

## **BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Report of:** Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen, Leader of the Council

**To:** Cabinet, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020

**Author:** Maxine O'Mahony, Executive Director of Strategy & Governance & Monitoring Officer; Rob Walker, Executive Director of Place

**Subject:** COVID-19 Briefing

**Purpose:** This report sets out a summary of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Recommendation(s):**

1. It is RECOMMENDED that the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic be noted.

### **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 This report presents a high level summary of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Council's services and the way that we have operated.
- 1.2 The summary is intended to demonstrate the most significant implications on the way that the Council operates and the changes that have been made to services and also to the command structures in emergency response.
- 1.3 In the weeks leading up to 23 March 2020, when Lockdown commenced, Breckland's incident response structures were set-up. A Gold Command group was established under to leadership of the Executive Director Strategy & Governance and the Executive Director Place. This group oversees the emergency operation of the Council and provides the Council's coordination within the context of the work of the Norfolk Local Resilience Forum (LRF), which is using well established and rehearsed emergency planning governance arrangements to coordinate the multi-agency approach across Norfolk.
- 1.4 The LRF stood up a Strategic Coordinating Group, meeting at least three times per week which has been attended by the Chief Executive, a Tactical Coordinating Group meeting on the same frequency (attended by a Gold representative) and various Task & Finish Delivery Groups.
- 1.5 Gold Command meets with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council at least three times per week to brief on the latest position, to take a Member steer on the Council's response and operation, and to make 'emergency' Executive decisions as required.
- 1.6 In order to maintain regular contact across the Council, the internal communication function has been stepped up alongside our public messaging. The Leader has written regularly to all Breckland Council Members and the Chief Executive has frequently communicated with all staff.

- 1.7 In addition, the Leader meets regularly with the other Norfolk Leaders and the local MPs and briefings are provided each week by MHCLG and the DCN (amongst others).

**Note: It should be noted that the figures quoted in this report were accurate at the time of drafting but may have changed between drafting and the Cabinet meeting on 1 June.**

## **COUNCIL RESPONSE**

### ***Critical Services and Staffing***

- 1.8 The immediate priority for the Gold Command [at the outset] was to seek to maintain all critical services, deploy staff accordingly, and to ensure the safety of our staff and Members.
- 1.9 There has been an impact on all of the Council's services, with some having to stop (e.g. leisure), and some having a very different scope (e.g. Customer Services). These changes have been brought about to comply with government restrictions, and to ensure social distancing objectives, and we have had to focus our resource on core services.
- 1.10 It should be noted that all Breckland Council's critical services have remained fully operational during the response to the COVID19 pandemic.
- 1.11 Throughout the response to the COVID19 pandemic, over 85% of Breckland Council's staff have been able to work remotely from home. Only 7% of staff have been unable to work due to sickness, caring responsibilities, vulnerabilities, etc. There has been only 1 confirmed case of COVID19 affecting a Breckland Council officer. Over 50 officers have been redeployed from their substantive duties for the Council to be employed in the provision of community and business support.
- 1.12 Attached in **Appendix A** to this report is an infographic, which displays some of the key outcomes from our core critical services and the two work streams detailed below.
- 1.13 Government tasked local authorities with two core objectives during the emergency response phase. One was to support Vulnerable and Shielded people within our community by ensuring they had food and medicine supplies. The second was to support our businesses through the distribution of Business Rate Support and grants distribution. Its worth of note that both support to the Vulnerable and to the Business Community continues to date.

### **Economy**

- 1.14 On 17 March 2020, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a broad range of financial support for the whole economy and a number of these measures included further business rate reliefs, grants, and funding arrangements with implications for local authorities. Some of the key measures announced to date include:
- Business Rates Relief: Businesses in the retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors will pay no business rates in 2020/21. This "business rates holiday" applies to all businesses in these sectors regardless of rateable value.

- Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Grants Fund (RHLBGF): Businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors with rateable values of less than £51,000 will also receive a cash grant of up to £25,000.
- Small Business Grants Fund (SBGF): All businesses in receipt of small business rates relief (SBRR), regardless of sector, will be eligible for a cash payment of £10,000. It will not be available to some recipients of SBRR such as beach hut owners.

1.15 As at 28 May 2020, Breckland Council had made grants to 2,284 local businesses totalling over £25 million and making up 87% of the original funding allocation.

1.16 A further 5% or £1.5 million has subsequently been made available by government to support those local businesses that were not eligible under the first scheme (described above). Breckland Council will be opening its' local discretionary scheme w/c 1 June 2020.

### **Vulnerable**

1.17 As part of a countywide effort to support the most vulnerable members of our community and those on the "shielded" list, Breckland Council worked together with partners to ensure that access to food was sufficient for vulnerable and isolated people, food banks were supported, volunteer efforts were co-ordinated, local business support offers were utilised and that communities were supported to create their own projects and initiatives which improve community spirit, reduce the impact of social isolation and provide support to each other.

1.18 26 rough sleepers have been supported in emergency accommodation as a key vulnerable group.

1.19 Breckland Council set up a distribution centre at the Dereham Leisure Centre to distribute emergency food parcels to extremely vulnerable people identified through the shielded list. The ongoing delivery of food parcels is being provided to 50 vulnerable households each week.

1.19 The community resilience hub (reporting to Gold Command) have also been making proactive calls to ensure the wellbeing of individuals and providing responsive support as required. Over 3500 calls have been made to date.

1.20 A hardship fund was also initiated to support those in crisis and most in need.

### **TRANSITION: RESPONSE TO RECOVERY**

1.21 A draft COVID 19 Operational Recovery Plan is currently being developed. The Plan will focus on how the Council recovers as an organisation, how it reintroduces services, supports its staff and members, learns from the experience of dealing with COVID 19, benefits from its new community and business links, and more fundamentally how it ensures that residents can access the services they need. A Roadmap to Delivery has been developed and is attached in **Appendix B**.

1.22 From the 1 June 2020 new arrangements will be put in place to enable a focussed

approach to the Council's recovery. This will see a temporary place-based management arrangement for the duration of recovery (10 months) and whilst some Senior Officers will continue to work across both authorities (South Holland and Breckland) the majority will be focused on one or other Council.

- 1.23 **Appendix C** shows the new Interim Management Arrangements.
- 1.24 A Ways of Working document has been created which sets out the 'ways of working' as a predominantly place based team, with some strategic oversight and shared corporate services supporting each council's tailored recovery plan. There will remain oversight and guidance across both councils, especially between senior management for peer support when needed. This document also looks at Staff Morale, Wellbeing, Staff Survey feedback and sets out the expectations on staff at this time.
- 1.25 A Shared Management Roadmap (**Appendix D**) has been created to show how the Interim Management Arrangements go through Response, Transition, Recovery, Normalisation and completion and return back to a Shared Management arrangement over a 10-month period.
- 1.26 As government signals its intent to unlock some of the current restrictions on individuals and businesses in the coming weeks and months the Council is working collaboratively with Broadland and South Norfolk Councils and has established an economic recovery operation under the heading of 'Operation Beacon'. The purpose of this plan is to build confidence for our businesses, employees and residents by ensuring that we have clean, safe and vibrant public spaces. This will be a total council approach to supporting our businesses.
- 1.27 We continue to work remotely and Officers and Members of the Council have adapted and responded really positively to this forced way of working. The organisation that 'recovers' from the emergency will look different and should reflect the learning from the emergency and the opportunity it presents us.

