

NORTH NORFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL'S ACTIONS IN THE RECOVERY PHASE OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Summary: This report details the actions taken by North Norfolk District Council in the Recovery phase of the Coronavirus Pandemic at a strategic, local and organisational level over the period July – mid August 2020.

This includes:-

- rolling out the “You are Welcome” reassurance programme to support local retail, hospitality and tourism businesses re- open through the implementation and ongoing review of practical social distancing measures and hand washing facilities so as to create and maintain safe, attractive town centre and seafront environments, in accordance with Government guidance through the Re-opening the High Street Safely Fund programme
- with our cleansing contract partner, SERCO, responded to large numbers of visitors to the District through increasing the frequency of toilet cleansing, beach and foreshore cleansing and litter bin emptying in response to unprecedented levels of demand / rubbish
- managing the re-opening of Council playgrounds following Government announcements on the phased easing of lockdown restrictions from 20th July
- purchasing a fogging machine which has been deployed to reduce the potential transmission of Coronavirus on “high-touch” surfaces within the District Council’s public conveniences, playgrounds, foreshore shelters and on Cromer Pier
- completing the paying out of Small Business Grants on behalf of the Government and operating a £2.76million Discretionary Grant Scheme over two phases and recently extended to provide support to some town and parish councils which have lost sources of regular income due to COVID.
- Providing temporary accommodation for 55 individuals / households at a cost to date in this financial year of £317,000
- making a successful bid for £330,000 under the Norfolk Tourism Sector Support Programme of the Norfolk Strategic Fund
- making a successful bid to the Government’s Getting Building Fund administered locally by the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership for the North Walsham Heritage Action Zone Programme securing an additional £1.17million to support the early delivery of this important project to strengthen the appeal and vitality of North Walsham’s historic town centre

- supporting the Council's leisure contractor, Everyone Active, with the re-opening of gym and fitness classes from 15th July and swimming facilities from 20th August
- participating in regular meetings of the Norfolk Health Protection Board and Norfolk Health Engagement Board arrangements which are monitoring, reviewing and responding to local outbreaks of Coronavirus in the county in preparation for an anticipated increase of COVID infections in the coming months and by working with partners in Winter Preparedness arrangements.

Options considered: The report details the Council's actions in the Recovery phase of the Coronavirus pandemic during July and August. Actions taken are outlined in the report.

Conclusions: The report details the actions taken by the District Council during July and August in the Recovery phase of the Coronavirus Pandemic and of the ongoing preparations being made to support local communities and businesses adapt to a "new normal" as well as preparing for an anticipated increase in infections levels in the coming autumn and winter months.

Recommendations: **Cabinet is asked to note and comment upon the Council's actions during July and August in supporting communities and businesses across North Norfolk in managing Recovery from the Coronavirus Pandemic; and in preparing for an anticipated increase in infections during the autumn and winter months ahead.**

Reasons for Recommendations: To inform corporate learning from experience gained through the Recovery phase of the pandemic, and preparedness to respond to an anticipated increase in levels of infection in the months ahead.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS AS REQUIRED BY LAW

(Papers relied on to write the report, which do not contain exempt information and which are not published elsewhere)

Cabinet Member(s)	Wards
Cllr Sarah Butikofer	affected:
	All

Contact Officer, telephone number and email: Steve Blatch - Chief Executive
 Email:- steve.blatch@north-norfolk.gov.uk
 Tel: 01263 516232

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Coronavirus global pandemic event has now seen over 22.5 million infections and over 788,500 deaths worldwide (World Health Organisation, 21st August 2020). In the UK there have been over 322,000 confirmed COVID-19 infections and over 41,400 deaths (deaths within 28 days of positive test result; method of calculation revised by Public Health England on 28th July 2020) (BBC News website 20th August 2020).
- 1.2 Thankfully the numbers of infections and deaths in North Norfolk has been, and remains, low – 226 confirmed infections (as at 20th August) and 54 deaths (as at week ending 7th August), - both figures from the Norfolk Insights Report. This gives a cumulative case rate of 216 cases per 100,000 population in North Norfolk. This is the lowest rate of infection of any local authority district in Norfolk and in terms of rank is the 294th authority in England (with 1 being the highest and 317 being the lowest).
- 1.3 Whilst national and local data suggests that levels of Coronavirus transmission and infections remain considerably lower than the peak rates of infection and deaths in March and April, average numbers of infections in the UK are currently about 1000 new cases per day. The Government and local authority / NHS partnerships are closely monitoring levels of infection at local levels, with some parts of the UK subject to restrictions due to localised “spikes” in transmission and infection; largely, but not exclusively, associated with particular “settings” – factories, care homes, education establishments, rather than community transmission. In Norfolk local partners, under the direction of the Norfolk Director of Public Health’s team, are closely monitoring very small numbers of isolated cases and are seeking to manage these incidents through extensive track and trace arrangements with the objective of actively managing and containing any local outbreaks, so as to minimise opportunities for community transmission. To date this strategy has operated well in Norfolk, which has maintained some of the lowest rates of infection and transmission in the country; even with large numbers of tourist visitors returning to the County in recent weeks.

