

Response and Recovery Committee

28 May 2020

Report on the Council's Response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Report by Ian Thomas, Chief Executive

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Caroline Kerr, Leader of the Council

Purpose

This report provides Members with an update on the current situation in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic in the borough and the pan-London and Kingston specific resilience structures which have been in place since the pandemic was declared. A Council-wide overview of the response to COVID-19 is outlined, beginning with the Kingston Stronger Together Hub, followed by directorate specific responses. The report also includes an overview of the Council's current financial position.

To **resolve** that -

1. The actions the Council has taken to support residents and businesses affected by COVID-19, which are detailed in this report, be noted;
2. The Council records its thanks for all the front line and support service staff who have continued to provide vital services across the borough;
3. The Council records its thanks for the work of organisations, staff and volunteers across Kingston, including voluntary and community groups, who have enabled a strong coordinated response and ensured vulnerable residents receive the support they need;
4. The Leader, Portfolio Holder for Finance & Resources, Chief Executive and S151 Officer continue their efforts to raise awareness of the costs incurred by Kingston Council in response to COVID-19 to support residents, business and communities and the need for further funding from central government.

Benefits to the Community:

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic that the Council has put in place has helped to protect residents in the borough who are most vulnerable, be this to the adverse health impacts of the virus, the financial impacts of the measures put in place to control the spread of the virus, or to the social impacts arising from social-isolation and social-distancing.

INTRODUCTION

1. Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a novel infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. It spreads from person-to-person primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes, and which someone else then inhales or touches surfaces with the droplets on, and then touches their own mouth or eyes.
2. Symptoms generally include a fever (temperature of $>37.8^{\circ}\text{C}$), a new persistent cough, or a loss or change in the sense of taste or smell. However people can be infectious two days prior to symptoms developing. For older people, evidence is emerging that the initial symptoms can be atypical and mild, for example including a loss of appetite and feeling generally 'under-the-weather'.
3. Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, severe obesity and cancer, are more likely to develop serious illness and there is no specific curative treatment for coronavirus infection at present. It is hard to establish precise death rates from COVID-19 given the lack of definitive data on infection rate but estimates range between less than 1% to well over 3%. It is also becoming apparent that rates vary according to many different factors such as age, with older people suffering higher death rates, gender and possibly BAME background. The over representation of people from BAME communities has become a global and national question and has led to the Government commissioning a formal review which will be led by NHS England and Public Health England with work by the British Medical Association. Potential drivers have been suggested, including socio-economic, policy and or biological factors. The Council will examine the findings of the review when it is published and any recommendations it may have for local authorities.
4. On 16 March 2020, the Prime Minister announced a range of measures, including requesting people avoid pubs, bars, restaurants and clubs, effectively establishing the concept of social distancing in the UK. On 23 March 2020, the Prime Minister announced a series of further measures to restrict the spread of the coronavirus, which in effect put the UK on a period of 'lockdown'. People were required to stay at home unless travelling to and from work, where the work could not be done from home, for shopping for essentials, for medical needs, or for one form of exercise a day, alone or with household members. The Government directed all non-essential shops to close and closed schools premises, apart from to children of key workers and those who are most vulnerable, including disabled children and those with Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs).
5. In addition to the general lockdown, a smaller subset of the population with serious underlying health conditions were advised to 'shield' themselves for a period of 12 weeks. Individuals who are shielding are advised to stay at home at all times and avoid any face-to-face contact. The Government identified a group of around 1.5 million people who this applies to and wrote to all of them. In addition, it

encouraged any person who believed they had a serious health condition, but who had not received a letter, to contact their GP to discuss any concerns they had.

6. These measures required an urgent response from the Council to put in place provisions to support residents and businesses. These include measures directly prescribed by central Government, such as the Business Support Grant, as well as discretionary measures like the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund for the voluntary and community sector.
7. This report provides details of the current number of cases in Kingston borough, and the pan-London and Kingston specific resilience structure. The report goes on to provide an overview of the Council's response, beginning with the Kingston Stronger Together Hub, followed by directorate specific responses. The report also includes an overview of the Council's current financial position.
8. On 10 May 2020, the Prime Minister announced modifications to the 'lockdown' conditions, to provide some greater flexibility of movement and working conditions. This next phase of the COVID-19 response is not covered in this report due to guidance on these flexibilities only just being released by the government at the time of writing, but these will inform the next steps in the Council's response.

LOCAL CASE UPDATE

9. In Kingston, there were 498 people confirmed as having the infection by 14 May, but this number is likely to be an underestimate as testing is still limited to people in particular sectors of society. According to registered deaths in Kingston, as of 14 May, an estimated 96 deaths have been COVID-19 related. Fifty-six of these people have sadly died in hospital, 35 in care homes and five in the community. The total number of confirmed positive cases in Kingston has been in the mid-range for London Boroughs, with a rate equivalent to 283.8 cases per 100,000 resident population, which is slightly below the London rate of 293.1 but higher than the rate for England of 250.6 per 100,000 population. The number of known cases in the borough rose significantly following the increase in availability of testing with the opening of the facility at Chessington World of Adventures early in May.
10. On 14 May, there were 297 confirmed COVID-19 cases in South West London Trust hospitals, of which 37 were in Kingston Hospital NHS Trust. The number of cases has been declining across recent weeks, with the highest in-hospital total recorded on 31 March. At time of writing, there were seven newly diagnosed cases across South West London Trusts in the past 24-hours, of which four were in Kingston Hospital. There were 58 patients with COVID-19 in High Dependency Units (HDU) / Intensive Treatment Units (ITU), of which 10 were in Kingston. This daily total has started to decrease from a peak around 12 April 2020.
11. Local data shows 35 people receiving social care services from the Council have either tested positive with COVID-19 or are suspected to have COVID-19, as above it is suspected that these figures are an underestimate. Sadly, 29 service

users who had tested positive or were suspected to have COVID-19 have died. The Council has also been made aware of the death of at least one staff member in a Kingston care home. Data supplied directly by care homes to regional bodies does not prompt for this information, so the full situation is not yet known.

LOCAL RESILIENCE ARRANGEMENTS

12. The Borough Emergency Control Centre was formally activated on Wednesday 18 March 2020, with the first meeting of the Council Gold Command (Gold) on 23 March 2020; prior to this planning was being managed through the Senior Leadership Team, with regular updates from the Director of Public Health. Meetings were held of the Borough Resilience Forum and the Tactical Coordination Group to discuss the emerging pandemic. Gold moved swiftly to close potential sites where the spread of infection was likely to be higher, for example gyms and outside gyms and children's playgrounds, where there are frequent touch-points which cannot be cleaned between use.
13. Gold consists of the CEO, all Executive Directors, Directors of Adults and Children's Social Care, General Counsel and a number of key senior officers. It is chaired by the Director of Public Health. Gold, responsible for setting the strategic response to the crisis, met initially on a daily basis and then reduced to three times a week from 4 May 2020. Sub-groups were established under Silver Command (tactical level) to take forward the following workstreams for this initial phase of the response:
 - Communications – remit to have oversight of all external and internal communications
 - Contact Centre and out of hours 24/7 capacity
 - Kingston Stronger Together Hub for vulnerable people, including those shielding
 - Home care providers support
 - Freeing up NHS beds & integrated hospital discharge with health partners
 - Social care commissioning/market sustainability and integrated commissioning with the NHS
 - Schools offer and key worker childcare support (and wider children's services)
 - Mortality planning and excess deaths
 - Finance (revenue & benefits administration and impact of rates/grants) and business support (communications, external relations, logistics)
 - PPE procurement, utilisation and training for use
 - COVID-19 testing - inline with guidance
 - HR support for above workstreams, including home working, redeployment, resilience.
14. Silver meets on the same days as Gold and advises Gold on its areas of expertise.
15. The Council engages with partners in the emergency services, health sector and other organisations through regular meetings of the Borough Resilience Forum,

and Partnership Tactical Coordination Group (partnership Silver). These groups have been meeting on an alternating weekly basis and have seen a range of mutual support benefits in response to the pandemic. Engagement with surrounding boroughs has been through the South West Sub-Regional Resilience Board.

16. The crisis has required incredible efforts from all council staff and a wide range of providers and partners. The commitment, adaptability and resilience of staff throughout the period and at all levels is deeply impressive and commendable.

LONDON RESILIENCE ARRANGEMENTS

17. On a Pan-London level, London resilience has established a Strategic Coordination Group (SCG) which is chaired by the Town Clerk and Chief Executive of City of London.
18. The SCG is a multi-agency group comprising the Metropolitan Police, London Fire Brigade, London Ambulance Service, London Local Authorities, GLA, City of London Police, Public Health England, Transport for London, NHS England and the Military.
19. The SCG receives information daily from all agencies and then reports this up to central Government. Coordination between the Council and the SCG comes through the London Local Authority Coordination Centre to whom the Council submit daily situation reports. London Local Authorities are represented by London Local Authority Gold. This role is filled on a rota basis by a Chief Executive from one of the London Boroughs.
20. There have been a number of London workstreams with CEOs volunteering to coordinate sub-groups to take forward this work. Kingston Council CEO led a workstream on modelling the impact on citizens who have been discharged from hospital having been treated for COVID-19 infection.

COVID-19 COMMUNITY RESPONSE: VOLUNTEERING AND SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO ARE 'SHIELDING'

Establishing the Kingston Stronger Together Hub

21. The Council moved quickly to bring the voluntary and community sector together, holding a 'socially distanced' workshop on 18 March 2020 to discuss support for the community, and how this could be achieved in partnership.
22. This work quickly led to the establishment of the Kingston Stronger Together Hub, comprising a central point where people could volunteer to support the COVID-19 response, as well as a place where people could request help and support if they did not have this from local family, friends or other trusted sources. The volunteering element of the Kingston Stronger Together Hub launched on 20 March 2020 with a central helpline number and email address for those seeking

help. It became operational on the 27 March 2020. The Government's expectation is that the hub acts as a single point of contact for residents who are in most need of requiring support, particularly those who are 'shielding'.

23. Objective of the Kingston Stronger Together Hub:

Establish and coordinate the Kingston Stronger Together volunteer hub ensuring Kingston residents receive the support they need in response to COVID-19.

