

**SPECIAL CABINET PANEL
WEDNESDAY, 6 MAY 2020 AT 10:00AM**

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19 (Update no.3)

(Please note the content of this report is accurate as at the 27 April 2020)

Report of the Director of Resources

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Executive Member: David Williams, Leader of the Council

1. Purpose of the report

1.1 To provide Members with the latest update on Hertfordshire County Council's planning and response to Coronavirus (COVID-19).

2. Summary

2.1 This report provides an update on the COVID-19 pandemic since the last Cabinet Report of 20 April 2020 and the work that Hertfordshire County Council is undertaking with partners to address the challenges faced.

3. Recommendation

3.1 That the Panel notes the contents of this report

4. International and National Position

4.1 National Update – UK COVID-19 Cases Update

4.1.1 As of the 26 April 2020, Public Health England Statistics has confirmed that 669,850 people in the UK have been tested for COVID-19. Of those, 152,840 have tested positive with the virus. The number of hospital deaths due to COVID-19 currently stands at 20,732. In England, there are a total of 110,203 confirmed cases, with Scotland recording 10,324 confirmed cases, Wales recording 9,078 and Northern Ireland registering 3,308 confirmed cases.

4.2 Government Strategy – Social Distancing and Isolation

4.2.1 On 16 April 2020, the UK Government met to discuss the continuation of the extensive social distancing and isolation measures it had introduced on 23 March 2020 to combat the spread of COVID-19. In the subsequent daily press briefing on the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, First Secretary of State, Dominic Raab outlined the following message:

“The government measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 will continue for a further three weeks: Upon consultation with the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), the government has determined that the measures introduced on 23 March 2020 will need to continue for at least the next three weeks. Whilst significant progress has been made to limit the spread of COVID-19, all shops providing non-essential goods will remain closed over this period, with people instructed to only leave their homes for very limited purposes. This is to ensure that a second peak of the virus, and with it substantially more deaths, does not materialise.”

The First Secretary also unveiled the five requirements the government will need to see satisfied before it will consider lifting any of the current measures:

- 1) The government must be satisfied that the NHS will be able to provide sufficient critical care and specialist treatment across the UK.
- 2) There must be a sustained and consistent fall in the daily death rates from coronavirus, so the government is confident that the UK has move beyond the second peak.
- 3) There must be reliable data to prove that the rate of infection is decreasing to manageable levels across the country.
- 4) The government must be confident in its ability to respond to any future operational challenges.
- 5) The government must be confident that any future adjustments will not lead to a second peak of infections from COVID-19 and overwhelm the NHS.

The UK Government confirmed these restrictions would be kept under constant review. They would be looked at again in three weeks, and relaxed if the evidence shows they are able to.

4.2.2 The UK Government has continued to operate the shielding programme to protect those at highest risk from COVID-19. As of 14 April, 250,000 boxes of essential food had been delivered by wholesalers to those at highest risk across the country, with hundreds of thousands more to follow in the coming weeks. The UK Government has identified around 1.5 million people who fall into the clinically vulnerable group in England. This includes those with reduced immune systems or with severe respiratory conditions. These

packages contain essential food and household items for those who need to self-isolate at home but have no support network to help them.

- 4.2.3 Public Health England has continued to provide advice and guidance to the general population on how to maintain their personal wellbeing in isolation. The organisation's 'Every Mind Matters' platform has been updated to incorporate the new COVID-19 mental health guidance, providing content to help people look after their mental and physical health while staying at home.

4.3 **Government Strategy – Business Support**

- 4.3.1 The Office of National Statistics (ONS) published the results of a survey, carried out between the 20 and the 30 of March 2020, measuring the impact of the first wave of COVID-19 on businesses in Great Britain. It confirmed that 29% of businesses surveyed (4,598) reported having to reduce staff numbers in the short term. Those within the Accommodation and Food Services Sector, the Administrative and Support Services sector and the Arts, Entertainment and Recreation sector reported the largest proportions of reducing staff numbers in the short term.

- 4.3.2 The Chancellor of the Exchequer has confirmed that the Government's Coronavirus Jobs Retention Scheme will be extended by one month to reflect continuing social distancing measures. It was originally open for three months and backdated from 1 March to the end of May. This latest announcement means the scheme will now be open until the end of June. The scheme went live on 20 April, with businesses able to claim up to £2,500 a month towards staff wages. More than 140,000 companies, employing a total of about a million workers, applied for the scheme on the first day of operation.

- 4.3.3 The Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme was launched by the Chancellor on 20 April. The scheme is designed to support viable large businesses affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The Chancellor confirmed that all firms with a turnover of more than £45 million will now be able to apply for up to £25 million of finance, and up to £50 million for firms with a turnover of more than £250 million.

- 4.3.4 UK businesses driving innovation and development will be helped through the coronavirus outbreak with a £1.25 billion government support package. Announced on 20 April, this package includes a £500 million investment fund for high-growth companies impacted by the crisis, made up of funding from government and the private sector. Similarly, the government has introduced 'The Future Fund Scheme', a convertible loan initiative for innovative, UK-based, companies. The loans will range from between £125,000 and £5million, subject to at least equal match funding from private investors.

4.4 **Government Strategy – Council Funding**

- 4.4.1 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced that councils across England will receive a further £1.6 billion in additional funding as they continue to respond to coronavirus pandemic. The

funding will support local councils as they continue their efforts to support and deliver the government's shielding programme for vulnerable communities, assist the public health workforce and provide additional support across a range of vital services. This additional funding to councils is part of a £14 billion stimulus package from the Coronavirus Emergency Response Fund, to support the continued running of essential health and social care services. A total of an additional of £3.2 billion has now been allocated by the UK government to enable local authorities to respond to the pandemic.

4.5 Government Strategy – Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) & Testing

4.5.1 The government has issued updated guidance on the provision of PPE, with the aim of ensuring that all health and social care organisations have access to sufficient supplies of safety equipment. The UK government and devolved administrations have published [guidance on appropriate PPE for health and social care workers](#)¹, as well as [publishing simplified](#)² guidance for front line staff in both the health and social care sectors. As of the week commencing the 13 April, the UK government is now providing PPE to 58,000 different providers including care homes, GP surgeries, hospices and community care organisations. Furthermore, since 2 February, the government has distributed 761 million pieces of PPE across the UK.

4.5.2 The Department of Health and Social Care announced on 15 April that all care home residents and staff with COVID-19 symptoms would be tested as capacity was built up across the country. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) has been asked to lead the co-ordination of testing in the care sector. All 30,000 care providers in the UK are to be contacted by the CQC as central government prioritises the testing of care home staff and residents.

