

Cabinet – 28 October 2020

Covid-19 Update - response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Overview Committee

Portfolio: Councillor Craddock – Health and Wellbeing

Related portfolios: All

Service: Public Health

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: No

1. Aim

1.1 To respond to recommendations of the Scrutiny Overview Committee from its meeting on 25 August 2020.

2. Summary

2.1 In May 2020, the Scrutiny Overview Committee (SOC) established a Working Group to look at the economic impact of Covid-19 on businesses and communities. The finding and recommendations of the Working Group were reported to the SOC on 25 August 2020 and subsequently presented to Cabinet on 9 September 2020.

This report outlines the Council's response to the recommendations of the Working Group.

3. Recommendations

3.1 That Cabinet notes the actions being taken by the Council and with its partners in response to Covid-19.

4. Report detail - know

4.1 The Covid-19 working group was established to understand the economic impact of Covid-19 on businesses and communities and to determine the mechanisms needed to allow recovery. The working group met with Council Officers, partners and local voluntary and community organisations to inform their deliberations.

4.2 The Working Group report was presented to Cabinet on 9 September 2020. A copy of which can be found [here](#)

4.3 The recommendations of the Working Group, together with the response are set out below.

In responding to the recommendations, the Council believes its community response to the COVID-19 pandemic increased its ability to deliver effectively. The work of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Walsall has been outstanding, and this includes the work of Elected Members, officers, its partners, local businesses and most importantly, the local community, who are all thanked for their excellent response and for maintaining services in unprecedented circumstances.

Recommendation 1: *The Authority including Elected Members and Officers, its Partners, local businesses and most importantly, the local community, are thanked for its excellent response and for maintaining services in unprecedented circumstances.*

The Council continues to thank everyone for their continued efforts in these unprecedented times, including staff, Councillors and partners

Recommendation 2: *The Council needs to be prepared for a second wave of the virus. It is important that 'lessons were learnt' from the initial phase of the pandemic, A coherent 'Walsall Communities Emergency Plan' should be developed and include; A pool of volunteers ready to assist (police checked); Access to drivers, possibly WHG or the Fire Service to deliver food parcels; A strategy to help the most vulnerable who were not able to access digital/online services; Provision of coordinated information on accessing support and e.g. food bank, financial support and persons of contact; and Proactive work with local communities to further understand their needs ahead of a potential second outbreak.*

The Council has prepared for a period of tighter restrictions and step plans are in place. These plans, because of the lessons learned from the now paused lockdown will have a greater emphasis on individuals and families supporting themselves with assistance from their communities but appropriate help will be available to those who need additional support. Work has included:

- A pool of appropriately checked volunteers ready to assist.
- Access to more volunteer drivers. During the lockdown there was fantastic support from WHG and the Fire Service to deliver food parcels however depending on the terms of any tightening of restriction the number of drivers may need to be supplemented. Many of the Council's partner organisations no longer have availability of staff due to their operational requirements. We will still get support but that will need to be against a backdrop of their operational requirements.
- Support to help vulnerable residents who were not able to access digital/online services. The Making Connections Walsall (MCW) model includes arrangements for home shopping and doorstep delivery provision accessible on-line or by telephone.
- Provision of coordinated information on accessing support including key contact details including MCW and the Council's Money Home Job teams, bank, financial support and persons of contact.

- There has been a continuation of work on the community response to further develop the Council's community model. This has included regular constructive dialogue with local community organisations to further develop the model.

Recommendation 3: *Enhanced partnership working should be developed with foodbanks in the future to ensure that their expertise and resources are included in the Authorities emergency response.*

Food banks are a critical part of the Community network and this role is recognised. They carry out a vital role. The balance between food bank provision and food parcel distribution at an industrial scale meant that phase 1 of our response to COVID-19 focused on mass distribution of food parcels through Making Connections Walsall Hubs. If there is a period of tighter restrictions, there will be a different focus and the role of Food Banks will feature more in our support arrangements. Consideration is of course needed regarding capacity issues and the Council would wish to work in closer partnership to ensure they are adequately supported.

Recommendation 4. *Enhanced engagement with Elected Members on the local Covid-19 situation should be developed to provide more speedy and detailed dissemination of information as and when available.*

Throughout the pandemic there has been regular engagement with Members and local MPs with weekly meetings with Group Leaders, weekly e-mail briefings to Members and MPs as well as e-mails on key specific issues so that Members were briefed and could support their constituents. The Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing has also sent information to Members on the current situation and where Members can find further resources to support their constituents.

As part of the Councils' Outbreak management plan, the Council has set up a Member Led Engagement Board (called the Local Outbreak Engagement Board) where Councillors and members of the public can ask questions of the Board. Information on the Walsall Covid-19 dashboard is available which provides information on cases and spread of the virus across the borough. The dashboard is updated weekly and can be found on the Council's Coronavirus Information and Advice webpage. (access [here](#)).