Workstream 1: Support for people who are self-isolating

This workstream focuses on supporting higher risk groups and those self-isolating to get the help they need. This support is organised across a number of tiers:

- Tier 0 - Proactive contact of vulnerable residents (including the NHS shielding list)
- Tier 1 - Information and signposting
- Tier 2 - Food and medicine (including urgent deliveries for those in need)
- Tier 3 - Social contact including a telephone buddy system to call people who are self-isolating
- Tier 4 - Support for people who have health and social care needs enabling them to get the right services when they need them most

Workstream 2: Identifying Volunteers

This workstream focuses on identifying and deploying volunteering support to those who need it

24. A number of residents across the borough have been requested to "shield" themselves for 12 weeks as they have a significant medical condition that would make them far more susceptible to hospitalisation should they contract coronavirus. The criteria for shielding are very specific and includes residents in the following categories, in each case they will have been written to by the NHS or contacted by their GP:

- a) Solid organ transplant recipients.
- b) People with specific cancers:

- people with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy
- people with lung cancer who are undergoing radical radiotherapy
- people with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
- people having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
- people having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
- people who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs

- c) People with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe chronic obstructive pulmonary (COPD).
 - d) People with rare diseases and inborn errors of metabolism that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as Severe Combined Immuno-Deficiency (SCID), homozygous sickle cell).
 - e) People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection.
 - f) Women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired.
25. In some cases, these residents might not have family or other support networks that allow them to source food or other medication. In these cases, the hub can help ensure needs are assessed and, if appropriate, met – either via provision of emergency food, connection with volunteers for medicine collection and delivery, or other services provided by well-established partners in the voluntary and community sector.
26. In addition, there will be residents for whom the current situation significantly exacerbates their social care or health needs, thereby increasing their vulnerability. In these cases, callers' needs are assessed and signposted to appropriate services. Many other callers without immediate need or other welfare issues will be signposted to other information, such as Connected Kingston, and groups who might be best placed to support them.
27. The hub was launched within a couple of days of the Government making clear its expectation and has been staffed from the outset by a rapidly formed team of staff deployed largely from the library service, Contact Centre, and a variety of other services. Lines are open 24/7, with an out-of-hours service after 8pm. Extra provision has been put in place over weekends. The phones are answered directly and are managed by the Contact Centre, which is also still operational for the usual enquiries. The overall hub call statistics are as below:
- During office hours (9 to 5 Monday to Friday) the hub has seen an average of 44 incoming calls per day.
 - So far in May (up to 15 May) the COVID-19 hub has answered 266 out of 277 calls (96% answer rate) with an average wait time of 18 seconds.
28. All residents in the borough received a letter from the Leader of the Council advertising the hub contact details and the hub has featured extensively in communication across all channels with a focus on using video clips and other interactive 'Q&A' type communications. In addition, all social housing tenants and leaseholders have been contacted.
29. The hub collates information from callers and undertakes a 'first line' triage to establish key details and level of need and vulnerability. There are specific questions to establish whether a caller is 'shielded'. There is a comprehensive

protocol to follow, and for individuals identified as in higher need, these are passed to Adult Social Care (or Children’s Services if there are concerns about a child’s welfare) who assess each case and determine the next course of action. This has been invaluable in helping hub staff triage calls from shielded and vulnerable people.

30. Summary of the Kingston Stronger Together Hub support offer:

Who the Hub is for: The Hub is for Kingston residents who cannot leave their home because of COVID-19 or who are particularly vulnerable to the illness and who don't have support from friends, family or trusted neighbours.

How to access the Hub: The easiest way to [access the Hub is via the online form](#). The form can also be completed over the phone on 020 8547 5000. The best time to call is 9am-5pm, Monday to Friday. Only urgent calls will be taken outside of these hours. Calls to this number are free if you have inclusive minutes on your tariff, otherwise you will be charged at your standard network rate. You can complete the form on behalf of someone you are caring for if they are unable to do this themselves.

All completed forms are reviewed within 24 hours - where residents are triaged to the following support options:

Self Care and Signposting	Support with food, medicine and other essential items	Befriending Service	Links to professional Services
<p>All residents receive information to help them take care of themselves while staying at home.</p> <p>Connected Kingston (our local service offer website) has been updated to include the most relevant information based on the prevailing resident need, including information about wellbeing, housing, food access, finance, employment and bereavement.</p> <p>This resource is available to everyone by default, and does not need to be accessed via the hub.</p>	<p>For those who need supplies to their door.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Emergency food parcels and pre-cooked meals -Medicine (picking up a prescription) -Other essentials such as soap, sanitary and baby products <p>For those who can afford it, a shopping service is available.</p>	<p>Residents who are vulnerable to social isolation can be put in touch with volunteers who will check in with them regularly over the phone.</p> <p>Matching is based on language preference and other stated interests (where possible), as well as the skills and background of the buddy, who may be better placed to buddy with some residents over others.</p> <p>This service has seen a wide variety of people, including those who just want an occasional chat, to those with complex mental health needs.</p>	<p>This is for people requiring the highest level of support. People who are triaged at this level are referred directly into the Access Team.</p> <p>A professional assessment can be carried out at this level and referrals can be made into formal care and safeguarding services.</p> <p>The team also has links into Adult and Children's Social Care, wider Council support services, mental health; and other NHS services where people meet thresholds for additional help.</p>

The ‘Shielding List’

31. 1.5million people in the UK who are required to ‘shield’ themselves have been written to by the NHS or their GP highlighting the risks they face and asking them to register their needs on a centralised Government website. They were also asked if they needed essential supplies of food. Information on those who registered themselves centrally have been made available to the Council via a specialised data gateway since the hub launched. In addition, the Council now has access to the full shielding list that has over 5,351 medically vulnerable residents in the borough, although only 4% of these are registered as being in receipt of social care. Around 750 are council tenants.
32. The Insight and Data Team have been working very closely with several of the Silver workstreams to help manage, match and integrate the increasingly complex data flows from Government, NHS and other council departments. The handling of data has been a real strength and has undoubtedly allowed the Council to respond more quickly than other areas.
33. Adult Social Care and Housing colleagues have also been making calls out to the residents on their databases who are vulnerable, to establish their needs and whether any welfare support is required. Staff have been deployed from other

parts of the Council to support with this significant task.

34. As of 18 May 2020 the total number of people on shielded lists provided to Kingston Council is 5,351. The Council has successfully contacted 90% of these people. The remaining 10% are mainly from a new list provided on 18 May 2020 that is currently being processed, or people that have been provided without a phone number and we are attempting to contact in writing. People in shielded groups are being contacted as and when further information is received from Government.
35. Children's Services have been in contact with all children who have come through the government gateway and will be in contact with all 265 Kingston children who are on the NHS shielded list.

Food supply

36. The Government expects the Council's hub to be a backstop to its support to shielded clients. The Government is providing food support to all those who have registered on its website and indicated they have a food need. There is no direct involvement from the Council in the delivery of the Government provided food parcels, although the Council is contacting all of these residents including those who have had a 'failed food delivery' to check on their welfare. The hub has taken some calls from residents who no longer require their government food parcels and advice is given to these residents.
37. However, prior to the Government system 'kicking-in', it delivered an emergency bulk delivery of food to the Council's Food Distribution Centre to help the Council meet any urgent need coming through the hub – this was delivered on the 23 March 2020 by ECS Operational Services staff.
38. The Council has supported KT Churches to set up the Food Distribution Centre (Tolworth United Reformed Church, with Big Yellow as an overflow and public donation centre). Food parcels were delivered from the church to residents, with a total of 1,829 parcels delivered as of 14 May 2020. The council also supported the expansion of KingstonAid, who have delivered more than 10,000 frozen meals to those unable to cook. This comprises around 1,500 meals per week to local residents, including those in emergency hotel accommodation, such as the Travelodge.
39. On 27 April 2020, the Council also launched a new supported shopping service which is enabling volunteer-led shopping to be undertaken without the need for direct exchange of [physical] money between volunteer and service user. The shopping service is for any resident who can afford to pay for their shopping, but just can't leave home due to self-isolation, and who doesn't have local friends/family to get their shopping for them. This service is provided by a team of council staff and external volunteers, with required DBS checks complete, and recruited through the Hub. Shops are completed and residents are able to pay for their shopping over the phone or through the council website.

40. Whilst the Council's direct role around food provision is to support the Government shielding efforts, there is also the expectation from Ministers that "best endeavours" are used working in partnership with voluntary and community organisations to support wider vulnerable people's needs. The Council has been acting as a central hub for free food supplies and is now helping the distribution to groups who are actively involved in supporting their communities. The Council is also supporting the development of 'community food champions' to coordinate donations of food locally, with over 100 such food champions as of 14 May 2020.

Voluntary and Community Sector and Volunteers

41. Regular catch-ups have taken place with the key voluntary sector organisations. Bringing together the numerous local and positive initiatives into a coherent and coordinated whole remains challenging but communication is strong. The Council launched a COVID-19 VCS Response Fund to provide support for those organisations working directly to support their communities in the COVID-19 response. Money is now making its way to these groups to support their COVID-19 response efforts.
42. People interested in volunteering can complete an on-line registration form, with over 1,200 people having registered their interest in volunteering so far. The Kingston Stronger Together team is working to match these volunteers with organisations who could benefit from them and have already deployed 136 volunteers in a range of roles. Many organisations have their own pool of volunteers, and have also seen an increase in participants. The expansion of the NHS GoodSAM app has also seen a surge of volunteers, with many registering on both systems.
43. As of 18 May 2020, the Kingston Stronger Together Hub has received and managed a total of 2,085 individual requests for support from Kingston residents. In addition providing the food and shopping support outlined in the section above, the partnership with the voluntary and community groups has facilitated 321 medication deliveries and matched 143 people with a volunteer buddy. A total of 43 people have been referred to established health and care services.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE

Emergency Operating Structure:

44. The Adult Social Care operational teams have been reorganised in order to support critical arrangements. Adult Social Care operations continue to work within the integrated hospital discharge team which provides a seamless pathway into services to enable a two hour rapid discharge response including mental health and learning disabilities from 8am-8pm, seven days a week. A welfare check is undertaken by a newly established review team to ensure that people are safe after their discharge from hospital.

