

North Norfolk District Council's Transition from Response to Recovery in responding to the Coronavirus Pandemic

Summary: This report details the actions taken by North Norfolk District Council in making the transition from Response to Recovery in responding to the Coronavirus Pandemic at a strategic, local and organisational level over the period early May – mid June 2020.

This includes:-

- maintaining its dedicated COVID helpline and email address operated over extended Customer Service hours including weekends and Bank Holidays since 30th March until the end of May and now operated over extended office hours;
- developing and putting in place with partners, transitioning support arrangements for the more than 2500 local residents who have been “shielding” and a similar number of people who have been self-isolating and have requested support from the Council with shopping and prescription deliveries;
- stepping down the operation of the 10 Local Co-ordination Centres as support arrangements for shielding and vulnerable people have become more formalised and established, meaning that the demand for support from the original arrangements put in place have reduced over time.
- paying out almost £52million of Small Business Grants on behalf of the Government and developed and launched a £2.76million Discretionary Grant Scheme.
- managing the re-opening of Council facilities – public toilets, coastal car parks and Cromer Pier in response to Government announcements on the easing of lockdown restrictions
- developing the “You are Welcome” reassurance programme to support local retail, hospitality and tourism businesses re-open in the coming weeks through the provision of advice and practical social distancing measures, hand washing facilities and local marketing initiatives, so as to create safe, attractive town centre and seafront environments, in accordance with Government guidance.
- developing Return to Work policies and putting in place a range of social distancing measures within the Council's Cromer and Fakenham Connect offices which meet the COVID-secure

workplace guidelines as we plan to move to a “new normal” level of public service provision.

- contributing to the development of the arrangements being made in Norfolk to develop and put in place arrangements for a Local Outbreak Control Plan for Norfolk in managing incidents of Coronavirus in the county in the coming months as the transmission and management of the virus moves into a different phase.

Options considered:

The report details the Council’s actions in responding to the Coronavirus pandemic during the Response phase and the transitional arrangements being made for the Recovery phase as the Council prepares to operate in a “new normal” environment as lockdown restrictions are eased nationally and the District prepares for a curtailed summer visitor season. Options considered are outlined in the report.

Conclusions:

The report details the actions taken by the District Council in response to the Coronavirus Pandemic and of the preparations being made to support local communities and businesses “recover” from this unprecedented global event.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is asked to note the Council’s response and arrangements made to support Recovery from the Coronavirus Pandemic; and specifically comment upon the following:-

- **the short-term actions proposed in respect of:-**
 - **opening up the Council’s services and facilities;**
 - **the development and implementation of social distancing measures through the “You are Welcome” programme to assist the Re-opening of our High Streets and Tourist Areas Safely**
 - **delivery of the Discretionary Business Grant Programme**
 - **the Council’s planning for the return of staff to their main roles from working at home and redeployment into other roles;**
 - **the implementation of measures so that the Council is able to demonstrate compliance with the COVID-secure workplace guidelines**
 - **understanding the contribution North Norfolk District Council will make in supporting the partnership actions**

outlined in the Norfolk Local Outbreak Control Plan which will be a key element of managing any future outbreaks of COVID19 in the District over the coming months.

- the longer term need to review the Council’s Medium-Term Financial Strategy in light of the changing financial situation of the Council and as a result undertake a review of the Council’s proposed programme of activity as previously detailed in the Corporate Plan and Delivery Plan.

Reasons for Recommendations:

To inform corporate learning from experience gained through the Response and initial Recovery phases of the pandemic, the implication of which will remain with the District for many months to come.