4.5.3 The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care told the House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee that eligibility testing has been extended to include critical local authority workers, including police, fire service and prison staff. Testing can be accessed by frontline workers and symptomatic members of their family or household to allow the key worker to return to work.

4.6 Government Strategy – Volunteering

4.6.1 After over 750,000 people signed up to the NHS' call for volunteers in just four days when the scheme launched, three times the original target, the Royal Voluntary Service have now completed checks for all of the applicants who are now able to start protecting vulnerable from coronavirus in England.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe-plan/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe-plan#strand-1-guidance>

5. Hertfordshire Position

5.1 Hertfordshire Update – Number of Cases of Covid-19

5.1.1 As of the 20 of April, it has been confirmed that the county of Hertfordshire, currently has a total of 1,864 confirmed cases of Covid-19. In comparison, the neighbouring counties of Essex and Cambridgeshire have 1,892 and 530 confirmed cases respectively. As of the 16 of April, 332 total deaths have been registered in Hertfordshire as a result of coronavirus. Of these deaths, 224 deaths were recorded at hospital, 76 occurring in care homes, 17 taking place at home and 5 occurring in a hospice.

5.2 Update from the Strategic Coordination Group

5.2.1 The COVID-19 Strategic Coordination Group (SCG) has continued to coordinate the multi-agency response to the COVID-19 outbreak in Hertfordshire. The SCG incorporates all the relevant leads from health, the other emergency services, local and national government and the military.

5.2.2 A recent update from the Chair of SCG, Hertfordshire County Council's Chief Fire Officer, Darryl Keen, was published on 17 April 2020. This report provided an update to Hertfordshire's response to the virus in the following areas:

5.2.3 **PPE Supplies:** The Local Resilience Forum (LRF) has a dedicated multi-agency PPE group (known as a 'cell') set up to consider all PPE related issues and needs. The cell has received an interim supply of PPE from central government to support organisations that need PPE if their supplies are delayed or in transit, whilst a national online PPE supply system is established.

The guidance on the allocation of this stock lists the organisations the LRF should support with these supplies, such as GP practices, the police and hospices. It is not intended for acute (hospital) trusts or ambulance service trusts, which are resourced through the NHS supply chain. However, if an organisation urgently needs PPE, the LRF will try to help.

Hertfordshire's County Council Public Health services continue to advise staff working in Hertfordshire care homes to practise good hand hygiene, adopt social distancing methods where they can, and wear PPE as appropriate. Social care staff are being advised to wear PPE when delivering close contact care to all residents to ensure the spread of infection is minimised.

5.2.4 **Social Care Testing:** Hertfordshire's Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) have put in place a good system for testing frontline health staff, such as those working in hospitals and ambulances, for COVID-19. This is already enabling staff to check if symptoms there were experiencing were COVID-19 related and to return to work as soon as they are safe to do so. Services are now able to have unwell household members of health employees tested,

to establish whether or not they actually have the virus. A negative test will mean that frontline staff, who live with those individuals, will be able to return to work, safe in the knowledge that they are not carrying the virus with them.

Groups of staff who can be referred for swabbing to have expanded to include GPs and clinical staff working in the community supporting people's physical and mental health care. This is in addition to the testing already available for acute hospital and ambulance staff. From 17 April, testing will be available for care home staff and those providing social care in people's homes, with testing for community pharmacists coming soon.

Local centres for swabbing staff members and their household contacts have been set up at the Harpenden Memorial Hospital and Howard Court in Welwyn Garden City. Regional test centres are available too, for people that live further afield, at Wembley and Stansted. Altogether, this means that there is capacity available to test up to 400 eligible Hertfordshire staff per day, after they have been referred to the test centres by their employing organisation. Additional laboratory capacity has been secured so that tests results can be supplied in a timely way. Central London Community Healthcare, Hertfordshire Community Trust, Herts Urgent Care and East and North and Herts Valleys CCGs have all been involved in establishing these services.

5.2.5 Support for Care Homes: In common with other areas, Hertfordshire has had to face the sad loss of some of its care home residents. Between 09 March -16 April, a total of 76 suspected COVID-19 related deaths in care homes across Hertfordshire.

Hertfordshire has had a few COVID-19 outbreaks in care homes and sadly some deaths. Support is being provided through a Provider Hub – jointly managed by the Herts Care Providers' Association (HCPA) and the county council's Adult Care Services (ACS). ACS continue to work with Public Health England and the Care Quality Commission to monitor and support care providers. This support includes practical and financial help, as well as wellbeing support for staff experiencing anxiety or trauma.

The multi-agency care home infection co-ordination group continues to oversee, monitor and map outbreaks of COVID-19 across Hertfordshire. The group will share expertise and information amongst health and care professionals and support care homes to support the safe and efficient discharge of people from hospital and support homes and care services to remain open.

5.2.6 NHS Updates: Hertfordshire's CCGs are supporting GP practices to care for patients with respiratory and fever symptoms, which are common symptoms of COVID-19, by establishing clinics called 'respiratory hubs' where patients can be safely seen and treated. While most people are getting GP help by telephone, video or text, these hubs will allow face to face assessments of patients with COVID-19 symptoms. Each hub will work with their local practices and partner organisations to ensure that people with worrying

symptoms are supported in the right place for them, whether that's at home or in hospital.

NHS Herts Valleys CCG has four 'respiratory hubs' in the west of Hertfordshire at existing healthcare settings in Borehamwood, Harpenden, Garston and Hemel Hempstead Hospital. In East and North Hertfordshire, 13 respiratory hubs have been set up to cover the six locality areas of North Herts, Stevenage, Welwyn Hatfield, Upper Lea Valley, Lower Lea Valley and Stort Valley and villages.

Hertfordshire's NHS hospitals are working with the independent/private sector to provide COVID-free sites to carry out urgent cancer work, urgent planned procedures and diagnostic tests for patients. These sites are also caring for patients who have not had the coronavirus who are well enough to be discharged from an acute hospital but are not yet well enough to return home or to their care home.

Watford General Hospital has stopped treating patients with minor injuries and illnesses between 8am and 8pm. Until further notice, patients with minor injuries should attend the Urgent Treatment Centre in Hemel Hempstead instead, which is open between 8am and 10pm every day. Watford General is supporting Barnet Hospital by temporarily treating paediatric emergency patients from the Hertsmere area.

Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust has put in place a 24/7 service to support people at home and prevent avoidable hospital admissions, called an 'Enhanced Prevention of Admission Service'. A patient video consultation system is supporting patients where this is appropriate, and additional healthcare professionals are now on duty, helping patients to get home with the support they need when they are ready to leave hospital. The team has increased the number of patients they can care for in their community inpatient units, which support patients whose care cannot be provided at home.

