

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 responding to the ongoing Coronavirus Pandemic at a strategic, local and organisational level over the period December 2020 - March 2021. Actions taken are outlined in the report.

These include:-

- monitoring and responding to the rising number of local cases of COVID in the District during December 2020 and January 2021;
- making payments of COVID business grants in respect of the Tier 4 lockdown in Norfolk from 26th December 2020 and then the third national lockdown from 4th January 2021;
- supporting local health partners roll out delivery of the vaccine programme across North Norfolk;
- development of advice and support for the staged re-opening of local businesses as per the national roadmap from 12th April, 17th May and 21st June;
- preparing the District for the forthcoming visitor season through refreshing our "You are Welcome" reassurance programme, supported by social distancing measures, fogging of public toilets and other assets so as to provide as safe an environment for local residents and visitors as possible;
- holding conversations with the Council's staff about New Ways of Working beyond COVID capturing the benefits of remote working through maintaining customer service provision over the internet and telephone, whilst re-opening the offices to personal callers
- participation in the Marie Curie National Day of Reflection by lighting up Cromer Pier in yellow lights;
- holding discussions with the Norfolk Public Health Team to develop and deliver a programme of surveillance testing for local businesses over the coming months
- continued to support twice weekly mobile testing facilities on Council car parks in Cromer, Fakenham and from early February in North Walsham

- 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 in preparing for Recovery as lockdown restrictions are lifted in the coming months.

Options considered:

The Council's response to the ongoing Coronavirus Pandemic has been led through regular meetings of its Local Co-ordination Group civil contingency arrangements which has considered options dynamically based on data on local case numbers and Government statements and announcements

Conclusions:

The report details the actions taken by the District Council during the period December 2020 – end of March 2021 in responding to the ongoing Coronavirus Pandemic, including supporting our local communities and businesses during the extended third all-England lockdown and working with partners to support delivery of the local vaccination programme and in preparing the District for the forthcoming visitor season which is expected to be very busy with large numbers of staycation and day visitors.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is asked to note and comment upon the Council's actions during the period December 2020 – end of March 2021 in responding to the ongoing Coronavirus Pandemic, including supporting businesses during the extended third all-England lockdown, working with partners to support delivery of the local vaccination programme and preparing the District for the forthcoming tourist season.

Reasons for

Recommendations:

To ensure the Council continues to support our residents, businesses and communities respond to the ongoing Coronavirus Pandemic and has in place necessary arrangements to support Recovery as lockdown restrictions are lifted and large numbers of tourist visitors are anticipated to spend time in the District in the coming months.

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

Ward(s) 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 global Coronavirus pandemic event has now seen over 125 million infections and over 2.7 million deaths worldwide (World Health Organisation, 27th March 2021). In the UK there have now been over 4.3 million confirmed COVID-19 infections since the first cases were recorded in February 2020 and over 126,500 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 – 27th March 2021).
- 1.2 The number of infections in North Norfolk, relative to many parts of the UK, has been, and remains, low – with a cumulative total of 2,989 confirmed infections in North Norfolk at 27th March - giving a rate of 2581.1 per 100,000 compared to an England average of 6727.6 per 100,000; meaning that North Norfolk has the tenth lowest cumulative rate per 100,000 population of the 314 local authority areas in England.
- 1.3 The number of cases in North Norfolk compared to many parts of the UK had remained very low throughout 2020 until 14th December 2020 when the 7-day rolling case rate exceeded 100 cases per 100,000 for the first time. In the following days, in common with rising rates of infection across the UK, the number of positive cases in North Norfolk rose rapidly and peaked at 442 cases per 100,000 population on 4th January 2021, when the Government introduced the third all-England lockdown. In the days following the 4th January 2021, the number of cases in North Norfolk reduced faster than the Norfolk and England averages and since 6th February 2021 daily new case rates in the District have averaged as being in single figures. Of the total 2,989 cases recorded in the District since the first cases were recorded on 13th March 2020 up to 27th March 2021, 1976 cases or 66% of all cases were recorded in the eight weeks 14th December 2020 to 8th February 2021.
- 1.4 In the rolling 7 days to 22nd March 2021, there were 14 recorded cases in the District, giving a case rate of 13.4 cases per 100,000 population meaning that under this measure North Norfolk had the fifteenth lowest rate per 100,000 population of any local authority area in England.
- 1.5 The total number of COVID deaths (within 28 days of a positive test) in North Norfolk since the first death on 27th March 2020 is 188, giving a rate of 179.3 per 100,000. This compares to an England average of 197.9 deaths per 100,000. As with the number of COVID infections in the District, the majority of deaths (111 cases or 59% of all deaths) in North Norfolk were recorded in the period 14th December 2021 through to 8th February 2021. On this indicator North Norfolk doesn't fare as well as many other authorities being the 123rd lowest local authority area in England out of 314 authorities, possibly reflecting North Norfolk's older demographic.