2. North Norfolk District Council's support for recovery

2.1 Adopting the same principle as the reports to Cabinet on 18th May and 6th July, the following comments detail the actions taken by the District Council in response to the Coronavirus situation from early July through until the 20th August 2020:-

2.2 Rolling out the "You are Welcome" reassurance programme

2.2.1 Through this programme the District Council has co-ordinated the delivery of social distancing measures in our market towns, coastal resorts and Hoveton on The Broads – initially with funding from the Government's "Re-opening the High Street Safely" Fund programme – but expanded by the District Council to provide similar measures in popular tourist visitor areas of the District including seafront areas and Broads villages.

2.2.2 Measures introduced included:-

- some temporary works with Norfolk County Council as highway authority to provide safer socially distanced environments in locations with high pedestrian footfall, narrow pavements and queues to enter business premises where there was potential for vehicular / pedestrian conflict;
- information signage at car parks and in towns centres, promenades and the pier to advise people of key safety messages such as advisory one-way pedestrian flows, queuing advice, handwashing, pay by contactless / card and please place your litter in a bin messages
- floor decals advising people of advisory one-way pedestrian flows; and
- provision of hand sanitising stations.

2.2.3 The measures introduced have been kept under weekly review and some changes and revisions have been made as local circumstances have changed with regards to reduced or increased queuing to enter some business premises, increased numbers of visitors particularly in coastal towns and Hoveton.

2.2.4 There was initially some high profile criticism of some of the measures introduced in North Walsham regarding the removal of traffic and short-stay parking from the Market Place, which generated comment in local media and on BBC Radio Norfolk and subsequently resulted in revisions being made to the scheme. However, apart from the issues in North Walsham, which divided local opinion, the majority of the measures delivered by the District Council across the District have been well-received with levels of voluntary adherence to the messaging and social distancing measures being quite high.

2.2.5 The Council has received many favourable comments about the efforts made by both the District Council and local businesses to provide a safe COVID environment for local residents and businesses – including the BBC Beach Watch online feature during the week of the 10th August when the BBC online team spent two days in Cromer posting many messages about our tourism offer and COVID safety measures – including featuring our cleansing operations, deep cleaning of toilets, the RNLI lifeguards and water safety; focus on the measures some businesses had taken – such as the Rocket

House Café, No.1s and Mary Janes and an interview with the Leader of the Council. On 11th August BBC Look East also carried a positive piece on the social distancing measures delivered in Hoveton featuring our hand sanitiser stations and an interview with the Chairman of the Parish Council and positive comments from visitors.

- 2.2.6 Visitor numbers to the District have been monitored through car park usage and RNLI lifeguards and, with good weather and large numbers of staycation holiday makers and day trippers, it is believed that the numbers of visitors to coastal and Broads locations has been strong. Levels of footfall in inland market towns also appears to reflect levels of activity in other years suggesting some recovery of confidence amongst local residents, as well as tourist visitors.
- 2.2.7 With the good weather and limited indoor seating in some food premises, and notwithstanding the Eat Out to Help Out initiative promoted by the Government, the numbers of people eating picnics and takeaway food has far exceeded what we have seen in previous years and this has created significant demands on the Council's cleansing contractor, SERCO, in cleaning rubbish from beaches and promenades and the frequency of emptying litter bins. With the good weather many visitors have also stayed on the beaches later into the evening than in previous years, also creating some management issues for the Council and RNLI lifeguards in respect of water and beach safety.
- 2.2.8 Sadly there have been two sea swimming related tragedies in the District over the peak holiday period – one at Waxham and the second at Overstrand and the Council continues to work closely with HM Coastguard, the RNLI and blue light partners to promote beach safety messages – not only around swimming and water safety, but also the dangers of climbing or walking along or below cliffs.