45. On 19 March 2020, the Government published new Hospital Discharge Service requirements for the COVID-19 period. The guidance sets out requirements for the NHS and Local Authorities and introduces standardised pathways across the country.
46. Kingston Adult Social Care have been working closely with NHS colleagues, acute, community and the CCG to implement the new requirements. An integrated “Kingston Discharge to Assess Service” has been set up and acts as a single referral route to receive all health and social care referrals for Kingston residents leaving hospital. This service is provided in conjunction with Your Healthcare.
47. The service is operating Monday – Sunday, 8:00am – 8:00pm with an enhanced health and social care offer to meet the anticipated demand on the NHS. The integrated service provides a rapid response, short term support to people in their own homes for up to two weeks.
48. Due to COVID-19 and the need to release capacity across the NHS to support the response, the Delayed Transfer of Care (DTC) collection and publication of these have been paused. However locally up until March 2020, we had a total of 160 days as a delay, which has come well within the target of 168 days. This shows the consistent approach the Adult Social Care Hospital Team applies when working jointly with Kingston Hospital and community health partners, to get residents home as quickly and safely as possible.
49. The Adult Social Care Access Team are an integral part of the support the Council is providing to Kingston residents via the hub. As outlined above, the hub has four tiers, each providing different aspects of support. Access is the gateway to Tier 4 (Adult Social Care, Housing, AFC, Mental Health), and provides support for those with complex needs and in need of statutory services. Access also provides ongoing support and advice to Tiers 0-3, using a strengths based approach, with the aim of reducing the number of residents needing to come through to Adult Social Care. The team is also providing support to the Safetracker Team and those in Tier 0 making proactive calls from the daily NHS hospital discharge list and will make referrals and provide support as needed.
50. A ‘Safecheck’ safeguarding procedure has been developed which has established a process for referrals of people who have not responded to calls on the shielding or clinically vulnerable lists or who have left packages of food outside their home. Teams have reviewed all vulnerable people on their caseloads and have developed with them an escalation plan which identifies agreed actions in the event of a breakdown in their support network.
51. The Coronavirus Act 2020 included Care Act Easement guidance, which recognises that adult social care and the care provider market are facing unprecedented pressure and supports local authorities to streamline assessment arrangements and prioritise care so that the most urgent and acute needs are met. Decisions on implementing any easement ultimately sit with the statutory Director of Adult Social Services, but processes and a protocol have been set up to

consider and assess the need for any easement and how this will be implemented if and when required.

52. There are additional staffing costs relating to social work staff being on duty from 8am to 8pm, seven days a week. There is an expected increase in demand for care services as the pandemic continues, including additional support to people at home who are “shielded”, additional care provided to help avoid admissions to hospital and costs relating to hospital discharges. Additional demand is also likely to occur during the recovery phase, once the pandemic has ended, as some people with non-critical care needs are likely to have delayed contacting the Council for support during the lockdown period.
53. Care for people being discharged from hospital is being fully funded by the NHS, so are not subject to means-tested charges. Teams have risk assessed current care packages to enable a swift response to any serious reduction in home care capacity in the market.
54. Safeguarding Adults remains a priority for Adult Social Care. All safeguarding referrals and concerns are being responded to by the access team and social care localities, however visits to people and meetings are being conducted virtually or by phone calls, unless they are essential. The volume of referrals into Adult Social Care remains steady although there is an increase in self neglect concerns and domestic abuse concerns. The table below shows safeguarding activity for March and April 2020.

Month/year	info and advice	Progress	Month	info and advice	Progress
March 2019 - baseline	32	32	March 2020 - baseline	16	23
April 2019	24	33	April 2020	28	30

In April 2020, the council received 58 safeguarding adult concerns. Twenty-eight of these were provided with information and advice and 30 went on to a section 42 enquiry under the Care Act 2014 following triage and risk management decision. The team has strong links with partner agency safeguarding leads and attend relevant partnership risk meetings such as MARAC. The table below shows types of abuse reported for March and April 2020.

Month	Discriminatory	Domestic Abuse	Financial/material	Neglect	Organisational	Physical	Sexual	Sexual Exploitation	Modern Slavery	Self neglect
March 2020 - baseline	2	3	7	18	2	4	0	0	0	5
April 2020	3	12	6	18	1	11	2	1	1	9

55. The Deprivation of Liberty safeguard requirements remains in force during COVID-19. As far as possible, direct visits are being avoided and the work is being

undertaken remotely. The demand remains steady and the response from the service remains effective.

56. The Adults Emergency Duty Team continues to provide a full emergency response out of hours and the 24 Approved Mental Health Professional Service fulfils the Council's statutory duties under the Mental Health Act in partnership with South West London St. George's Mental Health NHS Trust.
57. In order to ensure the Council has sufficient workforce capacity, a small dedicated resource was put together to recruit additional social workers and to publicise the recruitment campaign. Many staff have been, and are, working 12 hour shifts, seven days a week. All staff, wherever their role allows, are working remotely supported by necessary IT equipment.
58. All day services are closed, with staff reassigned to support people remotely and ensure any critical needs are met either by providing direct support or seeking voluntary sector input to address core needs including shopping and emotional support.
59. All staff and residents at Amy Woodgate residential home during May were tested for COVID-19. The Council has ensured that the residential home has an adequate supply of Personal Protective Equipment. Amy Woodgate has been supported in terms of the treatment of COVID-19 positive residents by a dementia nurse who is employed by Your Health Care and is available from Monday to Friday each week. She has been giving advice for COVID-19 positive residents and on infection control. We have been proactively recruiting additional workforce to cover staff absence due to COVID-19. Staff who tested positive have now largely returned to work.

Supporting Our Care Market

60. From the outset of the pandemic we have dedicated time and resources to helping ensure we are not only supporting Kingston Hospital and NHS partners, but that there is a completely joined up approach to caring for elderly and vulnerable adults in the borough. The 43 care homes (26 older people) homes within the borough have been contacted daily for an update on their resilience and all are now signed up to the national NHS tracker system that will supply regular data on a range of metrics. This includes occupancy, rates of infection, workforce risks and the homes encouraged to supply their data on a daily basis.
61. The Council has established weekly dedicated working digital forums, where care providers and Kingston's Adult Social Care teams come together in a collaborative response. Initially these enabled a swift response to the national lockdown and self-distancing measures and now continue to play a key role in providing care sharing issues and finding joint solutions. The dedicated workforce forum recently undertaken had over 50 providers represented and is now working with the Prince's Trust, a London wide initiative called Proud to Care, and Skills for Care to support the recruitment of care workers locally.

62. Partnership working with providers, council teams, the NHS, community and voluntary groups providing the whole range of care has ensured the elderly, those with specialised physical and learning needs and vulnerable adults living within their own homes and residential care homes, and those reliant on specialist support services continue to receive the care they need.
63. This joined up approach has helped contain infection levels. The feedback the Council has received is appreciative of the swiftness of Kingston's response.
64. Testing is a high profile issue especially around care homes and adult social care. The Council has been at the forefront of driving testing for care workers in South West London until the national offer was implemented. Kingston has taken a coordinating lead with neighbouring SW London boroughs - Richmond, Merton, Wandsworth Sutton, and Croydon - in escalating the level of testing provision for care workers, and other essential workers, arranging over 1000 test appointments. Up to the 11 May 2020, Kingston had arranged for 190 tests to be carried out for 37 care providers within the borough. Testing at the dedicated centre at Chessington World of Adventures is running seven days per week and is now offering 200 testing slots per day. Testing sites at Twickenham Rugby Ground and London Gatwick, in addition to the mobile testing unit, are also offered. All appointments are now booked through the central Government booking portal.
65. The Council is in daily contact with providers to monitor the number of COVID-19 cases in care homes to ensure the wellbeing of residents within care homes, and that appropriate resources, support and protection are accessible to care providers. As of 14 May 2020, based on the data available, 4.6% of residents had COVID-19 like symptoms in care homes in Kingston, with a total of 36 residents having sadly died. Providers were reporting that out of 1,006 beds, 762 were available. During April 2020, six people were discharged via the integrated hospital discharge pathway as part of the COVID-19 response.
66. Following government guidance, care home residents are tested when there are reported cases of COVID-19 in the same home. When residents become symptomatic their care is tailored to ensure their wellbeing and prevent the spread of infection. Public Health and Adult Social Care services are working closely with the CCG, Community Health services and primary care to reduce the infection in care homes in Kingston.
67. To enable timely discharge from hospital, the Council has implemented a local real-time vacancy tracker to monitor which providers have vacant beds. The status of providers is monitored daily to enable the Council to provide support where required. At the present time there are sufficient beds in the community to meet the current demand but options continue to be explored to increase bed capacity should this be needed.
68. Throughout the pandemic the Council has been supporting care providers and essential workers to source PPE. Teams within the council have worked with local

suppliers and those who have access to stocks of PPE to share with those who require it under mutual aid arrangements. The Council is actively working with care providers including those in the community to make sure it is supporting them effectively, identifying the need for help with supply and the training of the workforce. The Council has supplied 77 providers with PPE who have required it, and 54 informal carers.

69. Additional central government funding made available to local authorities has been turned around quickly to reach Kingston's providers, to meet the pressures they were experiencing caused by COVID-19. Using the emergency decision-making protocol, following consultation with councillors Kerr, Davis, Holt and Green, an additional 30% one-off payment was provided in April to help support providers and stabilise the market, payments to providers were also bought forward and paid 'on plan' to ensure there were no delays in payments or cash flow to providers. In addition, 30% extra capacity was purchased from some specific providers to ensure that community equipment, reablement and other community support such as voluntary sector support was available to support discharges. The Council also increased payments for those with a direct payment to ensure that they were able to manage increased costs due to COVID 19.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

70. Access to the correct Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is vital in reducing the transmission of COVID-19. There have been significant challenges in procuring sufficient supplies of PPE, for both internal Council staff and to support contracted social care providers. The military delivered a large supply of PPE on 27 March 2020 which was distributed to Council departments, social care providers, and the Police.
71. A working group, chaired by a Consultant in Public Health, and with representatives from occupational health, resilience planning, ASC, AfC and commissioning, was set up to oversee production of guidelines regarding use of PPE, communicating this to staff, and updating this frequently as national guidance was released with new information. The group also developed a prioritisation protocol, which was approved by Gold. They also coordinated the procurement of PPE across the Council, which has been centralised. The provision of PPE to care homes, care workers and frontline critical staff is the single most pressing issue facing the Council at present. As well as accessing the emergency supply of PPE for the South West London region, distributed via the Croydon Hub, ECS staff have been working tirelessly to source PPE from the Council's own current supply chain, as well as exploring suppliers, nationally and internationally. To date the Council has managed to supply enough PPE to support its critical workers and aims to operate with a 14 day provision. The council has been able to provide mutual aid to Kingston Hospital when requested. Hearteningly, a number of private donations of PPE have been made by local businesses and individuals, which have been very welcome and helped ease the pressure. Kingston University and several Kingston secondary schools have also donated PPE to Kingston Hospital.