Cabinet Member(s)	Ward(s) affected
Cllr Sarah Butikofer, Leader of the Council	All
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Coronavirus global pandemic event has now seen over 8.5 million infections and over 460,000 deaths worldwide (The Johns Hopkins University, 20th June 2020). In the UK there have been over 303,000 confirmed COVID-19 infections and over 42,500 deaths (BBC News website 20th June 2020).
- 1.2 Thankfully the numbers of infections and deaths in North Norfolk has been low – 173 confirmed infections and 51 deaths (as at 18th June, Norfolk Insights Report). This could be down to a large number of factors, including strong compliance with lockdown restrictions and adherence to social distancing advice by a largely elderly population, socio-demographic profile of the District, low population density and most households living in self-contained housing, low use of public transport and the District not having an acute hospital.
- 1.3 National and local data suggests that peak rates of infection and deaths in the UK and locally in Norfolk were during the last week of March and throughout

April, since which time the numbers of infections and deaths has reduced, albeit that incidences of infection remain. During May and early June there has been much debate nationally about the rate of infection - the “R” level - in different parts of the UK and there has been a phased lifting and easing of lockdown restrictions. The lifting of restrictions has included household waste sites re-opening from 11th May; people being able to travel unlimited distances for exercise and visit garden centres from 13th May; outdoor markets and car sales being able to re-open from 1st June; some primary school pupils able to return to school from 1st June; non-essential retail businesses and zoos, as well as places of worship (for private prayer only) being able to re-open and some high school aged pupils being able to return to school from 15th June. At the time of writing this report (25th June) the Government has confirmed that food and drink businesses (cafes, pubs and restaurants) and other tourism businesses (some types of holiday accommodation and attractions) will be able to open from 4th July, and that social distancing guidelines can be lowered from the previously recommended 2 metre distance to a “1 metre plus” distance. These future changes have been facilitated through a lowering of the national Coronavirus Alert level from Level 4 to Level 3 announced on 19th June.

2. North Norfolk District Council’s response – as a timeline

2.1 Adopting the same principle as the report to Cabinet on 18th May, the following comments detail the actions taken by the District Council in response to the Coronavirus situation, mostly as a timeline, from early May through until the 20th June.

- Following the Prime Minister’s statement on the evening of the 10th May that there would be an initial easing of lockdown restrictions to allow people to take more exercise and travel unlimited distances for exercise, the Council’s position in having closed coastal car parks and all public toilets was reviewed. Initially it was agreed that the Council would re-open the car parks at Holt Country Park and Pretty Corner Woods to allow exercise by local residents travelling to those sites by car. These sites were re-opened on Wednesday 13th May.
- At that time, after consultation with partners across Norfolk, the District Council agreed that it would not open any coastal car parks or public toilets in response to the Prime Ministers statement as, other than for exercise, the Government’s guidance was that people should continue to stay at home. This position was widely adopted by the majority of local authorities and National Parks across England.
- However, following the good weather over the weekend of the 16th / 17th May, when many rural and coastal areas of England, including North Norfolk, saw large numbers of visitors, with issues of poor parking on narrow coastal access roads and anti-social behaviour associated with a lack of access to toilets (the vast majority of businesses with the exception of supermarkets being closed); and representations from Norfolk Constabulary, the District Council agreed to open nine public toilet blocks (eight along the coast and one in Hoveton), as well as the coastal car parks at Weybourne and Sea Palling, from 21st May in advance of the May Bank Holiday weekend.
- With the Community Support arrangements, particularly through the 10 Local Co-ordination Centres developed in the early days of the

lockdown working well such that the number of requests for support and assistance had declined quite markedly since the beginning of May; the Local Co-ordination Centre operation was scaled back to initially four centres, on 18th May and then subsequently three from 26th May.

