

Questions from Members (with Officers answers) at May Special Cabinet Panel

1) Question: What is the council's current approach to providing Mental Health Support for Frontline social care workers as they continue to help combat the Covid-19 pandemic?

Answer: During March we worked with Herts Care Providers Association to contract with an organisation who provide 24/7 counselling to front-line care staff, which has been made available to every care worker in Hertfordshire. This is publicised heavily through daily emails and on the dedicated website: <https://www.hcpa.info/guideline/covid-19-eap/>

(Answered by Iain McBeath, Director of Adult Care Services/ Jim McManus, Director of Public Health Services)

2) Question: Update requested on how the council is continuing to provide refuge support for victims of domestic abuse during lockdown.

Answer: In relation to refuges, referrals have increased significantly over the last week or so and we are working closely with the providers, and district housing colleagues, to ensure that capacity is available, wherever possible. There are clear challenges around the inability to share rooms and the cleaning of shared spaces – also that rooms need to remain empty for 72 hours before anyone else can move in, in line with PHE guidelines.

Also worth noting, that there are other forms of safe accommodation that are considered wherever possible – refuge is not the only option and can often be the most difficult. This can include temporary accommodation or supporting victims to remain in their own homes, with safety measures. Nationally, the Government have announced a significant amount of funding for safe accommodation, but we are yet to see the detail around how this will be cascaded. A full Members briefing on all aspects of DA and the funding position will be shared by the end of the week.

(Answered by Helen Gledhill, Strategic Partner – Domestic Abuse)

3) Question: Is the £12 million worth of funding for extra beds in care homes being covered by the council as part of its £47.8 million support package from national government or by NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups in Hertfordshire?

Answer: The latest understanding is that this £12 million pressure will need to be met by HCC. Initially it was considered that this cost would be met by Hertfordshire Clinical Commissioning Groups. However, there is a likelihood that this risk will fall to HCC. **[Latest Update – 15/05 : position has shifted back, and we expect the CCG's will fund this]**

(Answered by Scott Crudgington, Director of Resources)

4) Question: Question over whether funding for Hertfordshire's response to the Covid-19 pandemic will also be allocated to Parish Councils?

Answer: It will be up to the Parish Councils to initiate first contact with their Principal Council. In Hertfordshire, this means Parish Councils should get in contact with their respective District and Borough Council first with regards to their funding situation. Conversations would then commence on an individual basis as to what the next steps are.

(Answered by Scott Crudgington, Director of Resources)

5) Question: Has there been guidance from central government on testing arrangements for teachers and school workers? This is in line with the central government's proposal to start reopening schools in the near future.

Answer: Government has yet to offer clear guidance on this. There are arrangements currently in place to ensure that testing is available for key workers in Hertfordshire. When clarity on the testing for teachers and school workers is released from central government, correct guidance will be shared with all relevant workers in education, through a variety of means including texting.

(Answered by Jim McManus, Director of Public Health)

6) Question: How will schools provide support for primary schools as they look to provide provision for children who require additional support as a result of the impact on their learning, caused by Covid-19?

Answer: We are waiting for specific guidance from national government to be able to provide the correct level of support for Hertfordshire school. HCC's Operations Director for Education is working with Herts for Learning and Heads Associations to support them as they plan for potential scenarios in terms of the phased reopening of schools. Measures are being considered regarding student safety, testing and site cleaning. An in depth look at this will be provided once the correct information is shared.

(Answered by Owen Mapley, Chief Executive of Hertfordshire County Council).

Action: Terry Heritage asked for officers to provide an update on this issue in the Members Daily Bulletin. (Action to be completed by Jenny Coles, Director of Children Services/Simon Newland, Operation Director for Education)

7) Question: What plans are in place to mitigate any potential failing of providers within the care home sector?

Answer: The council has offered financial support to providers, including guaranteeing cash flow based on three months' worth of invoices from providers. This in order to guarantee payments to care providers in line with previous (before lockdown) levels of demand for their

services. The council has also set up an intelligence and surveillance system to ensure that we are able to monitor areas of potential risk, including staffing. As part of the financial package offered by HCC, providers also had to agree to offer financial aid to one another in times of significant pressure.

(Answered by Chris Badger, Operations Director – Adult Care Services)

8) Question: Where are there gaps in the current distribution of food packages as part of the Council's Operation Shield and Operation Sustain initiatives?