2.3 Licensing enquiries

- 2.3.1 Towards the end of July, the Government promoted the granting of pavement licences to allow more food and drink businesses to serve customers outdoors given that social distancing guidance meant that there were limitations on the numbers of people food and drink businesses could accommodate within their establishments. The District Council therefore amended its licensing procedures to respond quickly to applications for pavement licences, although, in reality, few such enquiries have been received from North Norfolk businesses because of the narrow pavements and limited outdoor public space which exists in the majority of North Norfolk towns.
- 2.3.2 Staff within the Council's Environmental Health, Licensing and Planning teams have however handled a large volume of enquiries in recent weeks from established businesses wanting to understand the regulations about the placing of outdoor tables, shelters etc on their own land, and from events businesses and business groups wanting to stage events. Advice has been sought about the nature and scale of gatherings, social distancing, ticketing of events for test, track and trace, volume of music etc within the Coronavirus guidance.

2.4 Re-opening of playgrounds

- 2.4.1 Government advice allowed the re-opening of outdoor playgrounds from 4th July but, with quite onerous conditions in terms of signing, cleansing etc – many local authorities, including the District Council, did not feel confident about opening these facilities at that time. The Council did come under some criticism for this delay, but wanted to ensure that as far as possible risks associated with the re-opening of these facilities was minimised.
- 2.4.2 The Council therefore carried out a detailed risk assessment of its 29 playgrounds before opening them on 24th July. This included the Council undertaking a full safety assessment of each site, reinstallation of some equipment which had been removed from some sites, cleaning of the equipment and display of signage advising of the need for handwashing / wiping before and after use to try and minimise risk of virus transmission.
- 2.4.3 All playgrounds and equipment now have a programmed schedule of cleaning to try and reduce / minimise the risk of infection.

2.5 Deep cleaning of public toilets

- 2.5.1 As increasing numbers of visitors came to the District during July, the Council invested in a fogging machine, as used by many rail companies, to provide additional disinfection of public toilets from Saturday 25th July. This machine is now being used on a programmed basis to disinfect the toilets and other “high-touch” surfaces such as the Rocket House lift, benches, railings and seafront shelters, as well as playground equipment, to try and minimise the transmission risk and reassure users / visitors that the Council is seeking to provide as safe an environment as possible for local residents and visitors.

2.6 Discretionary Business Grant Scheme

- 2.6.1 Following payment of over £52million of Government Small Business Grants during April and May, the District Council launched its Discretionary Business Grant Scheme on 1st June, with applications invited from 3rd June and an application deadline of 21st June. The Council received 224 applications in the first round – and made payments to 135 eligible businesses with a value of £1.204 million during the week of the 29th June.
- 2.6.2 The Economic Growth Team then launched a second round of applications from 23rd July, with an application deadline of 9th August. The second round saw a further 100 applications being received, with 85 approved in principle and the balance currently being processed. Final grant awards will be made through a Panel meeting scheduled for the 9th September.
- 2.6.3 On the 4th August the Government advised that Discretionary Grant Funds could be applied to some Town and Parish Council activities where they had seen a loss of income due to Coronavirus from income generating activities. The District Council had lobbied Government for such consideration based upon a small number of local town and parish councils approaching the Council with concerns about the impact on their budgets due to reduced income from parking fees (Blakeney) and some property lettings. Officers therefore wrote to Town and Parish Councils across the District on 14th August advising them of the change in Government advice with regard to such councils experiencing a loss of income from commercial activities advising that a further round of applications can be made to the Discretionary

Grant Fund – officers are therefore considering these applications currently before closing the Discretionary Grant Fund in accordance with Government guidance on 27th August.

2.7 Housing and homelessness support

2.7.1 At the beginning of the COVID lockdown the District Council accommodated 24 street homeless / rough sleepers under the national “Everyone In” initiative to provide a safe place for everyone during the peak of the pandemic. The Council continues to provide temporary accommodation for 12 of these cases.

2.7.2 Early in the lockdown, demand for housing advice services was lower than at the same time last year as people’s focus was staying safe at home in accordance with Government guidance. As the lockdown restrictions have lifted, demand for housing advice and support services has begun to increase, with a number of people with particularly complex needs presenting to us for support.

2.7.3. Numbers of people approaching / being supported by the Housing Options service at present are shown in the table below:-

	2019/2020	1 Apr 2019 – 25 Aug 2019	01 Apr 2020 – 25 Aug 2020
Prevention Opened	148	81	27
Relief Opened	127	52	62
Prevention Outcomes	141	75	17
Relief Outcomes	92	33	32
Final Duties	72	22	32
Final Duties Outcomes	56	18	41
Approaches to the Service	895	392	247

2.7.4 Currently the Council has 55 households (including the 12 street homeless / rough sleepers) in temporary accommodation, this is broken down 35 singles & childless couples & 20 families. Costs of accommodating these people in temporary accommodation to date this financial year has been £317,063 with a projected cost of £749,421 to the end of the financial year. These costs and demands on the service will be kept under constant review.