72. The London Resilience Forum set up a stockpile of PPE on 6th April 2020 for councils to access emergency supplies. The Council is accessing this emergency supply for social care providers in the borough who are unable to source PPE through usual supply routes. There are particular challenges with accessing face masks and eye protection.
73. Since the start of the crisis, Kingston Council has delivered combined items of PPE to care home workers and frontline critical staff. This includes 18,175 pairs of gloves, 21,420 masks, 34,600 aprons, 513 units of sanitiser gel (various sizes), 67 pairs of goggles and 249 face visors. In any given week the demand for PPE is around 17,500 individual items. A PPE dashboard has been developed to monitor stock supplies and utilisation.
74. The Department of Health is currently working on an E-procurement portal, entitled "clipper", that all local authorities and care providers can link into which will be available in four to six weeks. Kingston has worked with other London boroughs on an effort led by Ealing to place a pan-London order, which should secure greater and quicker access to a delivery of PPE.

PUBLIC HEALTH

75. In response to the local outbreak, Public Health specialist staff have supported all Council directorates and local partners across Kingston in their response. These specialist staff provide critical infection prevention and control advice, information and guidance to ensure effective protection of residents and staff from COVID-19 and provide a mechanism for coordination with regional and national Public Health bodies. In the absence of specific national guidance local guidance was developed to support continued safe delivery of essential Council services during COVID-19.
76. The majority of requests have been around infection prevention and control measures, including public information, supporting vulnerable residents and guidance on entering resident homes if there is a suspected case of COVID-19 in the household. Further requests for support have been in relation to housing and homelessness, adult social care, especially within care settings; and Children's Services in relation to schools and settings looking after children with medical or complex needs.
77. Members of the Public Health Team have been instrumental in the setting up and operationalisation of the Kingston Stronger Together Hub, drawing on the partnership and community sector links they have.

COMMUNITY SAFETY & RESILIENCE

78. The Community Safety Team continues to operate a service that focuses on key areas of risk management. The Council is fortunate in having close partnership working with the Police.
79. The police have reported a reduction in many crime rates during the COVID-19

pandemic. The latest crime statistics, perhaps unsurprisingly, show a drop in total notifiable crime. The total notifiable offences in the 12 week period ending May 17 2020 was 25.9% lower than the same period last year and 33.9% lower in the last 14 days. Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) has increased across the South-West London BCU (covering Wandsworth, Richmond, Merton, and Kingston) with a 138.5% increase in the 12 week period ending May 17 2020 and a 232% increase in the last 14 days. The increase is mainly due to callers reporting social distancing breaches and not what we would ordinarily refer to as ASB.

80. There are understandable concerns nationally about the lockdown and its effect on domestic abuse. It is important to highlight that COVID-19 does not cause domestic abuse, but is an escalating factor due to families being isolated and cut off from support networks. There is also the risk that it is harder for victims to report crimes or request help if they remain in lock down.
81. In Kingston the total number of domestic abuse offences over the past four weeks was 19% higher than the same four-weeks last year (21 more offences). The Community Safety Team have worked with the police and RBK Communications teams on messaging for professionals, victims, friends and family as well as the public.
82. The Council has worked with partners and issued regular communications to raise awareness of the domestic violence and refuge services available. The Community Safety Team have also reached out to local Korean and Tamil community organisations to raise awareness of the services available.
83. Kingston has seen a 70% increase in contacts to the domestic violence hub since lockdown, with people spending more time in doors. An increase in calls to the Domestic Violence Hub while concerning, also indicates that victim survivors are finding safe ways to make contact with the service to seek advice. The Domestic Violence Hub service has expanded, to maximize the opportunity for anyone to contact them for support.
84. The Domestic Violence Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (DV MARAC) has continued to operate virtually. Referrals have increased by 50% with the May MARAC hearing a total of 29 cases compared to 19 in the previous month and also in comparison to the same month the previous year. An increase in referrals to the MARAC is a concern as this indicates an increase in the severity of abuse. There is a growing worry about a further increase in referrals post lockdown and the DV Hub will be planning to meet any increase in demand alongside key partners including the Police, Schools, Children and Adult Services and Housing. The Community Safety Team is in regular contact with all partner agencies to ensure that referral pathways are working effectively.

REGISTRATION SERVICES

85. The service operates to new statutory and Gov guidance requiring cessation of all services with the focus on remote death registration via telephone and electronic transmission of cause of death. Exception made at local discretion with regard to attended deathbed marriages and emergency birth registrations. The service core hours were adjusted to 8.00am - 8.00pm 24/7 to cope with increasing demand. All ceremonies are postponed until the 1 July 2020 earliest. The ability to match service availability to demand has relied solely on the personal input and dedication of our colleagues in this very emotive area of service provision.

BEREAVEMENT SERVICES AND MORTUARY PLANNING

86. The service operates to new statutory and Government guidance requiring funeral attendances be limited to immediate family attendance subject to observance of social distancing. This has required adjustments to traditional ways of saying farewell to a loved one and some modification to various faith requirements. The service core hours were adjusted to 8.00am - 8.00pm 24/7 to cope with increasing demand. All other functions other than primary disposal were ceased. Operating practises particularly with regard to cremation were amended to allow for a shift rotation pattern to keep pace with the logistical challenges of storage and cremation of the deceased. The service has continued to offer attended service availability with no reduction in service time allocation to 8.20pm. The increased volumes and supporting administration together with increased housekeeping duties to prevent cross contamination post funeral service has required the deployment of several colleagues from RBK non critical/core functions. The ability to match service availability to demand has relied solely on the personal input and dedication of our colleagues.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

87. The key focus for children's services during COVID-19 is safeguarding children and young people from harm and the risk of harm, and promoting the wellbeing of vulnerable children, young people and families through the continued delivery of essential education and social care services. In particular, this has involved:
- a. Identification and assessment of safeguarding concerns and immediate safety planning for children and young people;
 - b. Supporting and delivering some interventions with children in need (under S.17 of the Children Act 1989), children subject to child protection plans, children in care, care leavers, and young people with youth offending cautions and orders;
 - c. Supporting care providers, including foster carers, to maintain and stabilise care placements, the short-break care offer, supported accommodation and tenancies for care leavers, and residential school placements for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND);

- d. Working closely with early years' providers, schools and colleges to offer places for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers, and to ensure that all pupils have access to online learning that meets their needs; and
- e. Continuing those services that must be continued during the partial lockdown, such as school admissions and Education, Health and Care planning and reviews, as well as adapting other services to a virtual offer, such as children's centres and youth work.

Children's Social Care

- 88. From mid-March, in anticipation of the possible impact of COVID-19, revised guidance was issued on the operating model for children's services during the pandemic based on the new lockdown and social distancing measures that had been implemented. The model was based on a risk assessment of all children supported by children's social care to determine those most vulnerable children during the partial lockdown and how plans to safeguard and support these children should be delivered. The child-centred approach taken involved using digital technologies to maintain contact with the most vulnerable children and families, with physical visits continuing to children and young people where there was a higher risk of harm. Social workers have used creative approaches to complete physical visits whilst completing with the social distancing requirements, including completing visits in families' front gardens, in parks and, when needed, in their homes using appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). This approach was validated in the government guidance on children's social care services, which was subsequently issued to all local authorities on 3 April 2020.
- 89. The Single Point of Access (SPA) and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is operating virtually as the referral point for safeguarding concerns. The SPA continues to ensure that all contacts are assessed and there is an appropriate response based on need and the risk to the child or young person. All children requiring a S.47 child protection investigation or an assessment of their needs continue to be seen by a social worker within required timescales. Telephone calls into the Community Hub relating to children and young people, as well as all those on the NHS shielding list who require a child or family assessment, are being routed to the SPA and are allocated to the Early Service where family support is needed.
- 90. All multi-agency safeguarding and child protection meetings, as well as planning and review meetings for children in care and care leavers, continue to be held virtually. This includes child protection strategy meetings, child protection conferences, child in need meetings, core group meetings for children subject to child protection plans, review meetings for children in care and the multi-agency risk, vulnerability and exploitation (MARVE) panel. The Youth Offending Service has also continued to operate to support and supervise young people subject to youth cautions and orders. The effectiveness of children's social care services continues to be monitored by the Quality Assurance and Review Service; new quality assurance methods have been employed to test the effectiveness of the

virtual support provided to children, young people and families during the partial lockdown.

91. The volume of children’s social care activity has fluctuated over the partial lockdown period, but this has been effectively managed within a reduced staffing capacity. Since 23 March 2020, there has been an overall decrease in the number of contacts made to children’s services since the partial lockdown commenced and a decrease in those that meet the threshold for support. As a result, fewer assessments have been completed and the timeliness of assessments and visits have been maintained (and in some cases improved), despite the fact that it has been more challenging to contact and visit families. Details are set out in the table below, which shows the weekly activity in the week prior to lockdown (week beginning 16th March 2020) compared to the most recent week in lockdown (week beginning 4th May 2020).

	Pre-lockdown w/b 16.03.20	Lockdown w/b 04.05.20	Change (%)
Contacts per week	244	211	-14%
Referrals per week	20	14	-30%
Referrals leading to assessments (%)	75%	86%	+15%
Child assessments completed	223	129	-42%
Child assessments not in timescale (%)	0%	20%	-20%
Child protection visits not in timescale	38	23	-39%
Children in care visits not in timescale	28	10	-64%

92. Regular communication with foster carers and residential children’s home managers has been maintained by video-call or telephone. Physical visits have been completed where there are concerns for a child, young person or foster carers, or the need to stabilise a care placement. Visits to children in care and care leavers have continued virtually or in person where this is needed. Some care leavers are at greater risk of vulnerability due to the wider economic impacts of COVID-19 and the requirements of the partial lockdown. Where care leavers have required emergency support, including finance, this has been managed on an individual basis.
93. A significant concern has been the availability of care placements, particularly residential care placements, during this period. Only a very small number of children have needed to be accommodated in care and it has not been necessary to arrange any placement moves due to the effectiveness of current plans, but this may become a greater issue as the partial lockdown continues.