- Following further good weather over the Bank Holiday weekend 23rd – 25th May, when even larger numbers of visitors visited North Norfolk, it was decided to open the remaining coastal car parks and a further 18 public toilet blocks from 29th May.
- On 25th May, the Government announced its support for local authorities in Re-opening the High Street Safely through providing grant monies for the introduction of social-distancing measures. It was subsequently announced that North Norfolk District Council would receive £93,332 through this Fund. Conversations were therefore held with Norfolk County Council's Highway Team, town and (some) parish councils and local chambers of trade about the nature of social distancing measures which might be put in place in our towns and seafront areas to reassure the public in seeking to move to a "new normal" in terms of shops and tourism businesses re-opening for business after a 13-week shutdown.
- These initial conversations were positive and in the following two weeks the District Council developed its "You are Welcome" programme and established a team of staff to support the detailed development and implementation of social distancing proposals in each location – further details of which are provided below.
- Throughout May, concern has existed around the capacity of the RNLI Beach Lifeguard Team to provide cover at all of our Blue Flag beaches and discussions have therefore been held between the Leader of the Council, Leisure and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder and key staff about the options available to the Council in providing an important lifeguard / beach warden service on our beaches over the summer months – more detail of this issue is provided below.
- During the week of the 25th May, a Task and Finish Group of our internal Silver (Service Managers) arrangements developed draft policies relating to people returning to work and the Council moving back to a more "normal" level of service. These draft policies were then the subject of consultation with staff, elected members and partners (tenants of our buildings); with the policy document agreed by our internal Gold structure on 12th June, following which a programme of measures has been implemented within our office buildings in order that the Council as a corporate body can demonstrate compliance as a COVID-secure workplace.
- On 1st June, the Council launched its Discretionary (Business) Grant Scheme with online guidance, applications able to be submitted via an online form from 3rd June and with a closing date for applications being 23:59 on Sunday 21st June.
- Whilst throughout the lockdown period two food stalls have operated at Sheringham Market, the District Council re-opened its markets at Cromer on a Friday and Sheringham on a Wednesday and Saturday from Saturday 6th April.
- As further restrictions were eased by the Government from 1st June, the Council re-opened Cromer Pier from this date for people to enjoy by walking and sitting, but due to risk of virus transmission through

surface contact, initially fishing and crabbing were not allowed from the pier and continue to be kept under review.

- The District Council's remaining public toilets (with the exception of the Rocket House in Cromer) were re-opened from 12th June, in advance of the 15th June date for the re-opening of non-essential retail businesses. The Council has not as yet re-opened the facilities at the Rocket House, pending further guidance on social distancing and the operation of the lift in that building which provides access from North Lodge Park down on to the Cromer East Prom.
- Throughout May and June, the District Council has continued to accommodate the provision of mobile testing facilities provided by the military at The Meadow Car Park in Cromer and Highfield Road Car Park in Fakenham on two days a week in each location.
- In early June Norfolk was identified as one of 11 areas of England which would pilot the development of Local Outbreak Control Plans to manage and respond to local outbreaks of Coronavirus in the coming months. The Norfolk pilot is also leading on the control of outbreaks in food factory settings and Tracy Howard, the District Council's Environmental Health Commercial Manager, is leading this workstream as part of the wider development of the Norfolk Local Outbreak Control Plan.

2.2 Throughout May and June, the Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) / Tactical Co-ordinating Group (TCG) arrangements at a County level and our internal civil contingency arrangements (as outlined in the 18th May Cabinet report) have continued to meet regularly (three times a week) and are considered to have operated well, allowing the District Council to participate in Countywide discussions on Response and Recovery and then interpret and develop local responses appropriate to North Norfolk and the Council at an organisational level. As levels of infection are now falling and considered to be at a low and stable level, consideration is being given to reducing the frequency of these SCG / TCG meetings in the next couple of weeks and as a District Council we will review our contingency plans and arrangements accordingly. Any structures and arrangements which have been in place are capable of being reinstated if there is any increase in the level of infections in the coming weeks and months.

2.3 Throughout the past thirteen weeks the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive have participated in a number of MHCLG, LGA, District Council Network and Norfolk level meetings and briefings on a range of issues relating to COVID – including Business Grants; Test, Track and Trace; issues of managing visitors in coastal areas post lockdown; Re-opening High Streets Safely; and the emerging Local Outbreak Control Plan arrangements.