Core services are still being provided for children and families, including the public health nursing service (school nursing and health visiting). Families are being contacted to advise them about the services available online and by telephone.

5.2.7 Emergency Services Update: The county's blue light services are in a good place with regards to available resources and remain ready to respond to emergencies 24 hours a day. Hertfordshire Constabulary will continue to ask people to respect the regulations, implementing the policy of engaging, explaining and encouraging local communities to follow government instructions.

5.3 Volunteer and People Assurance Cell

5.3.1 The Volunteer and People Assistance Cell (VPAC) was set up under the Strategic Co-ordinating Group to organise the humanitarian and volunteering

response to coronavirus.

5.3.2 The Cell includes officers from the County Council (including Adult Care Services, Public Health, Children's Services and Communications), a District Council representative and NHS officers. The group is working in close partnership with representatives from across the county including the ten District and Borough Councils, the local voluntary and community sector and local businesses.

5.3.3 It is responsible for managing two key operations: Operation Shield and Operation Sustain. Updates on both operations can be seen in the following paragraphs.

5.4 **Operation Shield**

5.4.1 Operation Shield is a project to support to residents in Hertfordshire with serious underlying health conditions, placing them at the highest risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

5.4.2 The countywide effort to ensure the extremely vulnerable can self-isolate for twelve weeks by providing food packs and household essentials, prescriptions delivery and access to other support as necessary is working well. As of 8 April, there were known to be 24,510 names on the 'extremely vulnerable' list for the county and therefore within scope of Operation Shield.

5.4.3 As part of Operation Shield, deliveries of food parcels, household essentials and prescribed medication to the most vulnerable of our residents continues; to date 10,870 food parcels and 301 prescriptions have been delivered. Volunteers who ordinarily work for Hertfordshire Constabulary are now working with volunteers from Fire and Rescue to make pharmacy deliveries and this is working well. Plans are underway to utilise other volunteers in warehouse tasks to pick and pack food parcels; up to 100 volunteers are expected to receive their induction shortly.

5.5 **Operation Sustain**

5.5.1 Operation Sustain is the mobilisation of residents and voluntary sector to support anyone that has been affected by COVID-19, is self-isolating and/or vulnerable but who have not received a letter from the NHS.

5.5.2 Over 9,500 volunteers have been recruited to the three key voluntary sector organisations working collaboratively on this task: #TeamHerts, Watford3RT and Communities 1st. The number of volunteers deployed to date is over 3,000. It has recognised that there is some frustration from those volunteers awaiting a role but work continues at pace to process and match volunteers with appropriate voluntary and community groups and processes have been streamlined where possible.

5.5.3 A surge of requests is expected from voluntary sector organisations for more volunteers but as of yet, this has not materialised. However, it is recognised

that there will come a time when the organisations will need to build on their current resources; take on more volunteers to meet demand and ensure their core volunteers can take a well-earned rest. It is assumed that the most vulnerable residents are going to need support from their communities for some considerable time.

5.6 Hertfordshire Economy

5.6.1 The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have placed significant financial pressures on Hertfordshire's local economy. Businesses are asking for increased support from public sector organisations, asking for greater clarity and improved guidance on how to access relief funding. The local support and advice network for Hertfordshire based businesses, the Hertfordshire Growth Hub, saw a 275% increase in calls and enquiries in the week commencing 6 April, compared to the first week of March before the lockdown began. A recent survey by the Growth Hub reported that, of the 150 firms to respond to the survey, 63% reported to be in crisis.

5.6.2 Hertfordshire districts and borough councils are working at pace to identify and contact eligible businesses to support them to apply for government funding and continue to distribute two major government grant schemes (the Small Business Grant Fund and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund) as quickly as possible. As of 14 April, councils in Hertfordshire had received a total funding allocation of £196.2 million to distribute to small businesses via the Small Business Grant Fund. Of the total number of businesses eligible, 26% of businesses have received grant funding. The value of these payments currently stands at £50.2 million.

5.6.3 Hertfordshire local economy has been the centre for key contributions made towards supporting public sector services as they tackle the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples of the support Hertfordshire businesses have made towards the national effort include:

- Aztek Logistics, based in Letchworth, has delivered 60-tonnes of specialist flooring to the NHS Nightingale Hospitals at NEC (Birmingham) and ExCel Centre (London), which has now started treating COVID-19 patients.
- Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst tenant, Ossianix, is developing an antibody to the COVID-19 spike protein. A screening campaign is advancing rapidly and the company hopes to announce results to the scientific community in the coming weeks.
- The University of Hertfordshire's Law Clinic, which operates in conjunction with local law firms, is providing free legal advice on family, housing and employment via video conference. It is also running a satellite clinic with domestic abuse charity Future Living to help those who are struggling during the lockdown. Furthermore, the university's Business Incubator will double its capacity by establishing four new online cohorts to provide peer-to-peer support for up to 50 early stage micro businesses
- Hospitality staff in St Albans who cannot work during lockdown are offering to help local farmers harvest crops to help keep food supply chains

operating. The St Albans Independent Hospitality and Retail Association has reached out to the National Farmers' Union and are calling for Hertfordshire farmers in need of help to get in touch via the 'Save St Albans Pubs' Facebook group.

- Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation's new COVID-19 Catalyst Grant Programme offers grants of up to £8,000 to registered charities, local churches, schools and other social enterprises involved in immediate poverty relief projects in Letchworth.
- Wenzels in Watford is sending food donations to frontline A&E hospitals, including West Herts Hospitals NHS trust and Greenbrook Healthcare's urgent care sites across London.

5.6.4 The Hertfordshire Growth Board continues its focus on securing long term placed based benefits and associated economic ambition for Hertfordshire. The current Growth Board programmes are being reviewed for their potential contribution to mitigating immediate economic shocks and supporting economic recovery and resilience going forward.

5.6.5 The County Council has introduced immediate payments among its measures to help alleviate some of the pressures felt by its suppliers during the COVID-19 outbreak. The change to the process means that, from 2 April, all cleared payment plans and invoices are being settled in three working days.

5.6.6 The Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) has also begun the process of planning for the recovery phase of the Covid-19 pandemic. This has included the establishment of the Economic Recovery Cell, which sits below the Recovery Coordinating Group, a subgroup of the SCG. The purpose of the Economic Recovery Cell is to coordinate the planning for the short, medium and long term recovery programme for Hertfordshire's economy. This terms of reference for the cells outlines a commitment to providing support for local businesses, lobbying government for support and ensuring the long-term resiliency of the Hertfordshire economy. The Cell is led by Scott Crudgington, Director of Resources at Hertfordshire County Council

5.7 Hertfordshire Voluntary and Community Sector

5.7.1 The voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Hertfordshire have scaled up and adapted their services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and are working closely with the Volunteering and People Assistance Cell. Across the sector, group activities and lunch clubs have been replaced with supportive telephone calls and linking vulnerable people in to volunteer support services. Web pages have been updated with useful and reliable guidance.