Schools

94. From 20 March 2020, schools have been closed to all pupils except for vulnerable children supported by a social worker, some children with an Education, Health and Care Plan, and the children of critical workers. Schools continue to provide meals for those children eligible for free school meals, either through their school meals provider or through the national voucher scheme. There is an expectation that all children subject to child protection plans and children in care will attend school unless it has been agreed with their social worker that they are safe at home. This risk assessment is regularly reviewed. Similarly, risk assessments have been completed for children with Education, Health and Care Plans, although here the principle is that children should stay at home unless they have specific needs that require them to be in school. An overview of average attendance each week is set out in the table below. Please note that a child may be both vulnerable and a child of a critical worker so values do not total. The shaded weeks are the school Easter holidays; the majority of schools remained open during the two-week holiday period but with a reduced learning offer.

	w/b 23.03.20	w/b 31.03.20	w/b 06.04.20	w/b 13.04.20	w/b 20.04.20	w/b 27.04.20	w/b 04.05.20
Children of critical workers	292	224	93	111	303	324	318
Children with vulnerabilities	88	110	39	45	179	183	200
All children at school	445	277	98	152	483	479	490

95. Most pupils attending school have been the children of critical workers. It is pleasing to note that the number of children with vulnerabilities attending school has significantly increased in the new term. This is approximately 36% of the cohort of vulnerable children that are expected to be attending school. Analysis by the Department for Education has shown that Kingston and Richmond are the London boroughs with the highest numbers of vulnerable children attending school. Schools and social workers are visiting families where these children are not at school to ensure they are safe and well.
96. Nurseries and early years settings, including childminders, have also been instrumental in supporting vulnerable young children and the children of critical workers. 34 settings in the borough remain open: 4 school-based nurseries; 12 private, voluntary and independent settings; and 18 childminders. 223 children attended these settings in the week beginning 4th May 2020 made up of 218 children of critical workers and 5 vulnerable children. The current analysis shows that there are sufficient early years places to meet local needs including those entitled to free childcare. The national guidance regarding funding for children accessing early education entitlement was amended on 28th April 2020 and this

poses financial challenges for some providers, which could impact on their longer term local sustainability. Achieving for Children is working with the Council to agree a possible local model which will incentivise settings who have stayed open and continue to support local sufficiency across the childcare market.

97. Schools have been providing online learning for their pupils using a variety of websites and portals and sending resources and materials to those families who do not have devices or internet connectivity. The education offer for children and young people is generally positively received by families and schools are keeping in regular contact to support connectivity and support resources where needed. Devices have been provided to a small number of children and young people to enable them to access online learning. On 19 April 2020, the government announced an initiative to provide laptops and internet access to all vulnerable children and young people with a social worker, including care leavers, who do not currently have access, and to disadvantaged pupils in Year 10 who will be sitting their GCSE examinations next year. 214 laptops and 44 4G wireless routers are being delivered to Achieving for Children for distribution to children in these groups.
98. On 11 May 2020, the government issued guidance on the phased reopening of schools from 1st June 2020 at the earliest for children in Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6. The guidance also indicated the plan for all children in the primary phase to be able to return to school for at least one month before the end of the summer term. From the 1 June, pupils in Year 10 and Year 11 will also have some face to face contact to support their learning. Achieving for Children is working with schools to develop their plans for the phased reopening of schools. This will be based on a risk assessment of the school site, teaching capacity and other issues relating to the specific circumstances of the school.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

99. Education, Health and Care assessments and reviews are continuing; however, there have been some delays, primarily due to the unavailability of some health professionals. Similarly, it has been challenging for schools to deliver some elements of children's Education, Health and Care plans at school and home due to the absence of specialist teaching staff, and/or the availability of physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists. Timescales for parental responses to assessments and reviews have been temporarily revised to allow more time for their submission, and guidance on the flexibilities that have been introduced, such as the use of direct payments for care and support, have been published on the Local Offer website alongside a series of frequently asked questions for parents and carers. The government has amended the requirements relating to Education, Health and Care planning in the Children and Families Act 2014, to reflect the current challenges facing all local authorities, schools and health services in using their 'best endeavours' to deliver some of the specific requirements in children's plans.

100. An area of specific concern for parents and carers has been the availability of short-break care, particularly overnight care, during the partial lockdown. There has been a severely reduced offer due to the temporary closure of several providers; however, Achieving for Children has worked with its main provider, Action for Children, to re-open some provision at Warren Park in Kingston. Short-break care provision at the Moor Lane has continued albeit focused on individual support rather than group activities.

PLACE DIRECTORATE

Emergency Operating Structure

101. London Council's COVID19 rating system identifies Kingston housing services "delivering a reduced service, compared to pre-COVID-19 services". This means that key services are being delivered and 80% plus of the staff are available to deliver services largely working from home. Similar assessments have been given to other London Councils. Housing receptions are closed, but emergency appointments are available, a full telephone service is being provided and online applications for housing can be made and are being processed.

Housing Management Services Provided to Council Homes

102. Following government guidelines, only emergency and urgent repairs are being undertaken including lift breakdowns and periodic gas servicing. New enhanced cleaning contracts started on the 1 April but with a reduced staff group due to the emergency, with a priority being given to sanitising common areas. The bulk refuse service continues unchanged but with an increased workload.
103. Sheltered Housing Officers remain in regular contact with residents. Communal areas have closed, and residents advised to avoid social contact around their scheme. More regular visible presence at schemes is planned to provide reassurance whilst maintaining social distancing requirements.
104. The directorate is contacting all vulnerable Council tenants to check whether they are coping during the COVID-19 restrictions, and if they need support. Their needs are logged on the Kingston Stronger Together database and this is followed up. To date a total of 2,173 phone contacts have been made with vulnerable residents and these are continuing on a rolling basis. A further 1,388 residents were reached by letter and more than 4,500 texts were sent to residents with information on how to access support.
105. The Cambridge Road Estate (CRE) regeneration team contacted CRE residents to check on support needs. Where required residents were referred to Kingston Stronger Together to receive the support they required. The team continues to make contact with residents on a regular basis to check on any changing needs.

Lettings, Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Services

106. Except for emergencies, lettings into council and housing association stock have significantly reduced given void works, connections, viewing and moving issues arising.
107. Accommodating rough sleepers is a national requirement and priority, and at 14 May 2020, 56 rough sleepers were accommodated in The Travelodge in central Kingston. However, there has also been considerable new demand. Challenges include sustaining rough sleepers in the accommodation provided and the exit strategy from these temporary arrangements as lockdown is eased and lifted. Costs relating to these emergency placements will be met by the Government.
108. There are also concerns that we may also see an increase in demand as the Private Rented Sector starts to retract and we see people facing eviction who have lost their ability to pay rent due to unemployment.

Major Works, Regeneration and Council Development

109. At the very beginning of the lockdown, construction works instructed by the Council did stall for a period of time but are now predominantly back on site. The construction site management policy of PHE and guidance of the Construction Leadership Council (CLC) has been helpful to the industry in providing information which has undoubtedly supported sites remaining open. Key larger sites for the borough, such as the Royal Exchange being developed by Berkeley Homes, appear actively on site and in construction which is a good signal of the local market. Some professional services organisations, such as commercial surveyors affected by the retail sector downturn, have been furloughed but most retain key staff to continue to progress in particular planning applications and delivery plans. Development contractors have in some cases stopped or have scaled back activities for a variety of reasons including sub-contractors no longer providing services, supply chain issues and staff availability. However most are still accepting new orders at this present time whilst being cautious about delivery without knowing the longer term impact of COVID-19 on the supply chain. Highways have continued works throughout again recognising the implemented policies and guidance of PHE and CLC.
110. As with other sectors of the economy, there are clear and significant risks to the construction industry if the sector were to slow due to access to a supply chain or staff. This could have potential impacts of additional costs to the Council arising from delays in delivering their own schemes which could affect how they decide to prioritise future schemes and resources accordingly. Discussions are ongoing as to particular pressures faced by contractors in fulfilling development contracts and what revised arrangements might need to be agreed (e.g. in terms of revised timelines for delivery). Information on capital and development projects can be provided to ward members on request.
111. On the Corporate Landlord side Council officers have worked with both voluntary and community organisations and commercial organisations who lease buildings or assets from them to support with the financial challenges. For the voluntary and

community organisations the Council has offered a three month rent holiday to ensure the sector can sustain its resilience. The Council does own a number of retail premises and has been mindful that any offers made in terms of financial support are considered within the context of Central Government funding available and are considered on a case by case basis.

Landlord Property Services

112. Officers in Landlord Property Services have been maintaining essential works (e.g emergency/urgent repairs and safety checks) in social housing homes where tenants allow the work to proceed, with appropriate social distancing practices in place. Routine repairs have been completed in communal areas where appropriate.
113. The completion of the Landlord's Gas Safety Record (LGSR), smoke alarm and carbon monoxide detector checks, for households that are self-isolating, have had appointments rearranged and for those residents that are shielding, discussions have been held with the tenants on how to achieve access.
114. The programme of LGSRs is carried out predominantly in the summer months and the issue of access will continue to impact on the level of non-compliance for LGSRs.
115. The planned and cyclical programme of works was initially paused and is now progressing as intended. There will be delays to the replacement of kitchens and bathrooms, due to households self-isolating and shielding.

Regeneration and Economic Development

116. Advice and resource pages linked to the government's COVID-19 support for businesses, employees and the self-employed were quickly set up on the Council's website. The service continues to reach out to businesses and is dealing with a significant increase in enquiries. Staff are working closely with the BID which faces particular challenges to operations and funding but will be a key part of the recovery effort.
117. Whilst the immediate focus has been on getting support to businesses in response to the containment measures, officers are identifying measures that can assist businesses through subsequent phases that will hopefully see a gradual relaxation of measures, allowing economic activity to return whilst maintaining the necessary public health protection. Remobilisation of business activity will not be straightforward and the council will need to continue to provide advice and information on how this might take place as well as the cumulative impact on the borough, especially locations such as town centres. Maintaining as much economic capacity as possible during this period is a priority as it will provide the conditions for as swift a recovery as and when normal conditions return.

118. The Regeneration and Economy team has reviewed the Economic Development programme with a focus on: COVID-19 business recovery and support measures, Strategic Partnerships, Skills and Employment Support initiatives; and targeted mitigation/investment for recovery. The review of emerging economic priorities and programme is starting to plan for the following adverse impacts:

- **A major reduction in the number of businesses and employment.** This is likely to be concentrated in the short term in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors, which are over represented in the Kingston economy and could impact negatively on the perceptions of town centres.
- **An increase in both unemployment** (by 10% in Q2 2020 according to the UK Office for Budget Responsibility) and **'underemployment'** i.e. people working fewer hours than they would ideally like. This is likely to be concentrated in low income groups, the under 25s and women, who are disproportionately employed in sectors that will be impacted hardest.
- **A high increase in the number of new Universal Credit (UC) claimants.**
- **Significant levels of employee furloughing.**
- **A general reduction in household income** either due to unemployment, furloughing or employers choosing to reduce salaries for a temporary period.
- **A significant increase in home working** (49% of workers worked from home between 3 -13 April 2020). this is very dependent on type of job and business.