2.7.5 The Council has also submitted a bid to MHCLG for grant funding to purchase four single person units of accommodation in the District to provide emergency long-term, supported move-on accommodation for rough sleepers on an ongoing basis, the outcome of which should be known by the end of September.

2.8 Mobile testing facilities – North Norfolk

2.8.1 Local COVID testing facilities have been provided in the district at The Meadow Car Park, Cromer and the Highfield Road Car Park in Fakenham since the beginning of May, supported by District Council staff setting up the car parks for this purpose on a twice weekly basis. The testing operations

were initially managed by the military during the period May to end of July; with the service being provided by G4S since the beginning of August.

- 2.8.2 Numbers of tests being carried out at these two locations have reduced since the peak weeks in May. In May there was an average of 328 tests per week at Cromer and 272 per week at Fakenham. In the week of the 12th August this had reduced to 94 tests in Cromer and 109 tests in Fakenham.
- 2.8.3 The District Council has been pleased to support these local testing operations at Cromer and Fakenham, as more distant “regional” facilities at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital, Postwick Park and Ride and at Kings Lynn and Great Yarmouth are some distance from North Norfolk meaning that local residents including care workers, older residents in particular would be disadvantaged in terms of time and cost in accessing test facilities beyond the District. It is therefore hoped that despite falling numbers of weekly tests being accessed locally at present, that these facilities can be retained locally.

2.9 Applications for external sources of funding

- 2.9.1 During July, officers in the Economic Growth Team submitted proposals for COVID funding from the Norfolk Strategic Fund and the Government’s Getting Building Fund, the latter of which was administered through the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership.
- 2.9.2 Two applications made under these schemes were successful – a £330,000 under the Norfolk Tourism Sector Support Programme of the Norfolk Strategic Fund and a £1.17 million bid to the Government’s Getting Building Fund administered for the North Walsham Heritage Action Zone Programme to support the early delivery of this important project to strengthen the appeal and vitality of North Walsham’s historic town centre – substantive reports on both of these schemes are included elsewhere on this agenda.
- 2.9.3 A further application for funding under the Norfolk Strategic Fund was submitted at short notice by the Head of Finance and Assets seeking additional funding to support the early delivery of enabling infrastructure in support of the Fakenham Urban Extension – a decision on which is anticipated by the end of September – although it is understood that there was significant competition for this Fund.
- 2.9.4 The Leader of the Council, Cabinet portfolio holder for Economic Development and the Chief Executive also held a high level meeting with senior officers of the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership to explore how through working jointly together we could promote the LEP’s Resilience and Recovery Fund to North Norfolk businesses and this contact has seen a larger number of applications made to this Fund by local companies.

2.10 Working with our leisure contractors

- 2.10.1 Officers and members have worked with the Council’s leisure contracting partners Everyone Active and Openwide Coastal to plan for the re-opening of leisure centres and the Pier Pavilion Theatre.
- 2.10.2 Everyone Active re-opened gym and fitness classes at Fakenham Sports Centre, the Victory Swim and Fitness Centre at North Walsham and Splash

Leisure Centre from 15th July; with swimming facilities at North Walsham and Splash re-opening from 20th August.

2.10.3 The Council has maintained a regular dialogue with Openwide regarding the facilities which can be opened on the Pier. Openwide have operated a food and drink offer on the Pier since early July, when the long-planned glazed windbreaks were installed near Tides Restaurant and in front of the Pavilion Theatre Bar and have supported the strong demand which has existed for outdoor eating and drinking space. The Council has also advised on how shows might be staged within Government guidance in the Pavilion Theatre and is delighted that a variety show will be staged four nights a week (Thursday through Sunday) from 23rd August and throughout September to audiences of 100 people – being one of the first programmed events in a theatre nationally and which has already received positive media coverage for the shows, the Pier and Cromer.

2.11 Strategic Partnership working

2.11.1 Throughout July and August, the Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) arrangements at a County level and our internal civil contingency arrangements have continued to meet regularly (now once a week) to ensure that national developments, announcements on key public messages etc are appraised, interpreted and implemented locally.

2.11.2 Planning and delivery of actions to support the Recovery phase of the pandemic continue at a Norfolk level – particularly around the support for the economy. There has also been some review of how partners worked together and delivered through the early response phase of the pandemic and national lockdown so that lessons are learnt should there be a future increase in infection levels in Norfolk in the coming months.