Answer: In terms of Hertfordshire's Food Distribution scheme, we are calling before packages are distributed in order to make sure that the package is required. The process with national government scheme is to ask individuals to contact the government to ask for packages to stop being delivered. This has proved to be difficult for users and not as effective as intended. HCC has sent a letter to all Hertfordshire households over Easter, setting out what to do if residents needed support. HCC is currently having regular meetings with MHCLG, where HCC was informed a regional shielding team has been established. It is understood that better communications channels will be in place between central and local government moving forward, in order to identify and mitigate against challenges with the current process.

(Answered by Helen Maneuf, Assistant Director – Planning and Resources – Adult Care Services).

9) Question: Update on Covid-19 related cases in Hertfordshire.

Answer: In common with other areas, Hertfordshire has had a higher number of deaths in care homes than would usually be expected at this time of year (a monthly average would normally be 90 residents per month). Between 9 March – and 30 April (8 weeks), a total of 370 people died who were care home residents, passing away either in the care home or in hospital. Not all had a positive COVID-19 test result but were symptomatic. Hertfordshire has 8,000 care home beds. There have been a number of COVID-19 outbreaks in care homes. Immediate support is available through the NHS and HCC Out-of-Hours Services to these homes. Support is also being provided through the Provider Hub – jointly managed by the Herts Care Providers' Association (HCPA) and the county council's Adult Care Services (ACS). This support includes practical support on infection prevention and control and financial help, as well as wellbeing support for staff experiencing anxiety or trauma.

(Answered by Iain McBeath -Director of Adult Care Services)

10) Question: Supply chains to hospices and charities with regards to PPE. How are they getting access to PPE and how is this being funded?

Answer: Care providers have been asked to source their own PPE and this will be reimbursed by HCC monthly and on demand from the £26m Government Grant. In the event that their supplier lets them down they can buy from Herts FullStop Ltd, HCC's local authority trading company which has stock. In an emergency, a weeks' supply of PPE will be

delivered for free as a one-off from the LRF stockpile. Money will be spent on the appropriate grade of masks, gloves, visors and aprons for the care setting in line with PH guidance.

(Answer provided by Iain MacBeath – Director of Adult Care Services).

11) Question: What is the position about the additional funding for Citizens Advice and how is that being regulated and controlled?

Answer: 'Prevention of Crisis Support' is an existing contract under community wellbeing which is currently delivered by Hertfordshire Citizens Advice Service – All 10 CAB's working together under one contract with HCC. This contract provides an advisory service re debt & financial management and longer-term emotional support. The contract value is £350k pa. In addition to this the CAB will be receiving £30k additional funding to support the current service to enable them to still carry on their work under lockdown through telephone, webchat and email services. (this is change to their usual face to face offer) The additional funding will help advisors address the issues effecting people during the COVID crisis. The current CAB are supporting are Universal Credit (UC), Benefits and Tax Credits, and Employment. (This is change from pre Covid-19 where housing benefit was the top issue).

The clients currently using CAB tend to be more confused (due to uncertainty of CV 19) and their problems are more complex so need in-depth questioning. The advisers are taking longer to deal with each client's issues, but trying to deal with the majority of their problems at first contact.

Finding out to what extent district councils are funding CABs will need more time to respond. Note the point raised at SCP today re advising members of funding into CABs in relation to member locality budgets and requests to fund.

(Answered by Helen Maneuf, Assistant Director – Planning and Resources – Adult Care Services).

12) Question: Are District Leaders being briefed on relevant information in relation to the Hertfordshire response to the Covid-19 pandemic?

Answer: A weekly meeting is taking place between Hertfordshire leaders where all current pressures and challenges occurring as a result of the pandemic are being discussed. All stakeholder briefings including the Chief Executive's briefing to MPs, briefings from the Voluntary and People's Assistance Cell and various other updates are shared directly with District Leads.

(Answered by Owen Mapley – Chief Executive of Hertfordshire County Council).

13) Question: How many pupils are in schools currently and what are we doing about getting vulnerable children back into schools?

Answer: On 4th May there were 4245 pupils reported as being in Hertfordshire state-funded schools. As regards vulnerable children, Social workers are working with families to try and get them into school in circumstances where this is appropriate. Social workers are working with foster carers to support children currently on foster placement to identify whether it is appropriate for them to return to school.

(Answered by Simon Newland, Operations Director for Education – Children Services)

14) Question: Why will Hemel Hempstead HWRC will not be a site that will reopen on Monday the 11th of May?

Answer: The sites have been chosen base on access and the ability to maintain safe distancing. The sites have been chosen based on the Council's ability to control access to the site and to ensure that correct social distancing and safety measures are in place.

(Answered by Terry Hone – Executive Member for Community Safety & Waste Management)

15) Question: How many staff with HCC or HCC related businesses have applied to be furloughed?