119. The review also offers the Council an opportunity to reflect on wider socio-economic issues related to the impact of the CV19 crisis. Central to this will be how resilient local businesses and businesses networks have been to the impact of the shutdown and their ability to transition out of the recovery phase.

120. To support the framing of the Economic Development Recovery Programme the Council has adopted as good practice the Programme Framework recommended by the Institute for Place Management, which draws on internationally recognised health disaster management frameworks.



Business Recovery Support Programme

121. The impact of the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the important role the Council needs to play in the recovery process and in the development of any business support programmes. These programmes will need to focus on adaptation and resilience, incorporating both Council facilitation and business ownership and leadership.
122. In addition to reframing the economic development priorities, a draft recovery action plan is being drafted. This plan will set out a series of actions covering the recovery phases as set out in the IPM framework, with the anticipation that as the situation shifts to a new normal, the action plan also adapts to this, with an ongoing focus on transformation and resilience. Importantly the action plan is not linear - the phases overlap and are more fluid by necessity, with some early activity providing groundwork for later actions. This will need to remain flexible to adapt to changing circumstances, particularly the possibility of increased transmission peaks and subsequent full or partial lockdown periods.
123. A key feature underpinning any economic development recovery programme is the ability to collect and analyse precisely what is happening in the local economy. Therefore the initial phase of the recovery plan has focused around:
 - **Intelligence and Insight.** Robust local level data is being compiled and analysed to allow multiple future scenarios to be developed to help the Council understand the nature of problems and plan for them. The current crisis has highlighted gaps in the Council's data held on strategic employment sectors such as manufacturing. This is being addressed working with both internal resources such as the NNDR and Insight teams and organisations such as the Kingston Chamber of Commerce and Kingston First. The Council has also undertaken a joint COVID-19 business survey, a summary of the initial findings are attached [here](#). These results have been shared with partner organisations and will help frame additional business support measures and employment support programmes. In addition an economic data dashboard is being developed which will ensure the accurate monitoring and effectiveness of intervention measures.
 - **Communications.** As part of the Council's COVID-19 online response a separate business information page has been created which has been regularly updated with information on government grants and guidance. The Council has adopted a coordinated approach with Kingston First and Kingston Chamber of Commerce to ensure the clarity of message to the business community and the Council have worked collaboratively with both on a number of business supporting webinars. The Council has introduced a weekly online business newsletter. This has been a vital communication tool to disseminate information.

- **Direct Business Support.** In addition to sign posting online business support programmes promoted by the GLA London Growth Hub and others, the Council has commissioned a separate business recovery programme. This online programme is being delivered by CPG and provides a range of online business support to over 250 local businesses focused on improving businesses resilience. The online programme will target businesses within Kingston, delivered over a 90 day period and commenced on 14 April 2020. It will consists of a mixture of elements including: workshops on business support such as online selling; theme based Web Summits examining subject such as future business landscape and models for growth; One to One Strategic Business Support Sessions; and free access to an online portal with a library of over 400 training programmes available 24/7 available for the duration of the programme.
- **Government Lobbying.** The Council has lobbied on behalf of local businesses with the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) London Councils and South London Partnership on business grant support and wider support measures.
- **Strategic Partnerships.** The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of strong local partnerships. Partnerships arrangements already in place have had to adapt quickly to new realities and take on additional roles and responsibilities. This has included how data and information can be shared across different organisations and how delivery functions have been shaped. Key strategic partnerships such as with the Kingston Chamber of Commerce, Kingston First, Kingston University and Kingston Strategic Partnership have been key in responding to the crisis. Working with partners the Council is preparing comprehensive plans to facilitate the safe reopening of our town centres and key employment areas.

Non-Critical Service Areas

124. Other areas, like all parts of the planning service, whilst not strictly listed as “critical” are nevertheless essential to the Council’s response to the pandemic in terms of keeping the economy moving. The Planning Division and other teams have worked to change usual processes to maintain as much “business as usual” activity as possible within lockdown, including continuing to provide pre-planning meetings on a virtual basis.
125. The planning team anticipated that, notwithstanding the support from Government to businesses and individuals, there will be some residents, developers and businesses in the Borough that will not be able to pay the CIL or S106 contributions by the date they become payable. A plan is being progressed to put in place appropriate measures to handle this including the approval of a revised CIL instalment policy, together with powers to amend the triggers for payments and phasing of payments within Section 106 agreements. This will enable officers to respond to changing circumstances quickly and provide a lawful means of deferring payments due where problems arise, taking account of individual

circumstances as necessary. These measures should act to protect developments in the Borough and the income they generate for the Council; the Council has already received a number of requests for revised payment schedules.

126. The number of planning and other applications received has fallen, with 419 received during the lockdown period (up until 14 May) compared to 566 for the same period last year. Overall income levels have remained relatively stable during this period however, resulting directly from the timing of a number of pre-applications received. The pre-application fees received have offset the corresponding loss of planning application fees which has reduced income from £300k in 2019 to £285k.
127. The Council's Building Control service continues to support those developers who have decided to remain on site and observe the PHE guidelines around social distancing, based on an adapted site visit protocol which will be revised in the coming weeks to ensure further support to ongoing construction works.
128. The above measures demonstrate the Council's commitment and desire to keep going on the delivery of important functions, albeit in a different way, in the weeks of lockdown to come and should put the Council in as good a position as possible to get the economy moving as fully and quickly as possible again post lockdown. This principle has been applied by all the teams, including for example those that are working on all manner of transport infrastructure projects.

CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES

129. Central Government has made it clear that it sees the continuation of many of the universal environment-based services that are provided by the Council as vitally important during the pandemic. Commensurate with that, the service leads swiftly moved to put in place arrangements where it could sustain services where that remained possible within Government guidance; and making arrangements in readiness of any further changes, such as those made when partial lockdown became full lockdown.
130. These changes and measures were put in place rapidly across the various services and without fuss or complaint, which is a testament to the calibre of the Council's staff.

Critical Service Areas

131. The directorate identified early on a set of critical priority service areas it is delivering. This includes parks management, waste and recycling collections, street cleansing, environmental health, street scene services, network management, reactive highways and lighting, civil enforcement of moving traffic issues (not normal parking), building control and dangerous structures.
132. Some of these services have been cut back, in line with Government announcements. Staff have been redeployed to the Hub (see elsewhere). This

includes cultural and heritage, leisure centres, outdoor gyms and park playgrounds being closed to ensure there is sensible social distancing.

133. The Council's core waste and recycling services continued to operate with no disruption. The kerbside collection service has faced contractor staff absences related to COVID-19 of up to 3% of their permanent staff establishment, with any absent staff backfilled by agency staff. It has also seen increases in both residual and food waste tonnages by early May of around 6% and 5% respectively. Garden waste collections have been able to be maintained, but bulky waste collections and container deliveries were temporarily paused to reduce pressure on the service, and the Household Waste Reuse and Recycling Centre was temporarily closed to residents. Waste-related complaints during the lockdown period have been 382, compared with 812 for the same period last year, with the fall attributed to the increase in numbers of residents at home through the day and residents being advised on the website to only contact RB Kingston Council's Contact Centre if there is an essential need
134. New functions were passed to the Council by Government as it introduced new legislation, including the oversight and regulation of premises that should now be closed and business activities that cannot be provided.
135. Throughout the lockdown period there have been pressure moments for environmental critical services. One example of this is the public use of parks and open spaces and towpaths for their exercise. The sunny weather over the Easter weekend and May Bank Holiday placed significant pressure on the safe management of parks and open spaces, in particular the riverside walks and promenades and parks.

Financial Support to Business

136. The Government has made a number of significant announcements which provide COVID-19 financial support to businesses, to be administered by local authorities. It has confirmed that all costs, including appropriate new burdens funding to cover any administrative costs, will be reimbursed to local authorities in full.
137. An Expanded Retail Discount Scheme has increased the amount of business rate relief available to 100% for 2020/21 and broadens the eligibility criteria to include leisure, hospitality, estate and letting agencies and certain gambling establishments. Eligible registered nurseries will also receive 100% business rate relief for the year. Businesses do not need to apply for these reliefs as they will automatically be re-billed and their payment requirements recalculated appropriately. As at 14th May 2020, £48m of additional relief now awarded to businesses in the retail and hospitality sector. £800k relief awarded to qualifying child care nurseries within the borough.
138. In addition, the Government has committed to support the economy by giving grant support to some businesses affected by the outbreak. Those businesses eligible for Small Business Rate Relief (around 1478 in the borough) are eligible for a grant

of £10,000 each. Those businesses eligible for the Expanded Retail Discount Scheme with a rateable value below £51,000 (around 1,700 businesses) are eligible for a grant at two levels:

- a. £10,000 for properties with a rateable value of £15,000 or less
- b. £25,000 for properties between £15,000 and £51,000

139. Officers acted quickly, writing to all businesses considered as qualifying for the grants/reliefs in order to collate the necessary information to make payments (businesses can also provide the necessary details via the Council's website). As a result, the Council was quickly able to issue grant payments and up to 14 May has paid out 1,816 grants which is 84% of the identified eligible businesses, with grants paid totalling £26.21m or 85.6% of the total payable amount. Further payments are being processed daily (including weekends) and officers continue to work hard to encourage local businesses to provide missing details so more payments can be made. Kingston is 10th in London by percentage of businesses paid and 10th in London (and the top quartile nationally), by percentage of money allocated.
140. Central government has also launched an additional discretionary business grant scheme with guidance being issued at the end of last week. The grant is intended primarily and predominantly for:
- small and mirco businesses as defined by the Business, Enterprise and Employment Act
 - businesses with relatively high on-going fixed property- related costs
 - businesses that can demonstrate that they have suffered a significant fall in income due to the COVID-19 crisis
 - businesses which occupy property, or part of a property, with a rateable value of annual rent or annual mortgage payments below £51,000.

