

<b>Report to</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date of meeting</b>	30 <sup>th</sup> June 2020
<b>Lead Member / Officer</b>	Hugh Evans, Leader, Judith Greenhalgh, Chief Executive
<b>Report author</b>	Judith Greenhalgh, Chief Executive
<b>Title</b>	Denbighshire County Council Coronavirus Response

## **1. What is the report about?**

To update cabinet on the management of the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic in Denbighshire and North Wales and on the process for managing recovery.

## **2. What is the reason for making this report?**

For cabinet to consider and agree the various elements of the response

## **3. What are the Recommendations?**

That cabinet note the contents of this report, support the actions taken and agree the next steps as set out below

## **4. Report details**

### **Emergency Response**

4.1. Denbighshire County Council stood up its Strategic Emergency Management Team on 16<sup>th</sup> March as a response to the Coronavirus pandemic.

4.2. The Council has well established emergency planning arrangements to deal effectively with short term emergencies such as a flood or fire and with pandemic flu. The nature of coronavirus drove the need for these plans to be quickly adapted to the situation

- 4.3. SEMT is chaired by the Chief Executive, and comprises corporate directors, heads of service, the Council's senior HR officer and ICT officers and it attended by the leader and deputy leader. In the early days of the pandemic, SEMT met three times weekly; it now meets once weekly. Meetings are supported by an officer from the Regional Emergency Planning Team and a loggist to record decisions made and actions taken.
- 4.4. With all formal member meetings suspended, SEMT reported to cabinet who have been meeting informally. Decision making has largely been carried out under powers delegated to Heads of Service or Lead Members, where appropriate in consultation with cabinet.
- 4.5. The terms of reference for SEMT are attached at appendix one. Broadly, the meetings focussed on tackling both strategic and operational issues around a number of key themes; the initial key themes are shown at appendix 2 but have evolved over time as the pandemic situation developed.
- 4.6. The initial task for SEMT was to safely close down or remodel services in light of the lockdown. All non-critical services closed at the end of March, with many of their staff being transferred to supporting critical services or delivering new ones relevant to Covid-19
- 4.7. Staff sickness had remained low throughout the period since the start of the pandemic. Incidences of Covid have broadly been low amongst our staff group. However, the instruction to all staff with underlying health conditions to self-isolate, whilst being the correct thing to do, has put pressure on some services due to staff shortages, most notably our waste services.
- 4.8. The Council has responded extremely positively to the challenge of Covid-19. Innovative new services and approaches to service delivery have been developed, decisions have been made quickly and staff and trade unions flexible and collaborative in the actions we needed to take to keep our citizens safe.
- 4.9. Key actions and innovations in our response include the following:
  - Establishing 'hub' schools for key worker children
  - Making direct payments to everyone eligible for free school meals

- Distributing PPE across the County, including to private care homes and providers
- Pro-actively calling everyone in the 'shielded' group and contacting residents over 70 to offer support with shopping and other tasks or 'just a chat'
- Working with the voluntary sector to link vulnerable residents to community services
- Processing and paying grants to small businesses
- Contacting businesses, providing advice and signposting to help available in Wales
- Setting up a 'redeployment bureau' which has moved over 200 staff in to new roles including front line social care, community calling and support response, drivers and contact tracing and testing
- Pro-active communications through our website, social media and press releases
- Supporting 7 day a week discharges from hospitals
- Establishing a local TTP (Track, Trace and Protect) 'cell' to deliver contact tracing in Denbighshire

4.10. Regionally, the Covid-19 emergency response has been overseen by the Strategic Command Group (SCG), chaired by the police and including the Chief Executives of Local Authorities, Welsh Government, Public Health, NRW, BCU, blue light services and other key partner agencies. On behalf of the region, the SCG has co-ordinated:

- Information and intelligence sharing
- The establishment of three 'field hospitals', currently on standby in the event of a second 'wave' of Covid-19 and to assist with other emerging pressures
- A regional approach to TTP
- Oversight and co-ordination of PPE