2.11.3 Alongside the current Recovery work, planning is also underway at a Norfolk partnership level for Winter Preparedness so as to manage demand on NHS and care services through the winter months.

2.11.4 During July and August, the Council has also participated in regular meetings of the new Norfolk Health Protection Board and Norfolk Health Engagement Board arrangements which are monitoring, reviewing and responding to local outbreaks of Coronavirus in the county in preparation for an anticipated increase of COVID infections in the coming months and by working with partners in Winter Preparedness arrangements.

3.0 Alignment with Corporate Plan objectives

3.1 As outlined in the reports to Cabinet discussed on 18th May and 6th July, the Coronavirus Pandemic is an unprecedented event of global scale, which has continued to require a significant and co-ordinated response by North Norfolk District Council – most recently over the period covered by this report in supporting the local tourism sector open for business following the national lockdown.

3.2 Since the beginning of July when tourism and hospitality businesses have been able to trade, much of the Council's focus has been on creating and

maintaining “Covid-safe” visitor environments in our town centres, resort and tourist areas through positive signage and communication messages, social-distancing measures, maintaining hand sanitizing stations, increased cleaning of public toilets and frequency of street, promenade and beach cleansing and emptying of litter bins. This has required a huge effort by the Council and its contract cleansing partner, SERCO, so as to meet the demands of very large numbers of visitors – particularly to coastal and Broads locations.

- 3.3 At the same time, the Council has continued to maintain other services and is progressively giving thought to its Corporate Plan priorities and objectives in seeking to return to a “new normal”. Experience gained through the Coronavirus lockdown, particularly in supporting service delivery online, through virtual appointments and meetings and supporting customers over the telephone, all present opportunities for the Council to deliver differently to customers in the future and consideration is therefore being given to how such a “shift” in customer service focus and interaction might be maintained to deliver better quality and more efficient services in the future.
- 3.4 Whilst it is believed that the Council has continued to respond well to the challenges presented by COVID, reviews of our response to the lockdown and subsequent Recovery are being undertaken at a number of levels to ensure learning is captured and inform future actions both at an organisational and partnership level – the results of which will be reported to Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Governance, Audit and Risk Committee during the autumn.

4. Medium Term Financial Strategy

- 4.1 The Council’s Head of Finance and Assets continues to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on the Council’s expenditure, income and overall financial position and has detailed elsewhere on this agenda a timetable of key financial reports for the remainder of the civic year.

5. Financial and Resource Implications

- 5.1 See comments made at Section 4 above.

6. Legal Implications

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

7. Risks

- 7.1 This report details the Council’s ongoing response to the global Coronavirus pandemic, particularly the actions it has taken over recent weeks to support the re-opening of our local economy so that with limited opportunities for foreign travel and large numbers of people taking staycation holidays and day

trips to North Norfolk visitors and businesses have been able to make the most of a shortened summer tourist season.

- 7.2 Decisions taken have continued to 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, visitors and businesses. The Council's GOLD and SILVER civil contingency arrangements have continued to operate within the context of more strategic arrangements through the Norfolk Resilience Forum and emerging Norfolk Health Protection Board structures with the overriding objectives of protecting the public health and lives of North Norfolk residents and visitors whilst seeking to balance the needs of local businesses, employment and the local economy. Future planning is also being undertaken by the Council to plan for an anticipated increase in levels of Coronavirus infections, alongside normal winter pressures, particularly on health partners in North Norfolk, with the objective of managing pressure / demands on local NHS capacity, resources and infrastructure throughout the winter months.

8. Sustainability

- 8.1 None as a direct result of this report.

9. Equality and Diversity

- 9.1 None as a direct result of this report – however many of the actions taken by the Council over the past six months and in future planning, have sought / seek 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. Increasingly the Council and partners are giving thought to balancing the needs for support to local businesses and local residents in employment as the full economic impact of the pandemic is realised at a national and local level with projected rises in levels of unemployment and business closures which will create their own issues of financial hardship, economic inclusion, mental health and wellbeing creating new and different demands on both the Council and other support services.

10. Section 17 Crime and Disorder considerations

- 10.1 None as a direct result of this report.

11. Recommendation:-

Cabinet is asked to note and comment upon the Council's actions during July and August in supporting communities and businesses across North Norfolk in managing Recovery from the Coronavirus Pandemic; and in preparing for an anticipated increase in infections during the autumn and winter months ahead.