The Council will be working with partners to identify clear local priorities for the fund in light of the guidance and robust application process. We will be distributing funds in June 2020

Support to Council Suppliers

141. A key priority is the immediate and longer term sustainability of the supply chain. The focus has been to work with suppliers to ensure service continuity during these challenging times and to minimise the risk of failure in both the immediate and longer term. This is essential to maintain delivery of critical services but also to ensure that the Council is able to swiftly and easily resume delivery across all services when appropriate.
142. In March the Cabinet Office published a Procurement Policy Note (PPN 02/20) for public bodies on supplier relief due to COVID-19. In line with this guidance, the Council has reviewed its contract portfolio and undertaken a supplier screening

process to identify those organisations which may be 'at risk' as a result of COVID-19. The Council may consider a supplier to be 'at risk' if, as a result of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak:

- it will struggle to meet contractual obligations, or
- its ongoing viability is at risk due to issues with cashflow or liquidity, a reduction in its workforce capacity and/or disruption to its supply chains

143. In implementing the guidance, officers are working with suppliers to tailor support to the specific needs of individual organisations. This includes advice about the Government's business support packages, assistance regarding cashflow, agreeing payments on a retention basis, supporting access to PPE supply chains, or offering contractual relief in respect of performance or other obligations. Commissioners and contract managers have been in open and ongoing dialogue with Council suppliers to ascertain the types of issues experienced as a result of this emergency and continue to work with the Council's supply chain to ensure the availability of essential services. Details in respect of the support provided to the adult social care market are outlined elsewhere in this report.
144. A supplier relief process and approvals mechanism has been implemented to ensure that decisions are taken by the appropriate decision maker in line with the Financial Regulations and Contract Regulations. All decisions are taken in consultation with Corporate Commissioning and Finance, and are being implemented through a formal contract variation.
145. Much of the Council's planned commissioning and procurement activity has been suspended as it is not feasible to continue to progress projects in the current circumstances due to staff being deployed to COVID-19 response activities, the inability of the market to respond to routine tendering processes, and uncertainty around medium and longer-term requirements. As a result, it has been necessary to agree a number of variations, extensions and short-term direct awards to ensure continuity of key services and to provide sufficient time to undertake the appropriate process in due course. In addition, it has been necessary to ensure sufficiency of the supply chain in a number of key areas, for example supply of PPE as detailed earlier in this report. This has resulted in a large number of new suppliers being screened to ensure suitability before any orders are placed as well as engaging with sub-regional and regional local government partnerships to source necessary supplies. These decisions have been taken in line with the Contract Regulations.

Highways, Transport, and Regulatory Services

146. Regulatory Services have been actively monitoring levels of compliance with Coronavirus legislation that requires some business activities to cease and for many retail and other premises to close. Where businesses, particularly those serving food and drink, have had to close the Council has provided detailed advice and guidance to enable them to operate with takeaway or collection and delivery, enabling many to continue trading. Whilst the vast majority of retail and other

businesses have complied with requirements to close or cease certain activities, it has been necessary to require some to take action with 63 direct contacts leading to 21 businesses closing or ceasing activities voluntarily and four prohibition notices being served. The Council We will continue to provide advice and guidance to those premises who are able to trade, on measures to promote social distancing in the workplace and to help protect visitors and customers. For those businesses that have been required to close the service has arranged payment holidays for license fees to ensure businesses have the appropriate licenses in place to allow them to reopen once the regulations permit.

147. The Highways and Transport service has continued, largely, to operate a business as usual service for routine functions such as reactive highway maintenance. The team have also managed, with key contractor support, to continue to deliver key capital programmes including Go-Cycle. In addition, the sustainable transport team managed to refocus their service to help and support NHS workers to travel to work by bike. Attention in recent weeks has turned to refocusing the capital programme to reflect the new 'streetspace' agenda - delivering both short term 'social distancing' measures and medium term improvements to encourage active travel modes, whilst managing the impact of TfL budget changes as RBK like most boroughs remains very reliant on TfL grants to deliver highways and transport improvements.

Cultural and Heritage Service

148. Cultural and Heritage services have closed their physical presence and instead where they are able they have provided digital services and opportunities. This has included libraries, music service, adult education and heritage services. Many of the service staff have been deployed to support the Covid response.
149. Libraries have reported a 90% increase in usage of online resources compared to the previous year. The music service has seen 1,200 of its 1,800 pupils sign up to on-line tuition. The Heritage services has seen 166% increase in online engagement. Feedback we have received demonstrates that this has provided valuable support to Kingston residents during the lockdown.
150. Nearly 100% of Kingston Adult Education's accredited face to face courses were transferred to new online provision with good attendance and very good learner feedback. Nearly 300 examination enrolments have transferred online. Nearly 50% of the specialist skills programme, which covers Creative Writing, Ceramics, Languages, Weaving and Art, moved online, again to superb learner feedback.

ICT Service

151. The Council's investment in Google has been a real asset during the COVID-19 response, enabling the vast majority of the workforce to be able to work remotely. One benefit of which is a seamless connection into the Council's network from anywhere.

152. During March and April the IT helpdesk experienced a 25% increase in calls over the previous month. These calls have largely been in relation to supporting the move to home working and responding to these has been a key priority. Prior to March fewer than 25% of the workforce connected remotely. Since the 17 March the figure is now 95% of staff connecting remotely every day. The use of video-conferencing within the Council has now become a key tool for the Council and is now, in effect, the channel for all meetings. In the last seven days for example there have been 6,718 video meetings.
153. The Digital team have also been working alongside the Kingston Stronger Together Hub, developing the online forms for residents seeking assistance as well as those wishing to volunteer. Alongside this the team have introduced automation of processes including referrals to Revenue & Benefits and hospital discharge. This work continues with recent digital tools including the booking service for the Recycling Centres as they re-opened.

HR SERVICE

154. HR has acted as a key resource as the organisation has moved in a very short period to one where the majority of staff work from home. This has involved the provision of support on a wide range of issues including to those staff unable to work due to coronavirus, the daily monitoring of workforce availability across Directorates, plus tips and advice on staff wellbeing at home. The continuity of the payroll function has also been an absolute priority, with additional resilience measures put in place to mitigate the risks of any sickness absence in this key area.
155. The Recruitment team has been working with over seven agency suppliers to quickly source additional staff capacity to support the emergency response; and has on-boarded an additional 19 agency workers in a very short timescale, primarily into the Adult Social Care Directorate
156. As of 14 May, 54 members of staff have had a sickness episode of suspected COVID-19 without diagnosis, and 11 members of staff have been formally diagnosed with the virus. Eleven members of staff have a current sickness episode linked to the virus, of whom five have been diagnosed. Thirty-nine members of staff have self-isolated since the start of the outbreak with nine currently doing so; and two people have stayed at home as a precautionary health measure.
157. The Council has collaborated with other South West sub-regional local authorities in the early weeks of lockdown to support referrals for COVID-19 testing; firstly to Chessington and latterly also to the drive through set up in Twickenham. The Government's testing offer is developing at a rapid pace through a combination of large drive through centres such as Chessington, and temporary Mobile Testing Units (MTU) run by the Ministry of Defence. Kingston Council promoted home testing for those people who were symptomatic and didn't have access to a vehicle

for the MTU testing. It is a key focus for managers in all services to ensure where helpful and appropriate all staff can readily get a test. Staff who are self-isolating are therefore being advised to get tested, and HR are supporting and coordinating this. Officers are also liaising with schools and care providers to help support the promotion of testing for their staff

CUSTOMER SERVICES

158. The Head of the Shared Customer Services and a number of their key staff have been instrumental in supporting the establishment and operation of the new Kingston Stronger Together Hub, covered elsewhere in this report. Council receptions were kept open until Government advice precluded this and these are now closed unless there is an exceptional reason for a visitor appointment. This includes the reception for Job Centre Plus in GH2, which is running a reduced service. All COVID-19 related calls are being directed via the contact centre, which also handles other routine enquiries.
159. The vast majority of Contact Centre staff now work from home, enabled by effective IT and telephony systems that allow the usual rigorous focus on performance and call waiting times to continue. During the first three months of the year, call volumes remained high, and were up on the equivalent period in 2019. However call volumes in April 2020 have shown a substantial decrease, with 11,882 calls offered and 10,100 calls answered compared to 20,006 calls offered and 13,068 calls answered for the whole of April 2019.

	Kingston							
	2020/21				2019/20			
	Offered	Ans	% Ans	Ave Wait	Offered	Ans	% Ans	Ave Wait
April	11822	10100	85.4%	0:01:29	20006	13068	65.30%	00:05:06

Revenues and Benefits

160. The Revenues and Benefits service has been at the heart of early delivery of support to businesses and residents. The team has been working to change business rate reliefs, issue new business support grants, adjust the Council Tax Support Scheme, process an increased number of Housing Benefit claims and support an increased number of residents through the Discretionary Hardship Payments.

Facilities Management

161. Officers working with our Facilities Management provider have been facilitating the safe and effective closure of buildings and ensuring that those which remain open are appropriately maintained to ensure the safety of staff and occupants. Twenty

six council buildings remain open on a limited basis for essential staff, including the Guildhall and Guildhall 2. The Council has undertaken an assessment of its compliance with the Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19) in Offices and Contact Centres guidance published by the Government on 11 May 2020 and is adhering to the requirements set out for safe working practices.

162. The Council has updated its fire procedures and has undertaken a programme of modifications to ensure appropriate social distancing measures are implemented in the Guildhall complex. This includes limiting access to the buildings to named officers who have prior authorisation to attend the office for essential work which cannot be carried out from home. Signage and floor markings have been introduced to support social distancing, and additional cleaning supplies are being rolled out to both buildings.
163. Deep cleans have been completed for all closed buildings and appropriate security measures are in place. Detailed risk assessments will be completed before any building is reopened, including implementation of any modifications required to ensure compliance with Government guidance and best practice in respect of health and safety.

Accounting and Future Funding

164. The Government has confirmed that the “Fair Funding Review”, its review of the national funding formula distribution for local authorities, and move to a 75% business rates retention scheme will no longer be implemented in 2021/22. This will allow councils to focus on meeting the immediate public health challenge posed by the pandemic.
165. Finally, in recognition of the current challenges, the statutory deadline for the publication of local authorities’ 2019/20 accounts has been changed. Draft accounts must now be approved by 31 August 2020 (previously 31 May 2020) with final audited accounts published by 30 November 2020 (previously 31 July 2020). Work is progressing and officers are aiming to pass draft accounts to the external auditors in early July, although this timeframe is being kept under review.

Internal Audit

166. In Internal Audit, in order to ensure that front line services continue to be delivered, most routine audits have been suspended, with internal audit resources redirected to anti-fraud work and supporting delivery e.g. assisting with the business grant payments. Whilst this will impact on delivery of the Audit Plan the Audit Service will continue to meet its statutory obligations including reviewing the Council’s governance arrangements through the Annual Governance Statement. A three month rolling audit plan will be prepared covering the council’s emerging risks in response to Covid-19.

