

North Norfolk District Council's actions in the current phase of the Coronavirus Pandemic

Summary: This report details the actions taken by North Norfolk District Council in the current phase of the Coronavirus Pandemic at a strategic, local and organisational level over the period September - November 2020.

This includes:-

- monitoring and responding to local cases of COVID in the District, whilst continuing to support large numbers of visitors to the District during September and October, whilst local rates of infection / transmission remained low through maintaining our "You are Welcome" reassurance programme.
- maintaining social distancing measures and hand washing facilities so as to create and maintain safe, attractive town centre and seafront environments and working with our cleansing contract partner, SERCO, to maintain high frequency of toilet cleansing, beach and foreshore cleansing
- regular "fogging" of "high-touch" surfaces within the District Council's public conveniences, playgrounds, car park machines, foreshore shelters and on Cromer Pier to reduce the potential transmission of Coronavirus
- high frequency cleaning and regular fogging of the Council's offices at Cromer and Fakenham to operate a "safe" working environment for District Council and DWP staff
- Securing £330,000 through the Norfolk Tourism Sector Support Programme to support increased cleansing of key tourist areas in the District; development, promotion and appraisal of applications for a North Norfolk tourism adaptation grant scheme to promote investment which diversifies / extend the visitor season and promotion of the District to key markets throughout 2021.
- Following the Prime Minister's announcement on 31st October that there would be an all-England lockdown for the period 5th November – 2nd December to suppress rapidly rising rates of infection, the Council has stepped up its community support arrangements for vulnerable people and put in place arrangements to administer a further £5.2 million of Local Restriction Support Grants to local businesses which have had to cease trading during the lockdown
- continued to work with a range of partners to provide housing advice and support to people facing housing difficulties and is currently accommodating 48 households in temporary

accommodation pending securing permanent accommodation

- administering Test and Trace payments on behalf of the Government for people on low incomes who are required to self-isolate because of a positive COVID test or through close contact with a person with a positive test result
- continued to support twice weekly mobile testing facilities on Council car parks in Cromer and Fakenham
- continued to participate 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 and by working with partners in Winter Preparedness arrangements – including discussions around mass testing and vaccination programmes in the months ahead.

Options considered:

The report details the Council's actions in the current phase of the Coronavirus pandemic during the period September – December 2020. Actions taken are outlined in the report.

Conclusions:

The report details the actions taken by the District Council during the period September - December in the current phase of the Coronavirus Pandemic, including supporting our local communities and businesses during the second all-England lockdown and working with partners to prepare plans for mass testing and vaccination programmes in early 2021.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is asked to note and comment upon the Council's actions during the period September - December in supporting communities and businesses across North Norfolk during the current phase of the Coronavirus Pandemic, the second period of national lockdown; and in preparing for mass vaccination programmes in the first quarter of 2021.

Reasons for

Recommendations:

To inform corporate learning from experience gained through the earlier phases of the pandemic, and preparedness to respond to local incidences of COVID in the next few months, as well as preparations to support the local delivery of mass vaccination programmes during the first quarter of 2021.

Cabinet Member(s)
Cllr Sarah Butikofer,
Leader of the Council

Ward(s) affected
All

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The global Coronavirus pandemic event has now seen over 54 million infections and over 1.3 million deaths worldwide (World Health Organisation, 16th November 2020). In the UK there have been over 1.5 million confirmed COVID-19 infections and over 56,500 deaths (deaths within 28 days of positive test result; method of calculation revised by Public Health England on 28th July 2020) (UK Government COVID data – 25th November 2020).
- 1.2 Thankfully the numbers of infections and deaths in North Norfolk has been, and remains, low – with a cumulative total of 587 confirmed infections in North Norfolk at 20th November giving a rate of 559.9 per 100,000 compared to an England average of 2381.8 per 100,000; meaning that we have the second lowest cumulative rate per 100,000 population of all local authority areas in England.
- 1.3 The number of cases in the last 7 days in North Norfolk to 20th November was 71 cases - or a rate of 67.7 per 100,000 compared to an England average of 218.4 per 100,000; meaning that under this measure on 20th November we had the seventh the lowest rate per 100,000 population of any local authority area in England.
- 1.4 The total number of COVID deaths (within 28 days of a positive test) in North Norfolk at 20th November since the pandemic started in March of this year is 51 deaths, giving a rate of 48.6 per 100,000 - compared to an England average of 88 deaths per 100,000. On this indicator North Norfolk doesn't fare as well as a number of other authorities being the 45th lowest local authority area in England – possibly due to our older demographic.
- 1.5 Across all of these indicators North Norfolk has been incredibly fortunate and has consistently been in the lowest 10% of all local authority areas in England for cases and the lowest 25% of deaths – however we are far from complacent and are reviewing our situation daily, particularly as the number of cases in the UK, Norfolk and North Norfolk have been rising in recent weeks – with North Norfolk seeing an average of approximately 3 cases a day during much of October but this figure having risen towards an average of between 8 and 10 cases per day in the past couple of weeks.

