of a positive Covid-19 test), including two members of the Council's staff
 - (c) 17,900 residents' wages were funded through the furlough scheme at the peak of the take up (Jun 2020)
 - (d) 4190 people contacted the Community Hub Support between 23rd March 2020 and the beginning of July 2021
 - (e) Approximately 90 community groups, representing 2000 local volunteers, stood up to assist in the response – this included a number of pre-existing community groups as well as Town and Parish Councils also responded to provide practical support for members of their community.

- (f) Various pieces of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) were delivered by the Council
 - (g) A number of asymptomatic, mobile testing and vaccination sites were established, providing 'community collect' and assisted testing. This included the testing site at Newbury Showground as well as the Vaccination Centres at Madjeski Stadium and Newbury Racecourse and Quarantine Hotels
 - (h) In excess of £100m of business rate relief and grants have been distributed
- 5.5 Though these numbers do not capture the impact on individuals and various responses that the Council made throughout the period, they do set the scene for some of the impacts that the Council needed to respond to.
- 5.6 The results of our response to Covid-19 crisis are reflected by the statistical indicators reported as part of the Council's performance management framework (including the Recovery Dashboard – appendix A).
- 5.7 The measures available indicate that the District has coped better in response to Covid-19 challenges compared with other parts of the country.
- 5.8 The strong economy and more favourable social characteristics, placed the district in a stronger position and the work with our local communities and partner organisations protected lives and livelihoods ([West Berkshire Community Hub](#)).
- 5.9 The Covid-19 infections peaked in January 2021 but, compared with other local authorities in England, the cumulative rate remained in the [lowest \(best\) quartile](#). In addition, the district has achieved a [high percentage of Covid-19 vaccinations](#) for those age groups due to receive the vaccines.
- 5.10 Tragically, the District has not been immune to the impacts of Covid-19 and some residents have lost their life following Covid-19 infections. It is considered that the work with our communities and partner organisations before and during the pandemic has made the District more resilient and the data available shows that the cumulative Covid-19 associated rate of deaths per 100,000 population in West Berkshire remained in the lowest quartile compared to the other 152 single tier and county councils in England.
- 5.11 Given the national, regional and local response to Covid-19 challenges, the socio-economic indicators shows that the district is recovering better than other areas. In addition, the work of our Council staff and members ensured that the core services of the Council continued to be deliver at a high standard. Even improvement work included in our strategies and plans, set up before the pandemic, has continued to be delivered. In addition, where services have not been able to deliver their activity as normal, due to the restrictions and challenges of the pandemic, alternative and innovative ways have been identified to ensure that residents, especially the most vulnerable ones are supported appropriately.

Timeline (taken from the Institute for Government – March 2020 to March 2021)



Governance

5.12 At the inception of the pandemic and following the Government's announcement to stop non-essential contact and travel, the Council set up an emergency response framework on 16th March 2020. This required the establishment and co-ordination of various groups. These different groups, their frequency of meeting, and purpose are included in Table 1.1. We established regular meetings and communications with Head teachers of all WB schools, including the independent sector. During periods of restricted access to school, when they were open for key worker children and those with a social worker, our Educational Welfare Service made contact with families where the offer of a place had not been taken up. Education has provided seven day per week Covid-19 support and advice, via subject experts.

Table 1.1. WBC Covid-19 pandemic governance

Group (and attendees)	Frequency and end date	Purpose
<p>Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum (TVLRF) Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG)</p> <p>WBDC and RBWM CEOs representing Berkshire Councils.</p>	<p>Start – December 2020 (flights to Brize Norton from Wuhan)</p> <p>End – meeting monthly for strategic overview.</p>	<p>A strategic multi-agency group including Emergency Services, NHS leads, Councils, Military and MHCLG representative with the remit of coordinating the response across the Thames Valley.</p>
<p>TVLRF Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG)</p> <p>Paul Anstey, Gary Lugg and Jon Winstanley represented WBDC</p>	<p>Start – December 2020 (flights to Brize Norton from Wuhan)</p> <p>End – March 2021 (Hibernation)</p>	<p>A multi-agency group including Emergency Services, NHS leads, Councils, Military and MHCLG representative with the remit of putting in place the actions required by the SCG.</p>
<p>TVLRF Subgroups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Logistics Cell – re PPE (Peter Walker) Community Hub (Susan Powell/Jonah Maddocks) Adult Social Care (Paul Coe/ Jo England/ Carolyn Richardson) Testing Coordination Cell (Abbee Robinson/Carolyn Richardson) Excess Deaths Cell (Sean Murphy/Amy Gower) Managed Quarantine Hotels (Carolyn Richardson) Vaccination Cell (Andy Sharp/Carolyn Richardson) 	<p>Various start and finish dates throughout the pandemic. Some are currently live whilst others are in hibernation</p>	<p>To specifically drill down into the activities relating to their group to develop a plan and ensure the issues are mitigated.</p>