5.7.2 Herts Help the council's advisory body for local community and voluntary services have seen an increase of 300% in incoming calls to their support line. They have now moved to a seven-day service, 8am to 8pm every day and the number of operators answering calls has been increased at peak times. The hospital and community navigator service has managed 438 additional cases related to COVID-19 in the last week.

5.7.3 Herts Independent Living Service (HILS) are delivering 27% more “meals on wheels” and have extended their service to deliver food packs to people in the ‘Operation Sustain’ group.

5.7.4 Additional specific projects of local groups include:

- *Age UK Hertfordshire*: maintaining one to one support to people and carers dealing with dementia and memory loss.
- *Carers in Herts*: increased staffing for support and advice calls and publishing activities to do with the person being cared for. There is Admiral Nurse support to families struggling with Dementia.
- *Alzheimer’s Society*: Singing for the Brain group sessions by Zoom and phone. Sending out activity packs.
- *Groundworks*: clearing gardens so people can enjoy them, and so that essential services can get through.
- *Mind in Mid Herts & Herts Mind Network*: extended call centre hours, offering online courses for anxiety, depression and other support to emotional wellbeing
- *Herts Community Foundation*: provision of a Covid-19 Emergency Fund with weekly allocations of grants of up to £5,000

5.7.5 The County Council are providing Citizens Advice (CA) with additional funding to ensure support is provided to those most in need. Face to face appointments have moved to telephone and email and there are significant increases in the number of financial and employment issues. As a service, CAs advice content is via a central website and tracking the web traffic is providing insight into where CA are likely to need to provide more advice and training. For instance, searches for “self-employed coronavirus” increased by 352% in one week, and there were 53% more visits to pages about the minimum income floor for self-employed people claiming Universal Credit. This insight will be crucial for the recovery stage of this work. News on various relief schemes has been disseminated to the public and to partner agencies, however a surge in demand is anticipated when these schemes cease.

5.7.6 A VCS Covid-19 group has been established as part of the coronavirus response which brings together VCS leaders with representatives of the CCGs and District councils. The chairs of the VCS Leaders Forum attend, together with representatives from charities for mental health, carers and citizens advice. This facilitates the rapid dissemination of service changes, the sharing of ideas and the avoidance of duplication or gaps in service.

5.7.7 The Voluntary and Community Sector will undoubtedly have an important role to play in helping Hertfordshire in its broader recovery effort. The VCS COVID-19 group have started the planning for the recovery phase, exploring

how the VCS may look at certain stages after the lifting of 'lockdown', what new practices should be continued, and what additional demand there might be due to the social and economic impact.

- 5.7.8 Financial planning for VCS organisations has been impacted by reduced opportunities for fundraising, while their staff may not have been furloughed due to the ongoing demand for services, or the risk of losing specialist skills. Redeployment of staff between organisations and statutory bodies is being considered as a mitigation. Ongoing social distancing after the lockdown may mean new models of support are required, some of which may require a higher level of resources.
- 5.7.9 Frontline charities will receive an additional £750 million package from central government to support them in their work during the COVID-19 outbreak. Furthermore, charities may now also be eligible to apply for assistance from the Small Business Grant Fund. Charities will be eligible to enquire about a grant to cover running costs, especially if it is requesting cover to a fall in income as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 5.7.10 Voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations will soon be apply for grants of £20,000 or £50,000 for projects lasting up to 12 months to help them provide mental health services - or additional support. The Coronavirus Mental Health Response Fund (CMHRF) grant is funded by £5m support from the Department of Health and Social Care. A fast track assessment process has been set up so applications will be assessed every two weeks and applicants will be informed of the outcome within a month of applying.
- 5.7.11 In addition, The Charity Commission published an updated guidance package to help with running a charity during the COVID-19 outbreak. The guidance outlines what support charities will be able to offer to their local communities during the pandemic, how to work with businesses during the pandemic as well as safeguarding guidance.
- 5.7.12 The 2020-21 Locality Budget Scheme was opened early on 20 March 2020 to help local charities and other organisations support their communities during the COVID-19 outbreak and lockdown. Since then, 250 grants and over £175,000 have already been paid to primarily voluntary and community groups across the county.

6. Hertfordshire County Council Response

6.1 Strategic Position

- 6.1.1 Hertfordshire County Council's Incident Management Team (IMT) now meets weekly due to having establishing improved working practices across all directorates and is represented at both the county's SCG and the County Council's Senior Management Board.
- 6.1.2 With PPE being a specific issue the IMT has established a dedicated county council PPE Cell to support the wider SCG PPE cell.

6.1.3 Departments have undertaken a situational report rating each area of the business against a RAG rating. This 'sitrep' informs the SCG of the risks facing the council.

6.1.4 The IMT continues to plan for a 'recovery' of council services. This will be centred around the transitioning of services from their current model of operation to one of business as usual.

6.1.5 The IMT are coordinating a COVID-19 Testing steering group across Hertfordshire to ensure facilities are available to priority staff.

6.2 Hertfordshire Coronavirus Testing

6.2.1 Following Central Government's announcement on 23 April, Hertfordshire County Council, NHS East and North Hertfordshire CCG and NHS Herts Valleys CCG are making more coronavirus testing available for essential workers and people in their households over the weekend of 25 April 2020. Those able to receive a test will also include Anyone who works for schools, district councils, local government organisations or works for the voluntary sector, Hertfordshire health services are now expanding testing capacity and this means that those who fit the eligibility criteria below can arrange a coronavirus test, as long as you or someone in your household has a car and is prepared to drive you there.

6.2.2 The eligibility criteria for this additional testing is as followed:

- This testing is for all adults and also children aged five or older.
- For key workers or residents in their household who have symptoms of COVID-19 in the last 72 hours. The symptoms include a persistent cough or a temperature of 37.8 or higher, and are now self-isolating
- For key workers or residents in their household who has developed symptoms of COVID-19 in the last 72 hours and are now self-isolating for 14 days
- If an adult or child aged five or older lives in your household and has developed symptoms of COVID-19 in the last 72 hours, they can also be tested.

6.2.3 This additional testing will be carried out by colleagues from the military over the next three days in mobile drive-through testing centres. The drive-through only testing centre will have visited the following locations:

- **Saturday 25 April:** Hertfordshire County Council car park, Apsley Campus, Brindley Way, Hemel Hempstead, HP3 9DQ

- **Sunday 26 April:** Central Watford Leisure Centre, Peace Prospect, Watford, WD17 3HA
- **Monday 27 April:** Hertfordshire County Council offices, Six Hills Way, Stevenage, SG1 2ST

6.3 Redeployment Hub

6.3.1 The Redeployment Hub for Hertfordshire County Council staff went live on 2 April 2020. The Hub offers a matching service where staff displaced due to services ceasing, or where people are at home self-isolating (but are well enough to work) but can't work from home because of their job, have been asked to undertake other duties that are appropriate to their skills and experience.