2. North Norfolk District Council's support for recovery

- 2.1 Adopting the same principle as the reports to Cabinet on 18th May, 6th July, and 5th September, the following comments detail the actions taken by the

District Council in response to the Coronavirus situation for the period September through until the end of November 2020:-

2.2 Maintenance of the “You are Welcome” reassurance programme

2.2.1 Through this programme the District Council continued to support large numbers of visitors to the District during September and October, through maintaining social distancing measures and hand washing facilities so as to create and maintain safe, attractive town centre and seafront environments. This was achieved by us working with our cleansing contract partner, SERCO, to maintain high frequency of toilet cleansing, beach and foreshore cleansing. The Council, through a contracting partner, has also maintained a programme of regular “fogging” of “high-touch” surfaces within the District Council’s public conveniences, playgrounds, car park machines, foreshore shelters and on Cromer Pier to reduce the potential transmission of Coronavirus.

2.3 Council offices

2.3.1 The Council has maintained a programme of high frequency cleaning and regular fogging of the Council’s offices at Cromer and Fakenham to operate a “safe” working environment for District Council and DWP staff.

2.3.2 This has allowed a limited number of public facing services through pre-booked appointments to be re-established under COVID-secure arrangements in support of the majority of services continuing to be provided online, with the majority of the Council’s staff continuing to work from home.

2.3.3 Given the prolonged period over which reduced staff numbers have been working from the Council’s offices and that these arrangements are anticipated to operate well in to next year, the Council took the difficult decision in October to terminate the contract with its catering contractor whose staff had been furloughed for the period March – October, from early November.

2.4 Norfolk Tourism Sector Support Grant Scheme

2.4.1 Under the Norfolk Tourism Sector Support Grant Programme operated through the Norfolk Strategic Fund, North Norfolk District Council secured £330,000 to deliver against three key objectives:-

- support meet the costs of increased cleansing of key tourist areas in the District;
- the development, promotion and appraisal of applications for a North Norfolk tourism adaptation grant scheme to promote investment which diversifies / extend the visitor season, and
- promotion of the District to key markets throughout 2021.

2.4.2 The tourism business seasonal extension / adaptation scheme was promoted in September. After 79 expressions of interest were considered 38 full applications were received for the £175,000 grant fund and an awards panel met on 20th November and approved 29 applications for grant funding totalling £138,000.

2.5 England National Lockdown

- 2.5.1 Following the Prime Minister's announcement on 31st October that there would be an all-England lockdown for the period 5th November – 2nd December to suppress rapidly rising rates of infection, the Council has stepped up its community support arrangements for vulnerable people and put in place arrangements to administer a further £5.2 million of Local Restriction Support Grants to local businesses which have had to cease trading during the lockdown.
- 2.5.2 Whilst the Council has continued to promote and operate its 01263 516000 and NNDCCOVID19@north-norfolk.gov.uk helpline the numbers of people or households seeking support with shopping and prescription collection due to self-isolation during the second lockdown has been low compared to the numbers seeking assistance during the first lockdown, as many people have been able to make such arrangements through family and friends, neighbours or local community organisations. The Council stands ready however to support people in need of assistance at this time.
- 2.5.3 The Government has also asked District Councils to administer further business grants – the Local Restriction Support Grant scheme for businesses which have had to close during this second lockdown. North Norfolk District Council has received £5.267 million to distribute under this Fund and on 25th November had processed applications and made payments totalling £3.220 million (or 61% of the allocation) to 2328 businesses, with arrangements in place to pay further businesses in the coming days. Cabinet will be provided with a further verbal update of the total amount paid out at the Cabinet meeting on 7th December.
- 2.5.4 The Government has also paid a further £2.1 million to the Council to operate an Additional Restrictions Grant over the period to end March 2022. Given that many North Norfolk businesses which have had to close during the November lockdown are in the retail, personal services, hospitality and tourism sectors the Council has taken the view that it is not appropriate to consider how this Additional Restrictions Grant might operate in the period before Christmas when many businesses will be focussed on maximising Christmas trading opportunities. It is therefore proposed to consider how best use might be made of the Additional Restrictions Grant early in the New Year when the need for further restrictions through the tiered system are better understood dependent on levels of infection which exist locally at that time.
- 2.5.5 During the second lockdown, the District Council has not closed any public car parks, public toilets (except for three seasonal facilities which would not be open in November in a more normal year), playgrounds, woodland sites or Cromer Pier. The North Norfolk Deep History Coast Visitor Centre has however been closed in accordance with Government guidance during the lockdown.
- 2.5.6 The Council's leisure facilities, operated by our partner, Everyone Active, have also had to close during the November lockdown.