Group (and attendees)	Frequency and end date	Purpose
Berkshire West Health Protection Board	Commenced July 2020 Fortnightly	The primary role of the HPB was the ongoing development and delivery of the Local Outbreak Plan, work with the relevant TV LRF Cells, make recommendations to the pan Berkshire Recovery and Response Group on allocation of resources and respond to mutual aid requirements.
GOLD Core attendees: Chief Executive, Leader, Deputy Leader, Executive Directors, Public Health Comms, Service Manager Emergency Planning Others at various stages included leads for: Community Support Hub Testing programmes Contact Tracing	Start – 23 February 2020 Various – between 3 times a week and fortnightly End – June 2021	The GOLD Command Group was in overall control of the councils resources throughout the pandemic. It consists of the Chief Executive, Council Leader, Executive Directors, Communications, Emergency Planning and Public Health. GOLD Command will took decisions around local restriction measures in discussion with the Director of the Public Health
SILVER Chief Executive, Leader, Executive and Service Directors, Heads of Service, leads for Business Continuity from Services (BCLOs), various 3 rd tier managers, Comms, Emergency Planning	Start – 20 March 2020 Various – between 3 times a week and fortnightly End – June 2021	To ensure the activities in relation to the Councils management of COVID-19 are on track, raising any issues to the normal governance structure

Group (and attendees)	Frequency and end date	Purpose
Recovery Group	Fortnightly from 19 th May 2020- present	Co-ordinate the Council's recovery efforts Oversee the Recovery Strategy and plans Monitor on-going Covid-19 impact
Covid-19 co-ordinating cell (CCC) Public Health, PPP, Emergency Planning, Education, ASC, CFS, Communications, H&S, others as necessary	From 28 June 2021 Weekly End – to review at end of Sept 2021	To ensure the activities in relation to the Councils management of COVID-19 are on track, raising any issues to the normal governance structure
Local Outbreak Control Board (LOEB) Members, Public Health, Executive Officers, Communications, PPP, CCG	July 2020 Fortnightly meetings	The primary roles of the LOEB are to provide political ownership and oversight relating to an outbreak response, provide direction and leadership for community engagement, and approve public facing communications.
Governance and Ethics Committee Operations Board Corporate Board	6 monthly Quarterly Ongoing	Governance of the Risk management framework (Q2 2019/20 risk register updated to include risk of pandemic with mitigation including Business Continuity plans and work at regional level).

5.13 The primary meeting for decision-making purposes was the GOLD meeting. This was to support the Chief Executive in making decisions using the Emergency Powers element of the Council's constitution as well as to coordinate key activities across the Council.

Table 1.2: Impact and response for Residents

Item	Timescales	WBC actions	Review of activity
Community Support Hub setup	17 th March 2020	BCT Team abstracted from normal duties to set up Community Support Hub	An initial contact point and subsequent Community Support Hub function was created very promptly
	19 th March 2020	Dedicated phone number and email address published in Newbury Weekly News	The role of the Hub and how to make contact was efficiently communicated
	23 rd March 2020	Emergency Planning equipment and systems utilised to establish the Hub within Council	Existing equipment and ways of working were utilised and adapted to enable the Hub to established promptly
	From 19 th March 2020	Dynamic relationship with the Contact Centre developed to deal with incoming calls	The link with the Contact Centre was essential
	March 2020	Platform for recording/case managing contacts developed	The creation of a bespoke platform for case managing contacts to the Hub was essential and highly beneficial
	March 2020	Contact with Community Groups established and database created	Community Groups were very proactive in their communication with the Hub
	March 2020	Hub Bulletin created and distributed to Community Groups and via WB Volunteer Centre (weekly initially)	Community Groups responded positively to the Hub Bulletin
	March 2020 – August 2020	Hub Core Group meetings established (weekly initially)	There was consistent and committed attendance to Hub Core Group meetings
	April 2020 – September 2020	Hub Silver meetings established (weekly initially)	There was consistent and committed attendance to Hub Silver meetings