6.3.2 As of 15 April, a total of 849 council staff have been redeployed to work in critical services to help fight COVID-19. These numbers are expected to grow further as staff as time progresses. Staff have been redeployed in the following areas:

- **Public Health:** Around 270 public health clinicians, who were working as school nurses, health visitors, in drug and alcohol services and in sexual health clinics, have been seconded to help the NHS around the county. They are now working in a variety of roles, including Accident and Emergency, working on cancer wards, treating COVID-19 patients, running testing centres and in highly skilled programme manager roles within the NHS.
- **Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service:** 17 on-call fire fighters are now supporting the East of England Ambulance Service having just completed their induction and training programme at the Joint Emergency Services Academy, Stevenage. They will start driving ambulances so that paramedics are freed up to treat the most vulnerable patients across the region.
- **Other Redeployed County Council Staff:** Additional staff, including those who work in services that have been suspended as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, have been asked to offer additional hours if the work part time and move to different roles in order to support the Council's frontline services.

The Redeployment Hub has received offers from 102 members of staff to work additional hours, with a further 370 being considered for redeployment across suspended services. These individuals will be moved to more urgent duties within administration functions, adult social care or community support roles. A further 90 staff, supporting day centre provision that has been suspended, have moved across to roles in supported living accommodation, offering emotional and physical support to service users with a variety of needs.

6.4 Adult Care Services Update (ACS)

6.4.1 What has been delivered? (Update)

- ACS is working quickly to utilise £26 million worth of funding from central government to provide a significant package of financial support to care homes. The funding will be used to cover agency costs for staff who are either sick or in self-isolation, fund extra staff and help care homes buy PPE. The funding will also be used to set up and employ separate COVID-19 wings, corridors and floors with dedicated staff within care homes to physically separate affected service users.
- Guidance has been provided for health and social care professionals on PPE. A dedicated page on the Health in Herts section of the county council website now includes a page on PPE, advising professionals on how to safely use PPE, how to store it correctly and how it should be disposed of safely. Additional advice is offered for people who want to donate, supply or manufacture PPE to health and social care workers in Hertfordshire.
- Hertfordshire County Council is responsible for running the PPE Cell for Hertfordshire. Formed as a subgroup of the Strategic Coordination Group, the PPE Cell is supplying Social Care, Homelessness Services, GPs, Pharmacists, Hospices and many other agencies with safety equipment. The Cell also updates and summarises national guidance and among other tools has produced simple flowcharts, diagrams and videos for the care sector.
- ACS has taken the decision to change the way it provides information updates to councillors during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data on service performance will now be collected centrally from a variety of different sources and will be collated weekly by district. Councillors will be provided with a weekly update, providing them with the relevant information on developments occurring in the District's they represent.
- Imbedding new advice from the Department of Health and Social care on appropriate infection prevention and control (IPC) precautions for patients recovering or recovered from COVID-19 and remaining in hospital, or being discharged to their own home or residential care.
- Adopting guidance produced by the Department of Health and Social Care regarding health and social care staff who are caring for, or treating, a person who lacks the relevant mental capacity. The guidance ensures that decision makers are clear about the steps they need to take during this period.
- Working with the national government to successfully imbed the Department of Health and Social Care plan to support the adult social care sector in England throughout the coronavirus outbreak. The published document sets out the government's plan for controlling the spread of infection in care settings; supporting the workforce; supporting independence, supporting people at the end of their lives, and responding to individual needs; and supporting local authorities and the providers of care.

- Working with the Home Office to promote the new domestic abuse public awareness campaign. Under the hashtag #YouAreNotAlone, it aims to create a community around those affected and reassure victims that support remains available.

6.4.2 What is being planned (ACS) (Update)

- To continue to provide social care workers and the increased volunteer workforce with access to the correct PPE.
- To continue to promote the work of social care workers to meet the parity of esteem currently displayed towards NHS Staff.
- To continue to support the physical and mental wellbeing of frontline staff and to imbed national guidelines on helping staff who are facing additional pressures and anxieties.
- Work to ensure that vulnerable members of the Hertfordshire community are not going hungry. A recent survey by the Food Foundation claimed that more than 3 million people (6%) have gone hungry since the lockdown began at the end of March.

6.5 Children Services – Children Social Care Update (CS)

6.5.1 What is has been delivered? (Update)

- Working to implement the Department for Education (DfE) announcement that adoptive families will be offered emergency support including online counselling and couples therapy as the Government expands the scope of the Adoption Support Fund to meet needs arising from the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19). Up to £8 million will be available to pay for different types of therapeutic support for families whose adopted children may have already suffered trauma and be made more anxious owing to the uncertainty of the effects of the virus.

6.5.2 What is being planned for? (Update)

- Working with national government to implement guidance to ensure that children are kept safe online.
- To continue to offer support and guidance to families and parents to help them interact constructively with their children during this time of confinement. This is to include the provision for managing stress, education techniques and avoiding bad behaviour

6.6 Children Services – Education and Schools Update (CS)

- Over 260 Hertfordshire's schools stayed open over the Easter break to ensure that key workers could continue their work. This included over 243 primary schools, 10 secondary schools and a third of the county's Special Schools.

- Hertfordshire health visitors and school nurses will be given access to data about vulnerable children three years ahead of schedule. This is part of NHS Digital's national agenda to ensure the relevant officials have access to its Child Protection Information Sharing (CP-IS) system in order to strengthen the protection of vulnerable children.
- Schools have been issued with DfE guidance on the funding available to schools to support them with costs associated with COVID-19. This could include additional cleaning, increased premises costs and support for free school meals where these costs are not covered by the national voucher scheme. The additional funding for schools will be available on top of core funding allocations that will be paid as normal to schools for the 2020/21 financial year.
- Disadvantaged children across England are set to receive laptops and tablets as part of a push to make remote education accessible for pupils staying at home during the coronavirus outbreak. Devices will be ordered for children in the most vital stages of their education, those who receive support from a social worker and care leavers.