3.0 Some key data and information on current actions being taken by the Council

3.1 Community Support, Shielded and Vulnerable People, Food Hubs

3.1.1 Over the period 26th March – 31st May the Council's Community Support service provided assistance to almost 2500 "shielding" individuals and a similar number of people who were self-isolating in North Norfolk in

accordance with Government guidance. Direct contact was made by District Council with all of the shielding individuals and the Council's dedicated COVID helpline and website handled almost 6100 requests (4209 calls and 1888 emails) for advice or assistance over this nine-week period.

- 3.1.2 During these nine weeks, the District Council made up and delivered emergency food parcels to 490 individuals and delivered over 2900 prescriptions to people who were shielding or self-isolating in the District, as well as passing on enquiries for assistance to the numerous local community organisations which had become established in response to COVID to provide support to vulnerable people and households at a neighbourhood level.
- 3.1.3 Over the five-week period 28th April to 5th June a team of ten council officers and nine elected members made "companion" calls to over 450 individuals in the District who were shielding to check on their wellbeing - with 191 individuals receiving follow up calls based on their request for ongoing support and friendship through the service.
- 3.1.4 During May, at a County level a database of those who were identified as vulnerable across the County was introduced and used by each district to manage contacts with our customers, both those who contacted our helpline and those who were added to the shielding and Extremely vulnerable lists, who the District Council had previously been proactively contacting. The Norfolk Vulnerability Hub provides a consistent approach to managing contact information and options are being explored for its wider use beyond the Coronavirus crisis. From the beginning of June, ongoing requests for assistance from vulnerable people across the County have been fulfilled through the Norfolk Vulnerability Hub, allowing the majority of the District Council staff who were redeployed to staff our outbound contact arrangements to shielding individuals, as well as the staff in our Local Co-ordination Centres and on prescription delivery duties, to be released back to their substantive roles.
- 3.1.5 The Council has received a number of letters and emails of thanks from individuals we have provided support to through the Community Support Programme, as well as from Town and Parish Councils, which has been very heartening at a time of pressure on our organisation and is testament to the flexibility, commitment and resilience of our staff in providing public service to our communities.
- 3.1.6 The strength of local community support models, including longstanding Good Neighbour schemes and groups established specifically in response to the COVID situation, has been crucial in meeting individual and local community needs at a local level and it will be important for the District Council moving forward to consider its ability to support these groups into the future through practical advice, volunteer development etc in order to harness the capacity and strengthen community resilience in the future.

3.2 Homeless Support

- 3.2.1 The Council has continued to provide accommodation for 13 rough-sleepers and homeless people through the period of the Coronavirus lockdown and is involved in discussions with County partners and the Government about the longer-term support which might be provided so that better outcomes in terms

of housing, health and hopefully employment can be secured for this group of people beyond COVID. These discussions are ongoing and will be reported to Cabinet verbally at the Cabinet meeting or in the coming months as possible support models are developed.

3.3 Business Grants and the Discretionary Grants Programme

3.3.1 Between the 7th April and 18th June, staff in the Business Rates Team and support functions have paid out £51.9m of Small Business Grants, which is 94.4% of our identified total by value, to 4711 customers out of an anticipated 4993 account holders believed to be eligible for support through this programme.

3.3.2 The Council launched its Discretionary Grant Scheme on 1st June, with online applications able to have been made from 3rd June through until 21st June. The Council has developed its own criteria for the scheme, whilst taking reference from the national guidance, to deliver a scheme which hopefully meets the specific needs of North Norfolk businesses given the impact they have experienced from COVID-19. Our scheme offers support to the following categories of business.