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	April 2020	Newbury Rugby Club utilised for weekly collection point for Food Parcels provided by Food Banks to Community Groups	Transport Team worked collaboratively with Food Bank and Hub Officer coordinated Community Groups
	May 2020	Staffing Rota for weekend cover for the Hub established	Officers volunteered to work in Hub roles both at weekends and in addition to normal duties
	June 2020	Letter sent to all Shielding/CEV residents still receiving Government Food Parcels as Shielding was ending to ensure that their food needs were being met – signposting to local Food Banks where appropriate	Meetings with Food Bank providers enabled more collaboration
	June 2020	Meetings held with local Food Banks to support collaboration	
		Operational links between Hub and Covid Coordination Cell established	
	July 2021	Hub Operational Function transition into PPP	
Communications	March 2020-present	Additional resource deployed in to central communications team to provide extra capacity.	These actions were taken in a timely manner and proved very effective. Engagement rates on social media and with our newsletters were significantly higher than before the pandemic.

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		Initially volunteers were sought from across the council and officers were redeployed from all service areas to Strategy and Governance. When redeployed officers returned to their substantive role in June 2020, Covid funding was used to employ agency staff on an ad-hoc basis.	<p>According to the Residents Survey undertaken in July 2020:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 52.3% of Residents Survey respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with service delivery (vs 13.1% dissatisfied) • 56% of people responded positively to Covid response (v 4.7% negatively) • Reporting a problem was the most common reason cited for contacting us • 62.2% of respondents described service as excellent or good (vs 15.7% poor or very poor) • 21% had interacted with us on social media, 42% had used website, 62% were receiving e-newsletter <p>The survey's findings informed the Recovery and Renewal Strategy.</p>
	July 2020		
	Sept. 2020	Procurement and rollout of Gov. Delivery newsletter system	Significant increase in effectiveness and scale of the Council's communications
		Launch of Berkshire Public Health Covid Website	40,000 visitors on average per month (100,000 when the tier system came in)
Outbreak Management	June 2020	Publication of Outbreak Management Plan	A local outbreak control plan was published that detailed how we would respond of local outbreaks and rising community transmission. This included over 15 high risk setting action cards.

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	June 2020	CV19 Hot desk	Specialist local cells set-up e.g. surveillance cell A single point of contact to record, management and provide advice to local high risk settings led by PPP
	Autumn 2020 / Ongoing	Community Testing set up (static and mobile testing)	A number of fixed asymptomatic testing sites were established across West Berkshire. This was followed by a mobile testing van and subsequently the availability of assisted asymptomatic testing. This has since transitioned to targeted testing focusing on the hard to reach
	September 2020	Berkshire Health Protection Cell established	Substantial resources provided to Shared Berkshire Public Health Team to provide specialist advice on testing, event management and outbreak control
PPE	Ongoing	PPE Guidance	Developed local PPE Guidance to support the health and social care workforce and schools
	Summer 2020	Distribution of PPE	Worked with the LRF to establish local PPE stock and issued to high risk settings, schools and Council facilities where stocks were low
Setting up local test and trace	Sept 2020	Test and Trace payments (£500) issued to eligible individuals	Council created an online form to process these payments in line with Government guidance. 270 payments (£135k) in 2020-21 and 218 (£109k) in 2021-22 to 1 st Sept.

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	Oct 2020	Local Contact Tracing Partnership created to support the national test and trace service	Over 25 people trained in contact tracing. Dealt with approximately 15% of all local cases
Covid-19 marshals	58	Setup marshals to support Covid-19 measures put in place	Regular reporting to GOLD on issues of non-compliance enabling review of any changes needed
Resident's survey	May – June 2020	Delivered a survey to gauge resident's views of the pandemic and the impact on future impact on services	The headline findings showed an inequality of how residents had been impacted by Covid-19 and how their physical and mental health was affected as well as views on re-opening of shops and supporting the local economy ¹ .
Vaccinations	January 2021	Set-up local vaccine inequalities group Commission Vaccine Bus	Aim was to increase uptake and reduce vaccine hesitancy Provide funding for Oxford Health to support vaccination role out in
Town and Parish Councils	April 2020 March 2021	Creation of £500 floats for T&P Councils and community groups to access funds to individuals Funding to town Council to recompense for significant income losses	Take up by five organisations One bid (approved) for funding due to income loss