2. North Norfolk District Council's support for recovery

- 2.1 Adopting the same principle as previous reports to Cabinet on the pandemic, the following comments detail the actions taken by the District Council in response to the Coronavirus situation for the period December 2020 through until the end of March 2021:-

2.2 Monitoring local case rates

2.2.1 As local case numbers rose during December 2020 the District Council worked with local partners to deliver the Hands, Face, Space message to local residents and businesses and responded to the Government placing Norfolk in Tier 4 restrictions from 26th December 2020 by providing advice and support to local businesses, administering COVID local restrictions grants and paying Test and Trace payments to eligible people advised to self-isolate because of a positive COVID test or close contact with someone with a positive test. In early January, when case rates locally were still rising and the Government placed all England under a third national lockdown the Council very closely monitored infection rates in different parts of the District and delivered additional messaging in those areas with highest case rates to reinforce the message that people in those areas should take additional care in following Government advice.

2.3 Payment of COVID grants to local businesses

2.3.1 Since the announcement of the second national lockdown in November the Council's Revenues and Economic Growth Teams have paid out over £38million of COVID grant funds to local businesses (almost 20,000 individual payments) under nine different grant schemes covering the second and third England lockdown periods and the Tier 4 lockdown covering Norfolk for the period 26th December 2020 – 4th January 2021 including the Local Restrictions Support Grant Scheme, Wet Led Pubs scheme and the discretionary Additional Restrictions Grant Scheme.

2.4 Vaccine Programme

2.4.1 Vaccine take up in North Norfolk across the nine priority cohorts – ie age groups over 50, health and social care workers and people under 50 with a range of long-term health conditions as advised by the Joint Committee of Vaccination and Immunisation has been strong – starting initially through the Fakenham Medical Practice before Christmas and then extending to Sheringham Medical Practice, Rossis Leisure Centre, North Walsham, North Walsham Community Centre and Hoveton Village Hall in February and more recently local delivery at other GP practices and Cromer Hospital from dates in March. The District Council has strengthened its working relationship with local health colleagues around local vaccine delivery both at a Local Co-ordination Group level and at a frontline practical level with the Council's Property Services, Customer Services and COVID Support Officers all supporting local arrangements for vaccine delivery.

2.4.2 At 25th March 2021, 66% of the District's population over the age of 16 – some 61,100 people have had their first vaccination, meaning the District has one of the highest rates of vaccination nationally with many people in the oldest age cohorts and some health and social care staff now also receiving their second dose of the vaccine, giving increased protection from infection, severity of illness and hospitalisation.