4.11. Overall, both local and regional arrangements have worked well in an unprecedented and challenging time.

## **Recovery**

4.12. Most emergencies move from a short 'response' phase to a longer 'recovery' phase. The nature of the Covid-19 pandemic means that 'response' is likely to continue for some time but that simultaneously we will need to start on the 'recovery' process, restarting services in a safe manner, collaborating regionally with partners, planning for the future and focussing on how our organisations, businesses and communities can start to recover from the impact of Covid-19

4.13. The Council has determined its internal governance around recovery, with operational issues being discussed at the Senior Leadership Team and with work again focussed around a number of key 'themes', each with a designated lead officer and lead member. The governance proposal is attached at appendix 3, but the key issues for the Council to consider include:

- How to safely restart public facing services and Council buildings in the short to medium term
- Maintaining staff welfare, health and safety and returning staff to their substantive roles
- Restarting the democratic operations of the Council through remote working
- Managing the likely budget deficit as a consequence of additional costs and income losses and planning the budget for future years
- Dealing with backlogs in maintenance in our buildings, housing stock, highways and bridges
- Supporting Denbighshire businesses and restarting the tourism sector
- Supporting our communities
- Phased re-opening of schools, including transport to schools and children with special educational needs
- Working with Denbighshire Leisure (DLL) to manage the financial and operational impact of Covid-19 on the company
- Re-evaluation of our corporate projects and priorities, given the financial position, public priorities and the draw on resources to managing the response and recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic
- Embedding lessons learned and new ways of working in to how the Council operates in the future

4.14. Regionally, the recovery process will be led by a multi-agency Recovery Co-ordination Group. Mirroring the situation within the Council, the regional

recovery effort will need to run alongside the ongoing response. Key regional recovery themes include:

- Business and economic recovery
- Health and Social Care
- Community support and resilience
- Public Health and TTP

4.15. It should be noted that delivering the response and recovery programmes will need to be the key focus of work for the Council over at least the next 12 months and will leave little capacity for further new initiatives to be safely introduced.

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

5.1. Covid-19 has had a significant and long-lasting effect on services and the residents and businesses of Denbighshire. An effective response to dealing with the pandemic and a well-executed recovery plan will be fundamental to protecting the health and prosperity of the County

## **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

6.1. The financial impact of Covid-19 on the Council has already been significant, with major income losses and additional costs incurred.

6.2. There may be further additional costs associated with recovery actions that are yet to be determined. The scale of further income losses depends on when lockdown is released, the appetite of citizens to return to using services and the state of the overall Denbighshire economy.

6.3. The collective resources of the Council, both front line and back office services will need to focus predominantly on this major piece of work for the foreseeable future

## **7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?**

7.1. Not required

## **8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

8.1. In the absence of formal scrutiny meetings, political group leaders have been informed and consulted on the matters set out in this report

## **9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

Obviously the core focus at the moment is the financial response and recovery in recovery in relation to the Covid 19 pandemic. Although the pressures are very large the Council enters this period with the following advantages:

- A strong track record of financial management in response to over 10 years of real terms budget reductions. The systems and processes in place should help DCC in its response.
- The Council has relatively healthy financial reserves and balances of the Council.
- The Settlement and Budget set for 2020/21 allowed the Council to address a number of pressures in Social Care, Waste services, School Transport, Education and Schools. This does not mean that there are no ongoing business as usual pressures, however it does mean that we are in a better position than previous years.

The regular Finance Cabinet Report will keep members up to date and regular updates are provided to informal Cabinet.

## **10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

10.1. Covid-19 has and will continue to pose a significant risk to the health and well-being of our citizens and staff, the delivery of our services and the economy of our County

10.2. The current uncertainty over financing is a significant risk to the Council. Some funding has been made available to make up the emerging shortfalls but the complete position is by no means clear

## **11. Power to make the decision**

11.1. s2 Civil Contingencies Act 2004