¹ <http://info.westberks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=49030&p=0>

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Members bids	July 2020 – January 2021	Set aside funding for £1k per member to support town and parishes in their recovery from the 1 st wave of the pandemic	<p>A total of 44 awards for 33 members totalling £30k were provided. Funding included for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources needed to open community buildings safely – PPE, signage, sanitisers, screens and other additional costs. • Christmas trees and lights to provide a focal point in communities to raise spirits at Christmas time. • Road safety initiatives including road markings and a speed control initiative. • Computers / tablets for schools to provide to children learning from home and access for online learning. • Improvements to outdoor community facilities such as park and playgrounds – fencing, benches, access, pond project, wildflower community project and improvements to a climbing frame. <p>Other projects including insulated waterproof coats for a nursery school, outdoor sinks for a nursery school and contribution to the funds of a Covid-19 community support group</p>

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Recovery Strategy	May 2020 to present	<p>Established initial Recovery Strategy in July 2020</p> <p>Updated and revised Recovery Strategy in June 2021²</p>	<p>Actions in the delivery plan completed or ongoing and merged into the below</p> <p>Proposed schemes coming forward from June 2021.</p>
Ensuring sufficient staffing resource in the Council to deliver services	March 2020 to present	'Covid-19 secure' offices setup	<p>Quickly ensured that services could be delivered from Council offices. Reception closed initially but then re-opened (with shorter hours) then realigned to BAU hours. ICT acted as 'hub' for in-office activity. Rota of senior 'responsible person' staff at main offices. One of few Councils locally to have the office open for staff, though restricted occupancy, to support operation of the Council.</p> <p>In contrast to other local authorities, West Berkshire Council took the decision to offer an in person service to vulnerable residents seeking support throughout the pandemic. A recent survey undertaken of other authorities in the region showed that some are still to re-open their public facing customer services so this decision sets us apart from others and ensured that those most in need did not experience an interruption in service.</p>

² <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=49071&p=0>

		IT services delivered for staff	<p>Major issuance of (@100) laptops and ICT equipment and upgrades (Windows 10 roll out) to enable staff to work from home securely. Within hours work was rolling out support for staff to keep working through four additional servers. Some slow connectivity at points as more staff worked at home, but no significant service impact for residents and businesses. Post and/or equipment scanned or sent to staff. Wi-Fi installed in four care homes. Telephony and IT equipment provided for test & trace service.</p> <p>Roll out of zoom from March 2020 for all staff to video conference</p>
		HR monitoring of C-19 sickness levels	<p>No major service issues due to WBC staff C-19 sickness, though pressure across the Council where this did occur. Employee assistance programme (EAP) setup</p>
		Increase flexibility of working arrangements	<p>Allowed a much more flexible working pattern for staff to be able to continue service delivery whilst balancing unusual personal demands (e.g. home schooling, childcare, dealing with isolation). Staff survey results show that 84% of staff considered the Council a Supportive and Very supportive employer (only 2% gave a negative response).</p>

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Setting up democracy online	March 2020 to present	Online meetings setup for enabling democratic decision-making	<p>Utilising zoom meant we were one of the earlier Councils to have public meetings online (first meeting was personnel committee 24/4/20) and change procedures to enable this and public participation virtually.</p> <p>Meetings have evolved to enable hybrid meetings from May 2021 and greater in-person engagement as well as retaining an online presence.</p>
Public Health safety messaging		Different messages online and in specific locations.	Regular communication activity from the Council, including on social media to support the overall public health messages nationally and locally. Especially relevant when in tiered areas for example.
Covid-19 leaflet		Leaflet to all residents	Supporting the messaging around the pandemic and actions that the public could take and measures and information from the Council.
Protection of lives and livelihoods	April 2020	See Supporting businesses section below.	Support for businesses and employees maintained the % of population receiving benefits due to unemployment lower than regional and national levels. Economic activity and employment rates showed resilience of District.