## **COUNCIL GOVERNANCE AND DECISION MAKING**

- 1.28 In light of the necessity to ensure compliance with the requirements relating to social distancing the decision was made not to hold the planned committee meetings in April and May 2020.
- 1.29 The Chairman's Panel has now started to meet and has held three meetings to support the Executive Director Place in dealing with delegated planning decisions.
- 1.29 Meetings of Cabinet and Planning Committee are scheduled for June 2020 with further committee meetings being planned to follow. All of the above meetings will be held virtually. Indeed, new regulations which enable councils to make committee and council decisions virtually came into effect on 4 April 2020.
- 1.30 All decisions have been taken in line with government guidance and Breckland Council's constitution.

## **2.0 OPTIONS**

- 2.1 That Cabinet note the contents of this report.

2.2 Do Nothing.

### 3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

3.1 To ensure that members of the Cabinet are fully informed of the way that services have been managed under the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

### 4.0 EXPECTED BENEFITS

4.1 As above, to ensure that members of the Cabinet are fully informed of the way that services have been managed under the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

### 5.0 IMPLICATIONS

In preparing this report, the report author has considered the likely implications of the decision - particularly in terms of Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues; Constitutional & Legal; Contracts; Corporate Priorities; Crime & Disorder; Data Protection; Equality & Diversity/Human Rights; Financial; Health & Wellbeing; Reputation; Risk Management; Safeguarding; Staffing; Stakeholders/Consultation/Timescales; Other. Where the report author considers that there may be implications under one or more of these headings, these are identified below.

#### 5.1.1 Constitution & Legal

5.1.2 The Council has a memorandum of agreement with South Holland, which outlines our Ways of Working with the Senior Shared Management Team. This is important to ensure our Strategic Relationship remains strong through these challenging times and with several of our shared officers working placed based for a period through this crisis.

5.1.3 All decisions in the emergency response stage have been taken in line with the Council's constitution and government guidance.

#### 5.2 Contracts

5.2.1 We have worked with and supported our main contractors. Serco and Capita remain fully operational. Parkwood, on government instruction have closed the leisure centre sites and furloughed the majority of their staff.

#### 5.3 Corporate Priorities

5.3.1 We have needed to adapt our Corporate Priorities through this pandemic, whilst maintaining all core critical Council services. Our Priorities will be reviewed as part of our Recovery Plan.

#### 5.5 Financial

5.5.1 The Financial impacts of COVID-19 have been, provided in another report to this Cabinet meeting, which shows an overview of the current assessment of the emerging financial impact to the council from the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### 5.6 Health & Wellbeing

5.6.1 As detailed above, we have managed the Health and Wellbeing of all of our staff throughout this Crisis and it

continues to be a key focus. We have supported staff and allowed them to be home enabled.

## 5.7 Reputation

5.7.1 Communications have been key in all the work taken place through the pandemic to ensure we are managing the reputation of the Council. Internal communication has been increased to ensure our colleagues have the information and guidance they need to safely fulfil their duties, and to keep fully informed on the various changes that may affect their work. This is particularly important as a significant proportion of our colleagues are operating remotely during this period.

## 5.8 Risk Management

5.8.1 We have a strategic risk matrix for the Pandemic that covers all areas of Council services.

## 5.9 Staffing

5.9.1 All Staff and Councillors will have been affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic in one way or another. We have needed to be flexible and find new ways of working to ensure we are delivering the Council's critical services whilst protecting staff and Members. The majority of the Council's employees are working, and many are working enhanced hours to support our collective response.

## 6.0 WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED

6.1 All Wards and all Communities are affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic and, in turn, by Breckland Council's response.

## 7.0 ACRONYMS

7.1 NRF - Norfolk Resilience Forum

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Background papers: -

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**Key Decision:** No

**Exempt Decision:** No

**This report refers to a Mandatory Service and Discretionary Service**

### Appendices attached to this report

Appendix A Infographic on Delivery of Core Council Services and New Emerging Service provision.

Appendix B

Breckland Roadmap to Recovery

Appendix C

Breckland Interim Management Arrangements

Appendix D

Shared Management Roadmap