- Small businesses in shared offices or other flexible workspaces. Examples could include mills, units in industrial parks, science parks and incubators, which do not have their own business rates assessment;
- Regular market traders with fixed building costs, such as pitch fees or storage costs, who do not have their own business rates assessment;
- Bed & Breakfasts which pay Council Tax instead of business rates;
- Charity properties in receipt of charitable business rates relief which would otherwise have been eligible for Small Business Rates Relief or Rural Rate Relief.
- Businesses which are wholly involved in the hospitality, leisure and events industry but do not have a business premises open to visiting members of the public.
- Public Houses with a rateable value of £51,000 or higher
- Hotels with a rateable value of £51,000 or higher
- Day Nursery Premises

3.3.3 At the time of writing this report (20th June) the Council had received 224 applications for assistance under the Discretionary Grant Scheme. These are currently being reviewed, with payments to be made during the week of the 29th June. Details of the numbers of grants paid will therefore be reported verbally to the meeting of Cabinet on 6th July.

3.4 The “You are Welcome” campaign to support the Re-Opening of our High Streets and Tourist Areas Safely programme

- 3.4.1 Following the announcement of the Re-opening the High Street Safely Fund, the District Council held initial discussions with colleagues in County Highways and with Town Councils and Chambers of Trade to explore what type of social distancing measures might be implemented in towns across the District.
- 3.4.2 A number of small, temporary, highways related schemes have been proposed to assist with large numbers of pedestrians and people queuing to enter retail premises on narrow pavements. This has seen the suspension of a small number of on-street controlled parking spaces, allowing for the widening of pavements and advisory one-way pedestrian movements / queue guidance to be implemented.
- 3.4.3 In addition the District Council has commissioned some advisory “decals” (floor-placed images) to assist in social distancing; ordered some hand sanitising stations and is supporting local marketing campaigns. Recognising the character of our towns we are investigating the purchase of some good quality planters for use in some areas to minimise the use of unsightly plastic and metal barriers, although Government guidance has stated planters are not eligible expenditure under the Re-opening the High Street Safely Fund grant monies. Consideration is also being given to whether we could employ some Welcome Ambassadors in areas of key visitor pressure to provide advice to visitors on the social distancing measures in operation.
- 3.4.4 The first social distancing measures were introduced in Cromer and Sheringham town centres on Friday 19th June, with the schemes in other towns across the District due to be implemented during the week of the 29th June, before the 4th July when the Government has announced that food premises and tourism businesses will be permitted to re-open. We will implement these schemes as soon as we can dependent on the supply of the decals, hand sanitisers and planters.
- 3.4.5 Cabinet will be updated further on the roll out of the “You are Welcome” programme at its meeting of 6th July.

3.5 Beach Lifeguards

- 3.5.1 Early in the COVID lockdown the RNLI advised nationally that it believed it would be unable to recruit and train enough lifeguard staff to cover the usual 240 beach locations around the UK coast where it provided a beach lifeguard service. In North Norfolk we were advised that the RNLI would probably only to be able to service three of our beaches and even then at significantly reduced periods compared to a normal year. The Council was subsequently advised, in early May, that cover would be provided, based on risk assessments and a review of previous seasons activities, at Sea Palling from the 16th May; Cromer from the 20th June and one other beach (at that time not agreed) from the 4th July.
- 3.5.2 This concerned the District Council as the provision of lifeguard cover on our six Blue Flag beaches (Sheringham, West Runton, East Runton, Cromer, Mundesley and Sea Palling) and Wells Beach, which had a Rural Beach Award, was considered important in terms of our tourism offer. The Leader of the Council, Leisure and Wellbeing Portfolio holder and Leisure and Localities Manager therefore met to establish if on beaches where the RNLI said it

would be unable to provide a service this year, alternative arrangements could be made to provide a Beach Warden, rather than a lifeguard, service.

- 3.5.3 However, in early June the RNLI advised that it would be able to provide a service at Cromer from 13th June (a week earlier than previously advised) and that cover could be provided from 4th July at Mundesley, Sheringham and Wells. This means that compared to last year it will only be the quieter beaches of East and West Runton where a lifeguard service cannot be provided this year. Whilst this is regrettable, the position now proposed by the RNLI is considerably better than originally proposed and the Council is grateful for the efforts which have been made to provide this vital service to the District in the next few weeks. The Council comities to consider if it would be possible to provide a Beach Warden service at East and West Runton beaches.