Table 1.3: Impact and response for Service Users

Item	Value / £k	WBC actions	Review of activity
Contain Outbreak Management fund (COMF)	4,682	Includes all activity to contain local outbreaks; mainly funding public health, test & trace, outbreak management, prevention measures, recovery activity and communications	Activity is on-going but helping to contain the pandemic in line with overall numbers highlighted above
Provision of school equipment	20	Provision of laptops to 87 pupils, plus additional funds through Greenham Common Trust and member bids	Helped to support education from home during various lockdown periods and continue the sufficiency of education.
DEFRA scheme	103	Merged into the Winter scheme, see below	Scheme became a more holistic scheme with additional funding included per the below
Clinically Extremely vulnerable (CEV)	358	Contact all of the individuals on the CEV register who were shielding	During the first lockdown we contact over 2700 individuals during the first lockdown who indicated that they needed support
Supporting the Early Years sector	226	All settings were given the opportunity to apply for a business support grant. The grant was provided on a sliding scale dependent on setting size	Not all settings applied so not all of the grant was allocated. All settings who received the grant were very appreciative of the financial support this gave at a challenging time.

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		(numbers of places offered).	
Infection control in Adult Social Care settings	2,800	Allocation of funding to various ASC providers to support infection control measures	
Holiday Activity Programme	404	Worked with partners to put together a programme for holiday activities including 16 free days of activity in the summer 2021	
Libraries		Changed opening arrangements following moving to tiering system. At home system commenced. Amnesty on fines for periods of the pandemic.	
HWRC (Household Waste and Recycling Centres)	7	Creation of a booking system for accessing HWRC	Newtown Road Recycling Centre 156,190 Padworth Recycling Centre 101,910 Total 258,100 97% completed online, 3% by phone
Pausing car parking charges	@£600-700	Temporary pause from April – June 2020	Used to support key workers, residents and those businesses that were allowed to still trade

Impact and response for Businesses

5.14 The Government and Council provided a variety of new schemes to support business throughout the pandemic. A summary of these are provided below. The Business Grant provided became quite complicated as various different schemes were introduced by the Government to target different segments of the business community. The Government distributed these grants through 'BEIS', Department for Business, Economy and Industrial Strategy.

Table 1.4: Support for Businesses

Item	Value to WBC business	Funder	Timescales	Comments
Changes to Licensing arrangements	Approximately 100K lost income across all PPP authorities. Introduction of Licensing Liaison Officers – West Berkshire Share £30K	WBC with MHCLG Covid grant	Ongoing Ongoing	PPP is a shared service covering West Berkshire, Bracknell and Wokingham. Licensing supported business by holding licences and other measures including the provision of advice through visits and other routes
Pause of Business Rates payments	£3m of deferral of payments	WBC – cash flow cost	April – May 2020	Optional scheme implemented to delay Direct Debits and BRates payments due from businesses
Business Rates relief 2020-21	£38.1m	BEIS	WBC distributed by 30th June 2020	New Rate Relief Scheme introduced 19 th March 2020 after Annual Bills issued meaning that 2,500 bills were reissued by June 2020
Temporary pedestrianisation of Newbury Town Centre	n/a	WBC	1/6/2020-31/8/2021	Temporary pedestrianisation to facilitate social distancing in town centres and better use of space by hospitality businesses for tables

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Item	Value to WBC business	Funder	Timescales	Comments
				and chairs across the summer
Business grants – Retail, hospitality and leisure (RHL) and small businesses (rateable value under £51,000)	£29.4m	BEIS	All Councils needed to create a scheme and distribute from 13th May 2020 to 31 st October 2020	Took the decision to not pay through usual software supplier and contacted all eligible businesses for e-mail details. This took time, but meant that WBC was able to quickly pay out large sums and in later schemes (not known at the time) massively improved our efficiency of paying businesses. On 19 th April had paid 59% of eligible business and was 234 th of 314 Councils). By the 17 th May, WBC had paid 94.2% of eligible businesses (21 st of 314 Councils in the country).
Discretionary grants scheme ³	£1.2m	BEIS	All Councils needed to create a scheme and distribute from 13th May 2020 to 31 st October 2020	WBC was the 6 th council in the country to develop a scheme and commence payments. All payments were made within a month.
Support for the Re-opening of the High Street	£72k	MHCLG	Funding was allocated under the Re-Opening High Streets	Officers asked town centre managers and parish councils what measures were required to re-open their towns.