6.7 Environment and Infrastructure – Highways, Transport and Environment (Update) (E&I)

6.7.1 What has been delivered – Highways, Transport and Environment (Update) (E&I)

- The COVID-19 pandemic has complicated the delivery of the Highways Service's Integrated Works Programme. The service will continue to deliver the planned works for this year, in order to maintain and improve Hertfordshire's Highways. However, due to both operational reasons and increased disruption caused by the virus, it may be unable to deliver all works previously envisaged. The service will provide an update regarding deliverable works as time progresses.
- The service has altered its usual methods of delivering its work programme, resuming work safely in accordance with government requirements on social distancing. The following activities will continue to be delivered in a manner that safeguards both the workforce and the general public
 - *Safety Related Road-Marking (white line) Renewal:* The programme focusses primarily on the renewal of safety related road markings like T-junctions, roundabouts and pedestrian crossings and the sites have been selected from the unfunded Cat2 work pool, supplemented by intelligence from local area teams.
 - *Gully Cleaning/Emptying:* The programme priorities gully cleaning and emptying based on those needing to be cleaned more frequently - circa 7,000 'vulnerable' gullies are cleaned on a 6 month cycle and circa 7,000 gullies are cleaned on a 12 month cycle.
 - *Grass Cutting:* Grass cutting, undertaken by Ringway, in urban areas began on 20 April in the Three Rivers and Hertsmere districts. Grass

cutting in rural areas (i.e. swathe cut) undertaken by Ringway will be starting in early May in Hertsmere and Three Rivers Districts.

- *Street Lighting and Traffic Signals:* The management, maintenance and operation of street lighting and traffic signals is currently continuing.
- *Variable Message Signs:* A new message has been added to the service's Variable Message Signs thanking NHS staff and Care workers. The message was shown on Thursday 16 April between 7pm and 9pm and will be shown weekly for the following three weeks.
- The council has temporarily closed its visitor carparks at the Broxbourne Woods National Nature Reserve, as part of precautionary safety measures during the COVID-19 outbreak. This closure will also help staff and contractors to focus on more critical services across the county.

6.7.2 What is being planned for? – Highways, Transport and Environment (Update) (E&I)

- Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) staff are planning to produce a monthly eNews bulletin, Walking in Hertfordshire, which forms part of the Update Me stream. The latest edition will focus on keeping active locally. The document will promote key government messages regarding social distancing, reducing unnecessary journeys and taking exercise outdoors through walking and cycling on the 3,000km of Hertfordshire's Rights of Way network – footpaths and bridleways.

6.8 Environment and Infrastructure – Waste Update (E&I)

- UK government has released guidance on waste service prioritisation during the COVID-19 pandemic, categorising services into 'high', 'medium' and 'low' priority based on social need. The guidance does not mandate reopening Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRC) and therefore, all HWRCs in Hertfordshire will remain closed. As a result of this decision, stricter operational guidelines will need to be developed and communicated to staff and residents. The County Councils Network has written to MP's on this issue, detailing how the closure of HWRC's is having a significant impact on the waste collection of its county council members.
- The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) in partnership with key local authority network groups has published the findings from its second waste impacts survey. The biggest impacts are on collection services for bulky and garden waste where there are large numbers of authorities who have had to stop collecting so they can focus on core services.

6.9 Community Protection Update (CP)

6.9.1 What has been delivered? (Update) (CP)

- Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue have measures in place to keep responding to emergencies and is taking the necessary precautions to keep Fire and Rescue officers protected against COVID-19.
- The Fire and Rescue service is continuing to contribute to the successful execution of Operation Shield and Sustain (see sections 5.3 and 5.4). Fire service have redeployed four full time members of staff to organise the volunteer response for Operation Shield and Operation Sustain, providing vehicles, volunteers and co-ordinating around 30 extra Hertfordshire Constabulary volunteers.
- The Fire and Rescue Service in each operational district has set up a local IMT Group, chaired by the district commander. These daily meetings have greatly assisted in ensuring that lines of communications are maintained effectively whilst ensuring there is a consistent approach to common issues across each district area.
- The Fire and Rescue Service has started COVID-19 testing for operational staff. A sustainable testing strategy and associated guidance has been developed, which will help expand testing in line with Government guidelines.
- The Fire and Rescue Service will now be providing additional support to frontline services as a result of the decision reached by The National Employers, National Fire Chiefs Council and Fire Brigades Union to extend the content of their original agreement, issued on 26 March, to adding extra areas of work. Firefighters will now be able to frontline NHS and clinical care staff working with COVID-19 patients and also with the delivery of PPE to NHS and care facilities.
- Hertfordshire County Council Trading Standards are working alongside district and borough councils to help deliver the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Business Closure) (England) Regulations 2020 to protect the public. These regulations now require large numbers of Hertfordshire businesses to close, and others to significantly modify their operations to remain trading. Trading Standards will be working with local businesses to support them as they undertake this process and advise business on the correct implementation of the new legislation.

6.9.2 What is being planned for? (Update) (CP)

- Community Protection's People Strategy Working Group have prioritised the provision of mental health and wellbeing support for people as it is not unreasonable to expect an upsurge in demand for such services as the COVID-19 response turns into the recovery stage.
- Continue to work within the LRF PPE Cell to secure and distribute adequate supplies of appropriate PPE to Firefighters to enable them to undertake their roles both within normal business and as part of the COVID-19 response. This issue is under constant review as supply and demand alongside updated guidance, based on the evolving national picture, are making the situation relatively fluid.

- Continuing to provide the support and logistics structure for the Operation Hypnos and PPE cells working directly with the chairs and providing practical guidance to effectively meet the needs of the county, this has required very intensive support during out of and unsociable hours.
- Continuing to provide tactical support to the chairs of all of the multi-agency cells, the council's IMT and service areas. This includes integrating, managing and tasking of four military advisors.

6.10 Public Health Update (PH)

6.10.1 What is being delivered? (PH)

- New advice and guidance to volunteer PPE makers has been developed and published. The purpose of the guidance is to ensure that PPE within Hertfordshire is meeting the required standards and regulatory requirements to protect staff and service users.
- Working with Public Health England to imbed guidance for commissioners about doing a health and social care needs assessment of adults under probation service supervision in the community.
- Working with Public Health England to deliver advice to residents about how Public Health England has issued advice to assist people who manage the bodies of deceased persons infected with COVID-19. The guidance has been developed to ensure that the bodies of those people who have died as a result of COVID-19 and the bereaved family of the deceased are treated with sensitivity and moved in a safe manner.
- Working with the UK Government to imbed new guidance that outlines COVID-19 advice for commissioners and service providers involved in assisting people who are dependent on drugs or alcohol or both.
- Working with Public Health England to imbed guidance for commissioners and service providers involved in assisting people who are dependent on drugs, alcohol or both. The aim of the guidance is to support the continuity of drug and alcohol treatment services throughout the pandemic, whilst protecting staff and service users.
- Sharing the new Public Health England mental health guidance with residents. The 'Every Mind Matters' platform has been updated to include guidance that will enable residents to support the physical and mental health of one another whilst staying at home.
- Helping to deliver the Government 'Looking out For Each Other Campaign'. This aims to inform those who are well and not at risk, of the things that they can do to help support their friends and neighbours who need to stay at home because of COVID-19. Public Health England has produced a pack of resources to accompany the campaign.