2.6 Housing and homelessness support

- 2.6.1 During the peak of the COVID lockdown the authority provided accommodation for 24 street homeless/rough sleepers under the national “Everyone in” initiative. The authority continues to provide the same level of support to those that are street homeless/rough sleeping and the focus has moved to ‘Protect’ with the authority currently having five entrenched rough sleepers who continue to refuse support and accommodation, and six cases are currently being accommodated where the Housing Team continue to work with these individuals to secure alternative accommodation. The Council continues to receive notifications of Rough Sleepers across the district, however due to the transient nature of people in this group it is often difficult to verify their status, and currently we have three individuals who we are unable to verify. Since the launch of the ‘Everyone In’ initiative in March of this year the District Council has supported 14 Rough Sleepers into supported housing/social tenancies/private rented accommodation, with the remaining 10 cases were supported to return home or having left the District.
- 2.6.2 Since the first national lockdown was lifted in June, the demand for Housing Advice services has increased and we have found that more single people have approached the service due to relationship breakdowns and families no longer able to continue with arrangements. The types of cases approaching the Council continue to be complex in terms of their need for support.
- 2.6.3. 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	26 Aug 2019 - 26 Nov 2020	01 Apr 2020 - 25 Aug 2020	26 Aug 2020 - 26 Nov 2020
Prevention Opened	148	81	29	27	16
Relief Opened	127	52	34	62	43
Prevention Outcomes	141	75	22	17	2
Relief Outcomes	92	33	25	32	5
Final Duties	72	22	23	32	2
Final Duties Outcomes	56	18	23	41	2
Approaches to the Service	895	392	268	247	205

- 2.6.4 The data in the table shows that the number of Prevention cases have fallen compared to this time last year and it is believed that this is due to landlords not issuing notice due to a ban on evictions until 31 Mar 2021. The Housing Team is concerned that numbers of people given notice from their current accommodation might increase from 1 April 2021 when landlords will be able to issue two months’ notice and not the six months that is required at the moment.

- 2.6.5 Over the same period our number of Relief cases have increased compared to last year and Outcomes have reduced. Early in the pandemic the Council made an arrangement with the Your Choice Your Home partners to temporarily suspend bidding and instead move to a direct let arrangement whereby registered provider partners would allow direct lets to clients that were homeless and in temporary accommodation, at risk of going into temporary accommodation, who were street homeless or experiencing Domestic Abuse and Supported Housing Clients. In September 2020 partners agreed to a partial reopening of the Your Choice Your Home bidding process with the Council agreeing to one in three lets being a direct let to people in emergency need as described above.
- 2.6.6 Currently the Council has 48 households (including 6 street homeless / rough sleepers) in temporary accommodation. This figure is broken down between 29 singles & childless couples & 19 families. The costs of accommodating these households in temporary accommodation to date this financial year has been £447,750 with a projected cost of £750,120 to the end of the financial year. These costs and demands on the service will be kept under constant review.
- 2.6.7 The Council has also been successful in submitting 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 Council secured £140,000 of grant through this programme and is now in the process of purchasing the 4 units of accommodation – further details of which are provided in a separate report on this agenda.
- 2.6.8 The authority is now moving into the winter months and will be working with its roughsleepers to protect them over the winter period. An application has been submitted for the cold weather payment, the maximum the authority can apply for is £6,400.00 and this will be used to assist with ‘additional winter pressures’, separate from the SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol) arrangements.