³ "This additional fund is aimed at small businesses who were not eligible for the Small Business Grant Fund or the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Fund" - BEIS

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Item	Value to WBC business	Funder	Timescales	Comments
			Safely Fund to facilitate socially distanced re-opening	Signage, parking pay suspensions and the relocation of street furniture was carried out under the scheme, which had stringent ERDF guidance.
Local Services Restriction Grant (LRSG) – Nov-Dec	£5.5m	BEIS	Funds were distributed between November 2020 and June 2021 where successful applications made. First payments made 10 th November 2020	National guidance produced but constant revisions meant it was difficult to administer
LSRG – 19 th Dec. 2020 to 4 th Jan. 2021	£5.1m	BEIS	Continuation of above with first payments being made in January 2021	As above
LSRG – 5 th Jan. 2021 to April 2021	Amounts for this grant was added to the LRSG grant for Nov - Dec	BEIS	Continuation of above scheme with further payments being made in January and March 2021	As above

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Item	Value to WBC business	Funder	Timescales	Comments
Wet-led pubs (Christmas Support payment)	£95k £1k from BEIS, topped up with further £1k by WBC	50:50 between BEIS and WBC	Applications received from pubs etc. to cover the Christmas period where the temporary severely impacted income. First payment made 23 rd December	48 establishments were given this additional assistance
Closed Business Lockdown payment	£6.6m	BEIS	Additional Scheme introduced by Government for business who were forced to close due to the restrictions	Payments ranged from £4000 for small businesses to £9000 for larger ones.
Restart Grants	£7.9m	BEIS	Payments allowed from 1 st April	WBC opted to directly award rather than made business complete a separate claim form due to details already in existence and other counter-fraud checks made. As at end of April WBC had made nearly all payments expected and had 63 rd ⁴ highest percentage (79%) of payments made nationally. As at the end of April 2021, 51

⁴ This was based on Government estimates of eligible businesses rather than WBC estimates. If the latter had been used in league tables from BEIS the WBC % figure would have been higher.

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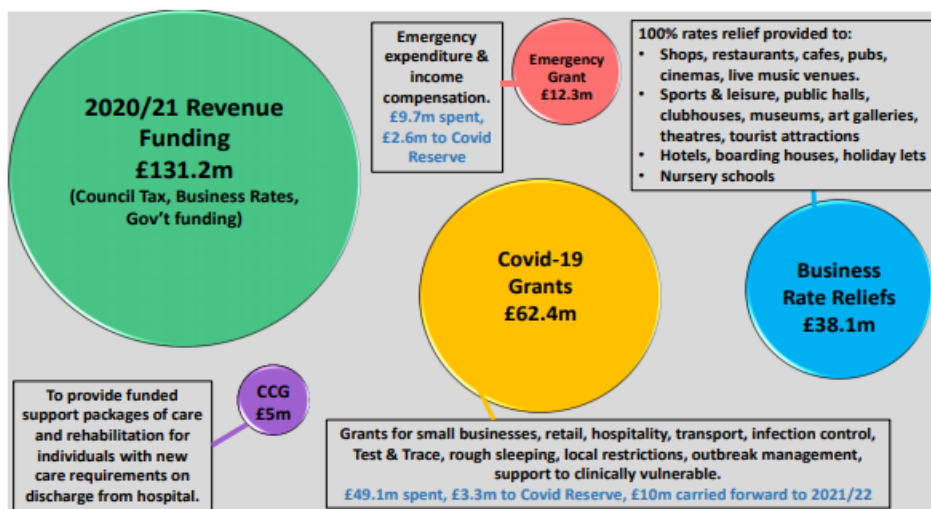
Item	Value to WBC business	Funder	Timescales	Comments
				<p>Councils had made no payments at this date.</p> <p>Criteria completely different to previous schemes.</p> <p>At the closure of the scheme 93.4% of the grant (estimated from BEIS) had been paid</p>
Additional Restrictions Grant – 1 st funding element	£4.6m	BEIS	Oct. 2020 – March 2022 ⁵	Scheme provided quickly from November 2020 into (eventually) 6 different elements. Administered mainly through the economic development team.
Additional Restrictions Grant – 2 nd funding element	£1.5m ⁶	BEIS	Aug. 2021 – March 2022	Revised scheme put in place to focus on those businesses still impacted by Covid-19 e.g. travel, as well as some funding for hardship.
Business Rates relief 2021-22	18m	BEIS	April 2021 to July 2021	Revised scheme put into place – 100% rate relief awarded from 1 st April to 30 th June then 66% from 1 st July to 31 st March. State Aid / Subsidy Allowance rules meaning that fewer businesses qualified after 1 st July

⁵ Original timescales – BEIS then changed the timeframe to allow for a 2nd funding element *if* a Council had spent its original allocation by June 2021 (this was subsequently changed to by July 2021 by BEIS).