Answer:

HCL: Furloughing staff - around 360 out of 1,800 are still working – the majority/rest 1,440 have been furloughed. Our policy is to pay 80% to those members of staff who do not want to take up other offers of work either in HCL if we have any, but more importantly, assisting with working in jobs identified in the Redeployment Hub within the County Council. For those wishing to be redeployed we will be paying 100% of their salary.

Herts Music Service: Under consideration in relation to music teachers – logic being that they are funded by parents/carers pay their wages via music lessons

Herts For Learning: Numbers low we understand – in the tens rather than 100s. HFL are considering furloughing staff who run breakfast/after school clubs.

(Answered by Sally Hopper, Assistant Director for Human Resources)

16) Question: Is Hertfordshire County Council speaking to the LEP/National Government regarding support for business support grants?

Answer: Yes, the LEP are an active participant in the Hertfordshire Economic Resilience Forum which is overseeing the various business support grants and tax reliefs. As a County District and Borough Council's have now distributed over 80% of grants to eligible businesses. The Business Rate reliefs have all now in place again the eligible businesses. The LEP makes weekly returns to Government (MHCLG) on the wider Hertfordshire economy covering a number of key metrics. The LEP Chairman following engagement with business representative bodies such as the Herts Chamber of Commerce and Federation for Small Businesses is making representations at a Government level on the key asks for our businesses.

(Answered by Scott Crudgington, Director of Resources)

17) Question: How are we defining frontline charities as referred to in section 5.7.9 of the report – Which charities are likely to receive £750 million government funding?

Answer: When the £750m funding was announced it was stated that it was for 'frontline charities' across the UK – including hospices and those supporting domestic abuse victims. The term frontline charities was not defined.

The total will be made up of £360 million direct from government departments and £370 million for smaller charities, including through a grant to the National Lottery Community Fund. The government will match donations to the National Emergencies Trust as part of the BBC's Big Night In fundraiser later this month – pledging a minimum of £20 million

No information is available yet about how the Hertfordshire share of the 750m will be distributed in Herts but we are working closely with HCF who receive funding from the National Emergencies Fund, and who are in discussion with the Lotteries fund about their distribution.

(Answered by Helen Maneuf, Assistant Director – Planning and Resources – Adult Care Services)

18) Question: Update on the progress made on the Rollout of laptop scheme for young people?

Answer: We are currently collating information from social care teams and community schools. We are not yet able to order any laptops and am awaiting to be advised of the opportunity to do this from the DfE. It has been possible to make available 50 refurbished laptops through a separate process which have been very well received by families.

(Answered by Jenny Coles, Director of Children Services).

19) Question: Has there been a good uptake on testing by Frontline service providers?

Answer: There has been a good uptake of testing by frontline service providers now that multiple routes have been provided including a mobile unit, the regional Centres at Edmonton, Wembley and Stansted and local NHS facilities. We don't have numbers data for these centres because they are NHS run or sponsored. The mobile testing unit deployed in various venues after its first day has been running at 85% - 95% of its capacity, with typically around between 160 and 171 tests a day, with fewer than 10 void appointments on any day.

(Answered by Jim McManus – Director of Public Health)

20) Question: How are we ensuring that all schools are sending out academic work?

Answer: The County Council cannot ensure that schools are sending out academic work. This is the responsibility of schools themselves. What we can and are doing is encouraging and supporting schools to do so. HCC officers have worked with HfL (Herts for Learning) on

an extensive range of support to schools round the challenges they are encountering during the current lockdown. This has included HR advice and support, advice and support direct to Head Teachers, advice helplines, a regular bulletin and linkages to central government guidance. This package of support has been very well received. Specifically, in relation to remote learning, we have commissioned HfL to prepare an on-line learning toolkit and a range of resources for schools, which has been made available free to all schools. Local examples of good practice have also been collated and made available.

(Answered by Simon Newland, Operations Director for Education – Children Services)

21) Question: Has the full surge of volunteers been successfully utilised?

Answer: As of 01/05/20 Operation Sustain has 10,124 volunteers in total recruited to all three key recruitment CVS organisations working collaboratively on this (#TeamHerts, Watford3RT and Communities 1st). Volunteers deployed is 3,948 in total. People can still register to become a volunteer however TeamHerts are making it clear to new recruits that volunteers may not be utilised straight away. It should be noted that as easing comes in some volunteers will be returning to work so the number of volunteers available will decrease. Whilst volunteers are waiting to be deployed they are receiving training, such as mental health, safeguarding training to help them in their volunteering journey and support their own mental wellbeing.

(Answered by Helen Maneuf, Assistant Director – Planning and Resources – Adult Care Services).