

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN: Cllr Philip Bullivant

DATE: 14TH July 2020

REPORT OF: Tony Mansour

SUBJECT: A review of the council's response to the impact of COVID-19 and our approach to Recovery.

PART I or II: Part I

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That members note and endorse the council's response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic to date.
2. That two working groups are established by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to:
 - a) Assess the impact of COVID-19 on communities in rural, urban and coastal areas calling witnesses from each.
 - b) Review the Council Strategy in light of COVID-19, determine whether the plans still hold true and confirm what the recovery plan should aim to enable.

1. PURPOSE

To outline the council's response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and outline our approach to recovery.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The council has played a vital role in responding to the global Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic by continuing to deliver core services whilst also re-aligning staff and resources to respond to the emerging needs of the community and Government initiatives.
- 2.2 The implementation of service-specific business continuity plans and utilisation of agile working systems has enabled the vast majority of staff to

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work efficiently and safely from home, whilst the ability and willingness of staff to take on new challenges has delivered support where it has been urgently needed.

- 2.3 The council continues to play a key role, alongside partners, in responding to the short, medium and long term impacts of the pandemic, and has implemented and enabled a range of essential support initiatives for individuals, the wider community and business.
- 2.4 The council has instigated a well-balanced communications strategy, both internally and externally, focussing on community leadership and the direct delivery of information through multiple channels and in conjunction with key partners.
- 2.5 However, the council's finances have been adversely impacted for a number of reasons with catastrophic loss of income being a critical factor. The scale of the impact cannot be accurately assessed at this stage and will be dependent on a number of factors including clarity on timescales for recovery and future Government support.
- 2.6 Although it is clear that, in emergency planning terms, we are still in the 'response' phase, it is important to plan towards 'recovery' although there are numerous unknowns.
- 2.7 The Government, specialist organisations and other sectors are turning their intention to recovery, what the 'new normal' may look like and what is the best route to get there. This will require a phased approach which is, where possible, evidence-led.
- 2.8 This report summarises what has been, and continues to be, a highly effective response by Teignbridge District Council to the challenges of the pandemic.

3. Preparation and Initial Response

- 3.1 Prior to the national lockdown measures being implemented, the council was actively preparing to respond to COVID-19. The council has an up to date and tested Emergency Response Plan. This was produced by the Devon Emergency Planning Partnership who have supported officers throughout the response phase of this pandemic. The Environmental Protection Manager, supported and delivered a pandemic flu exercise with colleagues from South Hams and West Devon on the 4th March. The learning from this exercise was used to run a pandemic flu exercise for all service managers at Teignbridge on the 11th March. This took the team through a number of 'reasonable worst case scenarios' to test out plans and preparations. All service managers then used this knowledge and learning to update their service Business Continuity Plans.
- 3.2 Daily Incident Management Team meetings started on the 3rd March with all members of SLT and key senior officers involved in the response. This

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allowed decisions to be made quickly based on emerging information from our key partners in Public Health England and the Police.

- 3.3 Regionally, the council is part of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) which is a multi-agency partnership made up of representatives from the emergency services, the NHS, Public Health England, Local Authorities and others, which includes the military. The LRF work to identify potential risks and produce plans to prevent or mitigate the impacts of, in this case, the pandemic.
- 3.4 During an emergency, or when a major incident is declared, the LRF set up a 'Battle Rhythm' of meetings and Senior Officers were nominated to join calls on the Tactical (TCG) and Strategic (SCG) Coordinating Groups. This, ensured that we were fully informed of developments as they emerged.

4. Responding to Community Need

- 4.1 As the full extent of the lockdown measures, the impact of the virus and the Government initiatives around support for the vulnerable and business began to develop, the council took a prominent role in responding to the needs of our communities and ensured that staffing resources were reallocated in order to support these efforts.
- 4.2 On 18th March, local authorities were tasked with identifying the people with the right skill sets to harness community effort and recruit volunteers as part of a nationally integrated plan with the National Health Service. Particular focus was given to the needs and well-being of the shielded cohort and other people who may be self-isolating, in need, or vulnerable for other reasons. In response, the council worked with Devon County Council to set up a 'hub' to coordinate volunteer efforts. The support efforts were divided into key three strands:
1. Co-ordinating and delivering basic necessity food parcels to "vulnerable" people staying in their homes for 12 weeks under the Government's Shielding Scheme.
 2. Arranging purchase and delivery of additional food items for people in the above group who had special dietary needs.
 3. Helping other individuals who may not qualify as part of the "vulnerable" group but who were unable to cater for themselves due to mobility problems or other disabilities. *Please see appendix 1 for further detail.*
- 4.3 The council gave £7000 to a special Prompt Action Fund set up by Devon County Council, part of £60,000 from Teignbridge's 2019-20 unspent budget which was reallocated for use in supporting COVID-19 response efforts.
- 4.4 The funds provided by Teignbridge, and other neighbouring districts, were used by Devon County Council to rapidly provide small amounts of grant funding to community led schemes. The table below lists the organisations which benefitted from the Prompt Action Fund, and the community help that they provided.