Making sure that all first responders, professionals and members of voluntary organisations, who as part of their normal roles provide immediate assistance until further medical assistance arrives, are provided with the

correct guidance and safety equipment to protect against symptomatic people who may have COVID-19.

- Despite the large redeployment of staff, much of the health improvement work and vital services that the Public Health team usually deliver continues. Essential Public Health services have moved online; many consultations are taking place virtually; sexual health testing kits and contraception are being ordered and sent out by post and the crucial stop smoking service continues.
- A new guidance document on mental wellbeing and mindfulness for council staff has been added to the COVID-19 information hub on the Intranet. It includes tools and resources available to support mental health, as part of looking after staff health and wellbeing.

6.10.2 What is being prepared for? (PH)

- Further support for council services and partners across Hertfordshire.
- Further information for the public.
- Prioritising work programmes to support business continuity and be able to offer support to partners such as Public Health England.
- Ensuring critically important services are kept running (e.g. drug and alcohol services where people may die if they do not get care; critically important nursing services for young children) while diverting nursing, medical and other clinicians to COVID-19 patient care during the epidemic.
- Ensuring updated national planning assumptions are shared across county council departments and with partners

6.11 Resources Update

6.11.1 What is being delivered? (Update).

- Property are working with Hertfordshire Equipment Services to provide additional storage to support equipment needs arising from the COVID-19 response. They are also supporting ACS in reopening previously closed elderly people's homes at Nevetts and Fairways to support additional requirements from COVID-19.
- Council meetings have transitioned to virtual format. Special Cabinet Panel and Cabinet were held via video conferencing on the 17th of April and the 20th of April respectively.
- Technology have put a video conferencing solution put in place for use in public committee meetings and a further alternative is now being tested. A telephone conferencing solution has also been put in place as an additional means to hold remote meetings.
- The County Council's furlough scheme claiming process officially went live on 20 April 2020. All submissions to furlough made by County Council

affiliated businesses are being assessed to ensure their suitability against government criteria.

- There has been an overall slowdown in recruitment with only essential posts being filled. Reassurance has been sought that the Council will be able to fill senior posts in terms of service resilience.
- Libraries have recommenced a Home Delivery Service to supply books to Hertfordshire residents. Libraries staff will be responsible for the delivery of requested books.
- The Customer Service Centre is maintaining performance and all main KPIs were achieved for March, including an average wait time of 19 seconds. The service has been used to offer support in the delivery of Operation Shield and Sustain.

6.12 What is being prepared for? (Resources) (Update)

- Property are progressing the relocation of the Trading Standards lab at Mundells to enable the lab to continue to support the NHS by undertaking calibration work. They are also in the process of establishing and facilitating the Tactical Coordinating Group Estates Cell.
- Human resources are currently increasing communications on domestic violence and working with Strategic Partners and Domestic Abuse Adult Care Services on delivering this project.

6.13 Update on the County Council's Trading Entities

6.13.1 The County Council owns or has a material interest in a number of limited trading companies including Herts Living Ltd (HLL), Herts Full Stop, Herts for Learning (HFL), Herts Catering Ltd (HCL) and Herts @ Home.

6.13.2 The Council is working closely with these organisations and is receiving regular updates from all services. There has been no new updates from the County Council's Trading Entities for this report.

7. Public Re-assurance & Volunteering Co-ordination (Update)

7.1 Overview

7.1.1 As this crisis has evolved, so too have the aims of the Corporate Communications Team, who are working towards four key aims:

- *Providing important news and updates to Hertfordshire residents about how the county council continues to deliver vital services and how we are responding to Covid-19 challenges with our partners.*
- *Engaging and reassuring Hertfordshire Residents through a number of proactive informative and community campaigns.*

- *Motivating and informing our 8,000 strong workforce* by providing regular and timely updates and a visible leadership team through a number of new internal communication channels.
- *Protecting and enhancing the county council's reputation* through this developing crisis by managing reactive press enquiries effectively and horizon scanning social media and other community conversations for emerging issues.

7.1.2 The Council continues to maintain a proactive approach, anticipating the next phase of the developing crisis and putting in place measures to ensure it is communicating Government updates or new emerging service related and community issues in a timely manner to protect and enhance the reputation of the county council and to get vital information to our residents and staff.

7.2 Latest Activity – 7 April onwards

7.2.1 **Proactive media activity:** Since 7 April, 11 press releases have been issued covering a range of stories such as promoting the thousands of residents who have signed up as volunteers in the fight against coronavirus, domestic violence awareness as people are confined to their homes, schools' contributions to the effort including many staying open over the Easter holidays, the redeployment of the council's workforce to frontline roles and the increased demands on the stop smoking service as residents seek help in quitting following the coronavirus outbreak.

7.2.2 There have been 45 pieces of media coverage as a result of dedicated sell-ins to broadcast, national, local and trade publications. A proactive briefing on the issue of care home deaths was also delivered and highlighted how the council was prioritising the safety of staff in this setting.

7.2.3 Since 7 April, proactive media work has also resulted in 24 occasions where councillors or officers have been interviewed on local and national radio or have had quotes featured in the press about our response to Covid-19.

7.2.4 **Reactive media activity:** Since 7 April, 27 enquiries from journalists have been received on a range of subjects. 20 of these were COVID-19 related enquiries on subjects including finances, coroner, scams, libraries and PPE.

7.2.5 **Digital update:** The Council continues to share messages across its social media channels and have seen good results, with posts garnering 735,805 reach compared to 302,582 for the comparable period last year, and receiving 15,613 engagements compared to 3,262 for the comparable period in 2019.

7.2.6 The Communications team organised for emergency services to clap outside a care home in Hertford last Thursday. This got coverage in the Daily Mail and the Mercury and generated 41,000 views, 3567 likes, and 372 shares/retweets. It was also shared across a number of local Facebook groups.

7.2.7 A campaign was also launched to recognise the work of teachers and parents online to share the #iSchoolation creative work across our social channels and are hoping to further this with a school prize based competition.

7.2.8 **Resident engagement and campaigns update** A leaflet was created for all Hertfordshire residents that went to around 495,500 households in the county. This featured important information and the message that help is at hand for specific groups, including those who have:

- received a letter from the NHS telling them to stay at home due to an existing health condition
- those who are over 70, pregnant, have an underlying medical condition or who are normally eligible for a flu jab
- those who are in financial crisis
- those who have lost their usual support network of friends, family and neighbours due to the impact of coronavirus.