Recommendation 5: *The Council should continue to ensure provision to businesses with/signposting to debt management and financial advice and continue to work in partnership with local business to support their needs.*

The council has set up Covid-19 external funding web pages. These are and will continue to be maintained to hold information for businesses and community groups, including links etc. to support this work. Information for Businesses can be found on the Council's Coronavirus Information and Advice webpage (access [here](#))

Recommendation 6: *The Local Authority should proactively work with its Partners to ensure that skills and training courses are developed to support career changes and to enable 16-24 year-olds to access the Government 'Kick Start Scheme'.*

The council has an approved extension for the EU funded Walsall Impact programme through to July 2023 to support 16-29 year-olds into employment and training, with an additional 1,400 places available. CMT approved a proposal for Walsall Council to become a Kick Start scheme intermediary, which will allow us to support employers to find and then take local unemployed people into this programme

Recommendation 7: *The Working Group welcome the Cabinet approved plan to address the mental wellbeing of residents caused by COVID-19 and encourage further valuable work by the Local Authority, it's Partners and the third sector to support residents to overcome their challenges created by the pandemic.*

The council will continue with this work and ensure that mental wellbeing is included in the Council's ongoing response to Covid-19. Further reports on how the Council is supporting the mental wellbeing of the community of Walsall will be brought to Cabinet in due course by the portfolio holder for Health and Wellbeing.

Recommendation 8: *Key Partners should be involved in the strategic and operational planning of the pandemic response, including at Gold Command, to ensure that skills and expertise was fully utilised.*

Throughout the response to the pandemic regular meetings and briefings with partners have been taking place. This includes initially weekly and then fortnightly meetings with Walsall Proud Partnership to share intelligence and coordinate partner action. In addition regular (weekly and then fortnightly) briefings were distributed to partners to keep them informed and involved in Walsall's response to Covid-19.

The Council has more recently set up a formal Incident Management Team which meets weekly and includes statutory partners, education, business, health, housing and community. This is a broad representation of key partners across the borough to coordinate the response to Covid-19.

Recommendation 9: *Consideration should be given to the funding arrangements for Community Associations and partnership work should be continued to allow the sector to develop.*

The Council has secured an extension to the EU funded Community Grants programme that can support local Walsall and Black Country community groups with small grants (up to £20k) to support local delivery of economic focussed training and support towards positive outcomes.

Recommendation 10: *A mechanism for logging and analysing the provision of digital devices, across partners, should be developed, to avoid duplication and ensure that resources are maximised to assist as many residents as possible.*

A mechanism for logging and analysing the provision of digital devices, across partners, should be developed, to avoid duplication and ensure that resources are maximised to assist as many residents as possible. Conversations are starting with partners including community associations and their level of digital awareness. This includes exploring opportunities to work with the Council's contracted technology partners to leverage the social value elements of council and partner relationships to support the community.

Council Corporate Plan priorities

4.4 The Council's vision set out in the Corporate Plan is to reduce inequalities. One of the key objectives of the Councils' response to Covid-19 is to protect the vulnerable and in doing so, direct additional resources to those in greater need, thereby mitigating the impact of Covid-19 and reducing inequalities.

Risk management

4.5 Governance and therefore risk management of actions are taken through the Councils' Gold and Silver command structure. Risks are continually evaluated, and appropriate action taken to mitigate those risks.

Financial implications

4.6 Financial impacts associated with Covid-19 to the council is reported through Gold and silver command structures which internally is reported to Cabinet.

Legal implications

4.7 There are no direct legal implications of this report.

Procurement Implications/Social Value

4.8 There are no direct procurement implications in this report.

Property implications

4.9 There are no direct property implications in this report.

Health and wellbeing implications

4.10. Key to the Councils' response to Covid-19 is mitigating the health and wellbeing impact. Covid-19 is going to have a long-term impact on our communities including health and wellbeing. It is the intention of the Council to understand this impact and is conducting a resident's survey and other work over the coming year to continue to inform how the Council should respond to this changing need.

Staffing implications

4.11 There are no direct staffing implications of this report, however the Council wishes to thank all the hard work that its officers are doing, with partners in response to Covid-19.

Reducing Inequalities

4.12. One of the key objectives in the Councils' response to Covid-19 has been to protect the vulnerable and in doing so, directing additional resources to those in greater need. In doing this the Councils' aim is to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 and reduce inequalities.

Consultation

4.13 Officers of Silver Command have been consulted to inform the content of this report.

5. Decide

5.1 The Council will continue to respond to the changing demands that Covid-19 places upon the Council and the community which it serves.

6. Respond

6.1 Gold and Silver Command, as well as the place-based Incident Management Team, will continue to meet until deemed necessary to step them down.

7. Review

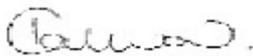
7.1 The Council will continually review how it responds to Covid-19, assessing the latest evidence, current context and prevalence of the virus. The formal strategic and tactical response to Covid-19 will be through our Gold and Silver command structures and that with partners through the place-based Incident Management Team.

Background papers

Covid-19 working group report.

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20 October 2020