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Date	Organisation	Support provided
06/04/20	Stokeinteignhead Emergency Plan	Deliveries of food, medicine and other necessities to old/vulnerable people with the support of volunteers.
08/04/20	Whistlestop via Alice Cross	Hot Meal provision for vulnerable people
14/04/20	Cheriton Bishop Support	Volunteer Expenses and food
14/04/20	Kingskerwell PC	Food and medicine delivery in Kingskerswell
14/04/20	Broadhempston Community Shop	Screens to protect shop volunteers
15/04/20	Bishopsteignton PC	PPE for volunteers and storage boxes
15/04/20	Shaldon PC	Production of flyers of Shaldon services
13/05/20	Teignmouth Baptist Church	Distribution of food and other items
19/05/20	Moretonhampstead Development trust	Strengthening Community Links

4.5 The remainder of the £60,000 fund was used for the provision of additional financial support to local foodbanks (£20k); funding for the CVS to provide a community hot food service (£2k), Westbank and the CAB (£20k shared); and providing assistance to the Meadow Centre, Buckland Community Centre and Chudleigh Youth Club by allowing a six month rental break (equivalent to 13K).

4.6 On 14th April, the council launched a Coronavirus Community Support Hotline for vulnerable people who might have otherwise ‘fallen through the net’ of available help. The hotline bolstered the support previously established such as food parcel deliveries, NHS responders providing help (through The Good Sam Scheme), and local and voluntary sector groups providing care and assistance. Between the weeks beginning 4th May and 8th June, 672 calls to the hotline were answered.

Please see appendix 1 for further detail.

4.7 A dedicated mailbox and online support form were also created, and the council received 186 emails and 190 completed forms between the weeks beginning 4th May and 8th June.

4.8 A direct mail-out to all customers on the assisted bin collection list was completed in April to notify them of the hotline’s existence and make them aware of COVID specific webpages which signpost individuals to local voluntary groups.

4.9 On 18th May, the COVID-19 Hardship Fund was launched by the council using monies provided by Devon County Council to support people experiencing financial hardship as a result of the pandemic. The fund can provide up to £200 to those in financial difficulties to assist with basic needs such as food, necessary household items, essential travel costs, utility payments etc. To

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date, 17 applicants have been provided with support. The relatively low take up of the scheme from eligible applicants means that we are now taking a more targeted approach to communications. It may also be an indication that the true extent of the economic shock from the pandemic is yet to be fully realised, particularly as other financial support has been made available, and the fund will become an increasingly important lifeline to those experiencing financial hardship in the coming months.

- 4.10 Council staff from Newton Abbot Leisure Centre and other services were redeployed to support food deliveries and other services to the shielded cohort and other vulnerable individuals, and also to support calls for assistance through the hotline. Demand for the hotline service was high, and the ability to resource the service was restricted due the financial need to furlough staff who could otherwise have been redeployed to assist with the hotline. Officers were drafted in from other services in order to provide cover, balancing call handling and the provision of support with their

Recognising the likely upsurge in demand for the hotline service that the launch of the hardship fund would bring about, Teignbridge liaised with Devon County Council to secure additional staffing resources from the county's redeployment pool. The county provided six part-time staff members from their Trading Standards Service for a period of six weeks.