The leaflet also included further tips on staying healthy at home and where to go for additional support. An additional 35,000 leaflets were distributed to supermarkets to hand out in their stores and to put in with deliveries to Hertfordshire residents.

7.3 Hertfordshire's Hidden Heroes

7.3.1 An approach is being developed to encourage residents to celebrate the people who have been making a difference in their local communities by going above and beyond the call of duty during the coronavirus outbreak. This piece of work will focus on local Facebook groups, which we know are a popular source of information for local residents. We will use this campaign to highlight the council's own Hidden Heroes both internally and externally.

7.3.2 **Stakeholder engagement:** The below stakeholder communications continue to take place:

- weekly updates for Hertfordshire MPs
- daily briefing for county councillors
- daily detailed update on key projects like Operation Shield/Sustain
- a summary bulletin to a wider range of stakeholders and partners

8. Interim Decision-Making Process

8.1 Due to the impact of COVID-19, in terms of limiting the ability to hold public meetings, legislation has been passed which enables regulations to be made that will enable councils to hold meetings via video or teleconference - i.e. permitting the attendance of councillors at meetings via virtual means. Meetings of the Special Cabinet Panel (17-04-20) and Cabinet (20-04-20), were held remotely via electronic means and further meetings are due to be held in that way until further notice. Officers continue to explore optimal solutions for holding virtual council meetings.

- 8.2 The interests of personal safety and that of the wider community are paramount and, in light of the risks arising from holding meetings, Group Leaders have agreed a protocol setting out how the Council will modify its decision-making process during the COVID-19 emergency. In summary, this provides that where possible/appropriate, decisions will be taken by the Chief Executive or officers under delegated powers. Where meetings are required, they will be held by virtual means in accordance with regulations issued by Central Government. Such measures will enable the County Council to continue to operate in the short term whilst avoiding the risks involved in bringing together groups of councillors and officers.

9. Associated Financial Implications

- 9.1 At the Daily No.10 Downing Street press conference on Saturday 18 April, the Government announced a further £1.6bn of additional funding to local government. As of 24 April, MHCLG have not allocated this resource to individual councils but the recent submission from all councils on COVID- 19 spend will undoubtedly inform their decision-making process. It is anticipated that the allocation figure will be available at the Panel and Cabinet meetings on 6 May and 18 May respectively.
- 9.2 In parallel to the initial COVID-19 Cabinet report the County Council have made their first submission to MHCLG detailing current increasing organisational cost pressures. Work on this information is on-going and in the process of being finalised by Finance.
- 9.3 Officers are also currently reviewing the savings commitments identified in the Integrated Plan (agreed February 2020) and considering the achievability of those savings within the current climate. The shift in resources across the organisation will have a negative impact on the ability for officers to set up and deliver savings initiatives.

10. Equalities Implications:

- 10.1 Under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), public authorities must pay due regard and attention to the rights of people in relation to their protected characteristics.
- 10.2 These rights include the ability to access information and eligible services on an equal basis and to have reasonable adjustments made to cater for a disability.
- 10.3 All organisations carrying out public functions must consider in their decision making the impact on people sharing different protected characteristics, and fostering of good relations in the community and between diverse groups and under the PSED to monitor how public services are meeting different needs.
- 10.4 Everyone has the protected characteristics of age, gender/sex, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity and religion/belief although certain diversity groups

within these characteristics experience more disadvantage than others.

10.5 Emerging Themes

10.5.1 The council's Equality and Diversity Team have been working with EDI practitioners across the UK in identifying areas where the impact of COVID-19 and social isolation could have an increase impact on specific communities. To note, further evidence gathering and understanding of identified risks will need to be carried out, including a detailed Community Impact Assessment. The paragraphs below highlight a proportion of the emerging themes identified:

- **Impact on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities:** Anecdotal evidence is highlighting black and minority ethnic people are at higher risk because of health inequalities. Government have announced a formal review to why people from a black and minority ethnic background maybe disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Working with Public Health colleagues, the council will be reviewing the Government's findings.
- **Rural Communities:** Social distancing is much easier to apply in a rural setting. Policies which are applied to address social distancing issues in an urban setting could have an unnecessary disproportionate economic/wellbeing impact in a rural setting.
- **Faith/Religion and Belief:** Individuals who practice their faith in a physical place of worship are unable to do so. This could lead to further isolation from their community support. Religious practices such as Ramadan will commence on 23/24 April and consideration will given to those who are either shielded or unable to get specific food provisions during the observant period.
- **Sex:** Women still bear the majority of caring responsibilities for both children and older relatives. With schools and nurseries closed, the need for this unpaid work will only increase in the weeks to come. Shortage of care services (childcare, healthcare, elderly care) will have also have a disproportionate impact on women as providers of unpaid care work.
- **Gypsy and Roma Traveller (GRT) community:** Hertfordshire has a significant GRT community. The council's GRT team will ensure dialogue with GRT communities continues to understand what is happening and identify what support is needed for those who are shielding.
- **Domestic Violence:** The Government has highlighted that there has been an increase in rates of domestic violence and abuse during the lockdown period. Possible reasons could be loss of income, increase in anxiety leading to drug/alcohol abuse and anger/frustration. Abusers could take advantage of victim's reduced social interaction with others.

10.6 County Council Responses and Actions to Identified Equalities Implications:

- Promotion of daily updates and guidance for residents and businesses from Hertfordshire County Council Coronavirus.

- Raising awareness of organisations who require volunteers for their Coronavirus related support work including #TeamHerts Volunteering, Watford3RT and Communities 1st.
- Developed an Easy Read website about COVID-19:
<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/adult-social-services/disability/learning-disabilities/my-health/my-health.aspx>

10.7 Next Steps:

- The next step is to work with the SCG's Community Resilience Cell (CRC) in developing a Community Impact Statement as well as further exploring with our services regarding what is currently being done in relation to mitigating the equality actions.
- Work is also underway to develop an internal equalities impact assessment to measure the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the county council's workforce.

Background information

Hertfordshire County Council's Planning and Response to Covid-19 - Cabinet Report, 23 March 2020

<https://democracy.hertfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s17387/200323%2006%20Urgent%20Covid19%20Report.pdf>

Hertfordshire County Council's Planning and Response to Covid-19 - Cabinet Report, 20 April 2020

<https://democracy.hertfordshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=146&MId=1530&Ver=4>

The Government's website is an important information source

<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

Hertfordshire County Council's realtime service updates is a key source of local information <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/about-the-council/news/coronavirus-service-updates.aspx>

Hertfordshire County Council's stay safe guidance is here

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/about-the-council/news/news-archive/coronavirus-frequently-asked-questions>