4. Alignment with Corporate Plan objectives

- 4.1 As outlined in the report to Cabinet discussed on 18th May, the Coronavirus Pandemic is an unprecedented event of global scale, which has required a significant and co-ordinated response by North Norfolk District Council. Despite the significant challenges presented by the pandemic over a prolonged period, it is believed that the Council has responded well in maintaining core service provision, whilst at the same time delivering a range of support and activity during both the response and now the recovery phase.
- 4.2 The Council's task is not done however and in the coming weeks as town centre and tourism businesses re-open and we welcome back larger numbers of visitors to the District it will be necessary for the Council to ensure the continued provision of social distancing measures, maintaining our public toilets and clean beaches and promenades etc, as well as supporting the partnership arrangements being developed to manage future outbreaks of infection in support of actions proposed through the Local Outbreak Control Plan.
- 4.3 Whilst it is believed that the Council has responded well to the challenges presented by COVID and has achieved much which has been appreciated and valued by communities across North Norfolk in terms of supporting shielding and vulnerable individuals, payment of grants to businesses and closing and re-opening facilities and the implementation of social distancing measures in our town centres and tourist areas; there is always scope for learning and improvement and the Council is therefore undertaking a "lessons learned" review to capture learning from this event to date, the learning from which will be applied as we move through the Recovery phase and manage any local outbreaks of infections in the months ahead.

5. Medium Term Financial Strategy

- 6.1 The Council's Head of Finance and Assets continues to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on the Council's expenditure and income and is preparing a detailed financial report for the August Cabinet meeting.

6. Financial and Resource Implications

7.1 See comments made at 6 above.

7. Legal Implications

8.1 Decisions taken under emergency provisions through delegated powers / authority are detailed within a separate report on this Cabinet agenda.

8. Risks

9.1 This report details the Council's response to the global Coronavirus pandemic and proposes future actions in support of North Norfolk's Recovery from this significant global event. Decisions taken have been informed with reference to Government advice and guidance and decisions taken through the Norfolk Local Resilience Forum arrangements in the interests of the North Norfolk community. Options have been considered in the agreement of specific actions, including relevant and associated risks with decisions taken under emergency provisions discussed, agreed and recorded at meetings of the Council's Gold Civil Contingency arrangements with the overriding objectives of protecting public health and life of North Norfolk residents and managing pressure / demands on local NHS capacity, resources and infrastructure.

9. Sustainability

10.1 None as a direct result of this report.

10. Equality and Diversity

11.1 None as a direct result of this report – many of the actions taken by the Council have however sought to protect and support some of the most vulnerable people in our communities by virtue of their age, frailty, underlying health conditions or housing situation.

11. Section 17 Crime and Disorder considerations

12.1 None as a direct result of this report.

12. Recommendations:-

Cabinet is asked to note the Council's response and arrangements made to support Recovery from the Coronavirus Pandemic; and specifically comment upon the following:-

- **the short-term actions proposed in respect of:-**

- opening up the Council's services and facilities;
 - the development and implementation of social distancing measures through the "You are Welcome" programme to assist the Re-opening of our High Streets and Tourist Areas Safely
 - delivery of the Discretionary Business Grant Programme
 - the Council's planning for the return of staff to their main roles from working at home and redeployment into other roles;
 - the implementation of measures so that the Council is able to demonstrate compliance with the COVID-secure workplace guidelines
 - understanding the contribution North Norfolk District Council will make in supporting the partnership actions outlined in the Norfolk Local Outbreak Control Plan which will be a key element of managing any future outbreaks of COVID19 in the District over the coming months.
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- the longer term need to review the Council's Medium-Term Financial strategy in light of the changing financial situation of the Council and as a result undertake a review of the Council's proposed programme of activity as previously detailed in the Corporate Plan and Delivery Plan.