2.5 Business advice and support

2.5.1 As local retail and hospitality businesses look to re-open in the coming weeks as national lockdown restrictions are lifted, the Council's Economic Growth and Environmental Health Commercial, Licensing and Public Protection

Teams are providing advice and guidance to businesses across a wide range of issues both through personal visits and via the Council's website where detailed guidance has been developed and posted – as per the link - [Home | Coronavirus: Support and Advice for Businesses \(north-norfolk.gov.uk\)](https://www.north-norfolk.gov.uk/coronavirus-support-and-advice-for-businesses)

2.5.2 The Government has also issued guidance that pubs, restaurants and cafes should be supported, where possible, to provide outdoor seating and dining spaces to accommodate customers as outdoor spaces are considered to be safer in terms of minimising the transmission of the virus. The Government has therefore relaxed permitted development rights relating to the provision of temporary structures, marquees and shelters and the Council's Planning, Licensing and Economic Growth Teams are therefore receiving a large number of enquiries about outdoor hospitality which required detailed consideration given the variety of businesses and context in which they operate relative to adjoining residential properties, amenity issues etc over perhaps a six month summer period.

2.6 Preparing the District for the forthcoming visitor season

2.6.1 As national lockdown restrictions are lifted in the coming weeks and uncertainties remaining about overseas travel, the District Council is working with local partners to plan for large numbers of staycation and day visitors coming to North Norfolk over the forthcoming visitor season. Many accommodation providers across the District are reporting strong demand / interest such that we are anticipating large numbers of visitors to the District from 12th April when self-contained accommodation can open and then from 17th May when the national roadmap proposes that serviced accommodation and caravan and campsites can re-open. Bookings are reported to be strong across all types of accommodation and across the whole of the spring and summer months, hopefully providing local tourism, retail and hospitality businesses to recover strongly after a period of considerable uncertainty and periods when they have been unable to trade, including the Christmas and New Year period and a second Easter Bank Holiday which is traditionally the start of the main tourist season.

2.6.2 The Government has recently announced further financial support for local authorities to prepare for the re-opening of their high streets, town centres and tourist areas through a new Welcome Back programme. Under this programme the District Council has been awarded £158,331 and arrangements are being made to refresh our "You are Welcome" reassurance programme, supported by social distancing measures, visitor information and signage and the fogging of public toilets and other assets so as to provide as safe an environment for local residents and visitors as possible. Additional COVID Support Officers are also being employed by the Council over the summer months paid for through funding made available to the Norfolk Public Health Team's Controlling Outbreak Management Fund budget as Norfolk seeks to support the safe re-opening of its tourist and town / city centre economies, which have now had some four months of "hibernation" through the national lockdowns since early November last year.

2.6.3 In addition officers are discussing with local partners whether additional temporary / peak season parking capacity can be provided in the key resort towns of Cromer, Sheringham and Wells and the provision of more litter bins, street and beach cleansing, cleaning of public toilets etc so as to manage

anticipated large numbers of visitors particularly during the late May Spring Bank Holiday and July and August; more details of which will be provided in due course as arrangements are confirmed.

2.7 Re-opening Council services to personal callers, adopting New Ways of Working and preparations for the elections on 6th May

2.7.1 As the phased lifting of lockdown restrictions proceeds as outlined by the Government, planning is taking place about how we open the Council offices to larger numbers of customers beyond the appointment system we have operated in recent months. During the COVID pandemic we have seen large numbers of customer enquiries and interactions with the Council move online and through telephone contacts and customer confidence in these arrangements presents longer-term opportunities for the Council to maintain and further improve customer access and service via these channels. Therefore, as with many customer service organisations, we have begun internal conversations with staff about New Ways of Working into the future which will seek to balance good customer service with remote and office based working moving forward. These conversations are now starting and will present opportunities for the Council moving forward in terms of our office estate, reducing our carbon footprint through reduced travel and providing new opportunities for the recruitment and retention of staff. Cabinet will be informed of the progress of these conversations as they proceed over the coming months.

2.7.2 In the meantime, the Council re-opened Cromer Pier in response to the first lockdown restrictions being lifted on 8th March and is planning to re-open the North Norfolk Information Centre from 12th April. From 12th April, recognising the re-opening of public services from that date, we are planning to receive larger numbers of customers to the Council's offices in Cromer and Fakenham in a COVID-secure way, not least because we expect a larger number of personal callers at that time with enquiries about postal and proxy votes for the Police and Crime Commissioner, County Council and some local elections on 6th May.