⁶ The remaining element was eventually circa £1.2m as some of this funding was used in the 1st funding element due to timescales from BEIS.

Financial Impact

5.15 There has been a significant financial impact on the Council due to the pandemic. The Government has provided substantial funding to the Council to support the various schemes and activities. These are summarised in the financial outturn report for 2020-21⁷



5.16 This summary is solely in respect of 2020-21 and during the 2021-22 financial year there has been further funding, primarily:

- £3.2m of non-ring-fenced funds to support the wider Covid-19 impact on budgets (this has been allocated to services per the 2021-22 budget setting paper)
- Q1 of income compensation scheme
- Business Rates reliefs for 2021-22 per the table in the response to businesses section
- A further £1.5m of Additional Restrictions Grant funding
- A continuation of the Winter Grant Scheme for some of the year

5.17 In the short term, 2020-22, the Council has managed its finances well to support services through the pandemic. Funding has been allocated to services where pressures exist due to Covid-19 or where specific Government Grants have been provided. During the pandemic, in 2020-21, the Council saw an underspend of £4.6m, though £2.8m of this underspend has been allocated to support the 2021-22 budget.

5.18 There will be a longer term impact on the Council's finances. This is unknown at present, but car parking income is unlikely to rebound to 100% of what it was before pandemic

as more retailers have enhanced their digital offering. Social Care will be impacted in both Adult and Children's Social Care as demand returns to these service areas.

Reflections on the Council's response

5.19 It is impossible for the Council to compare its response to anything that has occurred before, as the pandemic has had such a significant and lengthy impact on the community beyond any previous emergency the Council has responded to. On reflection, though, the Council put in place at pace a wide range of measures that have supported its communities and businesses throughout the pandemic. Where comparative information does exist, for example on the speed of distributing business grants, setting up online and hybrid meetings, maintaining customer services and enacting Government schemes, the Council has shown itself to be swift in its response.

What will be retained?

5.20 There will be a range of activities that will be retained beyond the pandemic from what the Council has learned over the last eighteen months. The bullet points below articulate some of the key areas:

- (a) Remembering those that we have lost as a district and as staff
- (b) Improvements to local democracy through:
 - Livestreaming public meetings enabling the public to ask questions and see meetings without having to attend in person (and watch these back)
 - Using the communications tools for newsletters about the Council as well as specific areas that different people will be interested in e.g. Environment newsletter or Economic Development
 - Improving the Council's website and access to this, to enable residents to find out information on topics that may interest them
 - Utilising a Resident's survey to gain a more holistic understanding of key issues facing residents concerning, for this period, the Covid-19 pandemic
- (c) Improvements to customer service through greater access to digital services enabling more residents and businesses to access services when they want to. Review the ability to roll-out online meetings for customers to reduce the need to come into offices and to enable greater flexibility and convenience
- (d) Build on the relationship with businesses who the Council may not have had much contact with before following the distribution of grants to share support available to enable greater economic development within the district
- (e) Celebrating and further embedding the culture within the Council of going the extra mile through additional working hours, rapid redeployment into other roles, the ability to juggle competing demands between new schemes and existing core business

- (f) Further rollout of flexible working practices to enable greater working within the community and/or for greater home-working

6 Other options considered

- 6.1 This report is based on a request from the OSMC. There could be further information that the Committee requests that has not been included within this report.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The report details the response and the positive steps that the Council has taken in response to, and in part in recovery from, the pandemic. As noted earlier in the report, the response continues as the pandemic remains, 18 months on from March 2020. There are many elements of response that the Council provided and continues to provide at present, and likely into the future. All of this is to be considered by the Commission as part of its review of the overall response to date to the pandemic.

8 Appendices

Appendix A - Covid Dashboard

Corporate Board's recommendation

Amended report to proceed

Background Papers:

None

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: ☐ No: ☒

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position	<input type="checkbox"/>
Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Item is Urgent Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Report is to note only	<input type="checkbox"/>

Wards affected: All

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Document Control

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