2.7 Test and Trace Support Payments

- 2.7.1 In September, the Government announced that it would provide support payments, through local authorities, for people on low incomes who were required to self-isolate because of having a positive COVID test result themselves or being advised to self-isolate through a close contact as notified through the NHS Test and Trace system.
- 2.7.2 North Norfolk District Council received £43,500 for standard Test and Trace self-isolation payments and a further £26,337 for discretionary applications, as well as £26,472 for administration costs. These sums were to cover the period 12th October 2020 to 31st January 2021; with any unspent monies having to be returned to the Department of Health and Social Care.
- 2.7.3 These payments in North Norfolk are being administered by our Benefits Team. At 26th November we had received 22 applications for the standard £500 payment of which 9 applications had been approved with 1 application pending. For the Discretionary Payment we had 25 applications - with 8 applications approved, 10 rejected and 8 pending. Applications are appraised

in accordance with Government criteria and guidance and payments can only be made where an applicant can demonstrate that they have seen a reduction in income through having to self-isolate and therefore being unable to work.

2.8 Mobile testing facilities – North Norfolk

2.8.1 Local COVID testing facilities have continued to be provided twice weekly in the district at The Meadow Car Park, Cromer and the Highfield Road Car Park in Fakenham during the September – November period, supported by District Council staff setting up the car parks for this purpose on a twice weekly basis, reducing the need for local residents to travel long distances to access testing facilities.

2.9 Strategic Partnership working

2.9.1 Throughout the period September – November, the District Council through the Chief Executive, Leader of the Council, Head of Environmental Services, Resilience Manager and Communications and PR Manager have continued to attend Countywide partnership meetings in support of managing the local response to COVID. This has included attending meetings of the Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG); Tactical Co-ordinating Group (re-established in October as the level of infections in the County began to rise) and new arrangements through the Health Protection and Engagement Boards and Norfolk Public Sector Leaders Board. Internally the Council has continued to operate its own civil contingency arrangements including increasing the frequency of our internal GOLD planning meetings following the Prime Minister's announcement of the national lockdown in early November to twice a week.

2.9.2 As we seek to protect communities across Norfolk and North Norfolk, proposals have been developed for District Councils to employ small teams of Coronavirus Support Officers and Test and Trace Contact Officers, funded through monies provided by the Government to try and minimise rates of infection and transmission and the District Council is looking to recruit into these positions in the coming days and Cabinet will be updated further on these appointments at the Cabinet meeting.

2.9.3 Alongside the continued Response and Recovery works detailed above, the Council is also engaged in discussions around the planning for the potential of mass testing and vaccination programmes to be delivered in the District.

3.0 Alignment with Corporate Plan objectives

3.1 As outlined in previous reports to Cabinet, 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 due to rising cases nationally as we experience a second wave of infections and the second national lockdown.

3.2 It is believed that the Council has continued to respond well to the challenges presented by COVID, whilst continuing mainstream service provision and progressing actions outlined in the Corporate Plan.

4. Medium Term Financial Strategy

- 4.1 The Council's Finance Team continue to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on the Council's expenditure, income and overall financial position and will continue to report our position through reports over the remainder of the civic year and in preparing a budget for 2021/22 for presentation to Council in February.

5. Financial and Resource Implications

- 5.1 See comments made at Section 4 above.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 Any decisions taken under emergency provisions through delegated powers / authority will be reported separately to Cabinet or Full Council as appropriate.

7. Risks

- 7.1 This report details the Council's ongoing response to the global Coronavirus pandemic, particularly the actions it has taken during the period September – November in response to the second wave of infection nationally and locally and the second national lockdown in England during November.
- 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 in support of health partners to plan for local delivery of any mass testing or vaccination programmes in the first six months of 2021 anticipated increase in levels of Coronavirus infections, alongside normal winter pressures.

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 nine 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.
- 9.2 More recently the Council and partners have given 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 rises in levels of unemployment, business closures, financial hardship, economic inclusion, mental health and wellbeing increasing and 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 the period September – November 2020 in responding to the ongoing Coronavirus Pandemic – including the second national lockdown and in preparing to support the delivery of mass testing and vaccination programmes in the District in the months ahead.