2.7.3 Detailed arrangements are also well advanced for the delivery of the elections on 6th May with all polling stations being assessed for COVID-safe practices including one-way systems, fogging with disinfectant in the days before polling day and with new signage advising voters of social distancing, need to wear face-coverings etc.

2.7.4 The Council is also in discussions with its contractors Everyone Active, Openwide and the RNLI beach lifeguards regarding the re-opening of leisure centres, Pier Pavilion Theatre and beach safety services in the weeks ahead as the lockdown restrictions are lifted and preparations for the summer visitor season move forward.

2.8 Housing and homelessness support

2.8.1 Throughout the pandemic the Council's Housing Options and Homelessness Team have continued to provide support services to people in housing need and at 29th March 2021 the Council was accommodating 40 households in temporary accommodation including 29 single people and 11 families. Of the 29 single people accommodated 15 are classed as rough sleepers and are

currently being accommodated through the “Protect” (Everyone In) programme.

2.9 Test and Trace Support Payments

2.9.1 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.

2.10 Mobile testing facilities – North Norfolk

2.10.1 Local COVID testing facilities have continued to be provided at least twice weekly in the district at The Meadow Car Park, Cromer and the Highfield Road Car Park in Fakenham and from early February the Vicarage Street Car Park in North Walsham, supported by District Council staff setting up the car parks for this purpose, reducing the need for local residents to travel long distances to access testing facilities.

2.11 Asymptomatic Surveillance testing

2.11.1 The Council is holding discussions with the Norfolk Public Health Team about a programme of asymptomatic surveillance testing for owners and staff of local businesses in the retail, tourism and hospitality sectors over the coming months as these sectors employ large numbers of staff in younger age groups unlikely to receive a vaccine until the mid to late summer. Regular Lateral Flow Testing of this workforce will therefore give confidence to business owners and customers of these important businesses within the local economy as the District accommodates large numbers of visitors over the summer months.

2.12 Marie Curie National Day of Reflection

2.12.1 The District Council was pleased to support the Marie Curie National Day of Reflection in memory of people lost to and support for people bereaved from COVID on 23rd March, which was the anniversary of the first national lockdown, by lighting Cromer Pier up in yellow lights. The Leader of the Council, Chief Executive and the two local ward members for Cromer

attended the Pier and met with a representative of the Marie Curie organisation for a moment of reflection.

2.13. Strategic Partnership working

2.13.1 Throughout the period December 2020 – end of March 2021, the District Council through the Chief Executive, Leader of the Council / Cabinet member Cllr Richard Kershaw, Director for Communities, 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, and the Health Protection and Engagement Boards. Internally the Council has continued to operate its own civil contingency arrangements including at least weekly internal GOLD planning meetings. It is envisaged that these arrangements will continue for the foreseeable future as local partners seek to monitor and remain ready to respond to any rising case rates of infection in the coming weeks and months as the phased lockdown restrictions are lifted and a busy summer of staycation and day visitors see large numbers of people visit and spend time in the County – particularly in coastal and Broads locations.

2.13.2 Strong partnership working has also been developed and operated at an operational level through the Council's COVID Support Officers working closely as necessary with local police colleagues to manage long-distance visitors to the coast during the lockdown and undertaking enforcement visits in respect of breaches to COVID legislation around house parties and gatherings. Strong partnership working has also been developed with the Clinical Commissioning Group and local health partners in the delivery and promotion of the vaccine programme 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.

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 for the remainder of the financial year and the budget for 2021/22.

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 December 2020 to the end of March 2021 in response to the second wave of infection the third national lockdown in England since 4th January 2021.
- 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 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.

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 twelve months have 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.
- 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 December 2020 – end of March 2021 in responding to the ongoing Coronavirus Pandemic, including supporting businesses during the extended third all-England lockdown, working with partners to support delivery of the local vaccination programme and preparing the District for the forthcoming tourist season.