Staff Communications

167. Throughout COVID-19 regular all staff emails (initially daily then four times a week) have been sent to keep staff informed. Initially, these communications focussed on national prevention of COVID-19 infection and service issues. As the situation has evolved these updates now focus on addressing frequently asked questions, highlighting the support that is in place for staff and advice on working remotely and how managers can support their teams. They also include information on deployment opportunities to support critical services.
168. The emails and newsletters signpost to the more in-depth resources that have been developed for managers and staff and which are published on dedicated pages on the Council's internal intranet. These resources include support for staff (including information for managers on supporting staff, practical advice and tips on keeping healthy and on mental health and wellbeing). There have also been regular staff briefings online during the pandemic as well as electronic updates. The live stream events engage over 350 staff.

External Communications

169. Keeping people informed about the support that's available, providing advice and being a trusted source of clear and accurate information is crucial in the current circumstances. In addition to focused activity to reach known vulnerable people, the council provided timely information as widely as possible. At the end of March a letter was delivered to every home in the borough (approx 68,000) outlining the support available and providing advice about how to stay safe. The resident e-update was sent daily initially, and then moved to three times a week, to a current mailing list of over 5,800 subscribers.
170. Social media is obviously a key channel to enable access to updated information regularly and the council has provided multiple daily posts on twitter, facebook, instagram and nextdoor. These have included videos as well as local information and government advice. The council has used these channels and the electronic updates to recognise and thank community and voluntary groups, volunteers, staff and partners for their support for residents throughout the pandemic.
171. Councillors and MPs have received regular updates, initially daily and then moving to three times a week, on latest developments locally and nationally. These started on 17th March 2020. There is also a dedicated councillor email address for COVID-19 enquiries which has received 65 enquiries. There were also two all councillor hangout meetings on 31 March and 21 April 2020 which included briefings on the support the council was providing during COVID19, key issues and the opportunity to ask questions.
172. In addition to the above there have also been a number of borough-wide digital events where the council through the Leader and/or CEO have been asked to contribute to discussions around the COVID-19 response for example the

Community Brain panel event, a question and answer session with the Borough Commander and a Health and Wellbeing interview with the CEO and Leader of the Council.

173. Working with Kingston First and the Chamber of Commerce, the council has taken part in briefings for businesses as well as introducing a weekly business e-update in early April which now has over 3,800 subscribers.

RISK MANAGEMENT

174. A key aspect of Council's response has been identifying and responding to the risks and issues that COVID-19 has created. A dedicated COVID-19 risk register has been established, which is managed by the Coordination Group with regular reports to Gold to ensure the risks are well managed and mitigating actions are taken.

GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

175. At an early stage of the pandemic response the Council took the exceptional step of cancelling its formal committee meetings in the interests of public safety. The transaction of all non urgent business was postponed and urgency mechanisms contained within the Constitution were utilised to enable the Chief Executive and Executive Directors to take urgent decisions which would otherwise have required Member approval in Committee. In order to retain as much democratic oversight as possible, measures were put in place to broaden the consultation undertaken with Members prior to a decision being taken and to ensure public notice of all decisions taken.
176. Democratic Services has worked closely with colleagues in IT to enable the Council to resume decision making by committee through virtual meetings. Virtual Committee meetings were not previously permitted but changes to legislation have enabled them to now take place. At an extraordinary meeting of full council on 19 May 2020, which took place virtually, arrangements for interim arrangements and a revised calendar of meetings were approved. There may still be instances in which urgent decisions are required and any such decisions will be taken in accordance with the constitution.

Consultation

177. There has been no formal consultations, due to the urgency needs in responding to the COVID-19 emergency. However, communications with partners has been key, as set out in this report.

COVID-19 Financial Impact

178. As set out in this report, the response to the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the delivery of Council services, with some services temporarily closing whilst demand

for others has significantly increased and new services have been offered to support local needs. This has happened alongside what is expected to be the deepest recession in decades, which has hit local residents and businesses in Kingston, as it has done nationwide. The combined effect of these things on the Council's finances is to significantly increase cost and reduce income.

179. Estimating the total cost of the response and the period during which income levels will be suppressed is challenging due to the number of variables and level of uncertainty. Whilst we have the initial outline of the Government's recovery plan, none of us know exactly how long it will take until things return to any form of normality. In compiling the estimates included in this report we have used the best information available for each set of circumstances.
180. The Council's ability to deliver on its planned programme of transformation and savings delivery is also affected by the COVID-19 response. In some cases this is because staff have been deployed into other roles as part of the response effort and in other cases, the change in the context we are operating in, makes it more challenging to progress some of the initiatives that were planned prior to the pandemic.
181. Government has announced a series of grants for local councils to contribute towards the costs of the response to the pandemic. There have been mixed messages from the Government as to whether the full financial impact will be covered with additional funding, but the grants announced to date will not cover our local estimates of the impact. In addition to the grants to support the cost of the response there has been specific grant funding for business grants, the council tax hardship fund and a small sum to support rough sleepers. The grant funding awarded to Kingston to date from the various schemes is shown below. A further £600m nationally has recently been announced to support care homes. At the time of writing, the allocation of this to individual authorities has not been announced.

	National Fund	Kingston Allocation	
Category	£'000	£'000	Purpose / Restrictions
COVID-19 Grant Tranche 1	1,600,000	3,709	To support the Council's response to Covid-19. No restrictions on use
COVID-19 Grant Tranche 2	1,600,000	4,816	
Total unrestricted grants		8,525	
Rough Sleepers Emergency Funding	3,200	15	To support provision of emergency accommodation for rough sleepers
Hardship Fund	500,000	1,132	To support reductions in Council tax bills for those facing hardship

Business Grants	12,333,504	30,646	To fund small business and retail, hospitality and leisure business grant programme
Total restricted grants		31,793	
TOTAL		45,934	

182. The additional costs, loss of income and reduced delivery of savings associated with the Council are summarised in the table below. This excludes the spend against the restricted grants.

Category	Total One-off Impact	Total per month Impact	Total for period
	£'000	£'000	£'000
TOTAL EXCEPTIONAL COSTS	2,839	38	3,067
TOTAL INCREASED SERVICE DEMAND	3,484	192	4,638
TOTAL IMPACT ON LOCAL TAXATION	0	520	3,122
TOTAL LOSS OF INCOME	3,440	1,738	13,866
TOTAL IMPACT ON SAVINGS / CAPITAL PROGRAMMES	3,001	0	3,001
TOTAL FINANCIAL IMPACT	12,764	2,488	27,694

183. The figures in the table above include a wide range of costs including additional demand in adults social care (where some costs may be recoverable from the Clinical Commissioning Group), Children's Social care and education, significant losses of income from parking and traffic enforcement as well as a loss of Transport for London grant funding and other income sources such as libraries, leisure centres and commercial property. The impact of the loss of business rates income through additional reliefs granted will be compensated in full, though other losses experienced through lower collection rates for example, will not be covered, so only this latter element is included.

184. Included within the cost estimates is an allowance for increased bad debt provision. The Council suspended formal recovery, enforcement and legal action across all debt types when the crisis hit in order to support residents and businesses who find themselves in financial hardship. It is however, important that the Council strikes the right balance between supporting its residents and businesses through this difficult time and protecting its overall financial position. As part of this, and in order to try and support debtors to ensure they are able to track debt outstanding and discuss payment schedules with the Council, for many types of debt we are therefore currently issuing appropriately worded letters containing

debt details and appropriate contact details. We will also start to explore when is the right time to recommence more formal action.

185. Members will note that the estimated cost exceeds the unrestricted grant funding, by £19.169m (before allowing for CCG funding which is not yet confirmed).
186. The excess of estimated cost against grant income creates a financial pressure in the 2020/21 financial year. The Council continues to report its estimated cost to the Government through regular returns. It is anticipated that this will identify the areas of pressure Kingston continues to face and may lead to additional funding being provided. However, the Council needs to prepare for the eventuality that these costs may not be met in full.
187. The year end financial position for 2019/20 is still being finalised ahead of the revised statutory deadlines and will be reported to this Committee in June. Assuming a balanced outturn position, the general fund balance at 31 March 2020 would be £16.133m. This provides insufficient cover for the additional costs in the immediate short term and would leave the Council exposed to significant future financial risk and this level of reserves would need to be quickly replenished. In addition to recovery of relevant costs from the CCG, in order to make up the shortfall, options for in year expenditure restraint and re-purposing of earmarked reserves will need to be considered.
188. The financial implications of COVID-19 beyond the current financial year have not yet been fully assessed and this work will be progressed over the coming weeks and months as part of the Council's financial planning for 2021/22 and beyond. There are, however, clearly significant risks to the level of income available from the main sources of council tax and business rates as the impact of the lockdown period on personal finances, house building (and therefore taxbase growth) and the success of businesses and their ability to pay business rates are likely to have an ongoing impact in the short to medium term.

Recovery and Renewal

189. As this report demonstrates, the Council is very much focused on supporting its communities, residents and businesses through this most difficult period. Support during COVID-19 will continue for many months to some. However, recovery and renewal work will become an increasingly important part of our work in the coming months. The Chief Executive will bring a paper to committee on this, for further discussion. It will include aspirations for:
 - Economic development
 - Community activism and engagement
 - Reduction in inequalities
 - Maximising resilience
 - Organisational transformation
190. The announcement of the Prime Minister on 10 May 2020 regarding the first steps to release lockdown will see a swathe of requirements put on the Council to manage the ensuing guidance, and which will have to be managed in an on-going

command and control structure, due to the country still being in the grips of the pandemic. We cannot be complacent about the infection rates of COVID-19 starting to increase again if the social distancing measures required aren't maintained. This will continue to be a priority for the council.

Conclusion

191. The COVID-19 pandemic has and will continue to have a substantial and sometimes tragic impact on the lives of Kingston residents, its businesses and on the Council's operations. The Council acted swiftly to put in place its resilience planning and adjust its services accordingly, and the incredible effort of the council's staff in achieving this is acknowledged.
192. The Council has worked with partners across the public and voluntary and community sectors to protect its most vulnerable residents and ensure that those who need support have access to it. The pandemic will have a material impact on the Council's finances, driven by a combination of increased costs and lost income, and welcomes the support and commitment from the Government to mitigate this impact through its emergency funding. As the pandemic moves into the next phase, the Council will monitor this and continue to put in place mechanisms to support the reduction in infection; whilst also starting the early discussions about a renewal plan to support the borough, its residents, the self-employed and employers as lockdown measures are relaxed and the wider economy is re-opened.

Background papers

There are no background papers to this report.