- 4.11 On 26th March, Local Authorities received a mandate from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to accommodate all people known to be sleeping rough in response to COVID-19 under the banner 'Everybody In'. Although Teignbridge had a pre-existing commitment to accommodate all verified rough sleepers, the council saw a significant rise in reports of rough sleeping in March and April as people were asked to leave precarious accommodation arrangements. Concurrently, temporary accommodation options were restricted as hotels and bed and breakfast premises closed as a result of unclear, and subsequently amended, Government guidance. In response, we increased our street homeless outreach visits from twice weekly to daily, and secured additional accommodation units from our social housing partners. In the first month following the issuance of the 'Everybody In' mandate, the council provided accommodation and support to 20 confirmed rough sleepers. Our homelessness service also provided food deliveries to those housed, and put in place protocols to ensure that anyone needing to self-isolate could be supported in self-contained accommodation. We were highly commended by our regional MHCLG representative for our approach and efficacy in relation to this work. The Council was also instrumental in establishing a Devon-wide Homelessness Coordination Cell made up of District Councils and statutory partner agencies including Public Health, Criminal Justice, and The Police. The Cell continues to meet on a weekly basis providing a consistent approach across Devon to meeting the housing and health needs of people who are homeless or 'vulnerably housed'.

- 4.12 We have not yet awarded the £150 Government-funded Council Tax hardship payment. The original software used was found to have a number of bugs that

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required resolving. A revised version of the software has been received and requires testing. To date we have identified 3,100 working age claimants who will qualify for this relief.

4.13 We will be using any remaining funding to help self-employed claimants who have been affected by COVID-19 by dis-applying the Minimum Income Floor when calculating entitlement, and also to uplift entitlement to ensure that the benefits of the weekly £20 increase in working tax credits and universal credit are not negated. We have received an additional 1,000 applications for Council Tax Reduction during the COVID-19 lockdown period, and 900 changes in circumstances directly attributable to COVID-19

4.14 Throughout the response phase to COVID-19, the council has continued to play a crucial role in community safety and the management of anti-social behaviour. Our Community Safety Lead has been engaged in key forums including:

- Weekly Operational Intelligence Cell meetings
- The Southern Children and Families Partnership
- The Safer Devon Partnership Operational Delivery Group

The Community Safety Lead also established a monthly Exploitation Prevention Network meeting in response to increased concerns in this area. These groupings identify key issues and themes, develop partnership responses and feedback to the Incident Management Team.

A council protocol was also put in place for unauthorised encampments as a direct result of risk assessments produced by Devon County Council in light of the restrictions on non-essential travel and social distancing. It was agreed that we would only take action to move any unauthorised encampment in exceptional circumstances. This was consistent with an interim policy produced by Devon and Cornwall Constabulary. When restrictions are lifted, we will revert to our standard policy.

5. Responding to Business Need

5.1 Business Rates Grants

5.1.1 Shortly after lockdown, The Government announced a range of grants to support business through the pandemic. In response, we significantly scaled up our Business Rates Team to deal with the volume of grant claims, enquiries and phone calls which inevitably ensued. We recognised from the outset that these grants were providing a crucial lifeline to our local businesses and economies, and have worked at pace to administer them.

5.1.2 Support was made available in the form of cash grants to eligible firms which included:

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- Any business currently receiving Small Business Rate Relief and Rural Rates Relief, eligible for a £10,000 cash grant
- Any retail, hospitality or leisure business eligible for Expanded Retail Relief with a rateable value of £15,000 or below, eligible for a £10,000 cash grant
- Any retail, hospitality or leisure business eligible for Expanded Retail Relief with a rateable value between £15,001 and £50,999, eligible for a £25,000 cash grant.

The council adopted new software to help process requests made through an online form on the council's website. Demand for grants was extremely high, with over 1,300 applications received within the first week of the scheme's launch. Additional support was made available via the telephone for anyone unable to complete the web based form.

5.1.3 As of 22nd June 2020, the council has paid grants to 2827 of the 3335 identified eligible businesses, equivalent to 84.7%. This amounts to a total of £32,785,000 of grant support.

5.1.4 The overall efficacy of the service is in fact much higher. The council has processed all applications that have been received to date. At present 487 businesses that have been identified as eligible applicants have still not applied. A significant proportion of these are second homes i.e. holiday lets.

5.1.5 We have taken a proactive approach to encouraging applications including writing to all businesses at both their business premises and, where different, their mailing address. We sent reminder notices to those who failed to apply following the original letter and then followed up with text messages and outbound calls. We also posted regularly on our social media platforms.

5.6 Discretionary Grants

5.6.1 On 2nd May, The Government announced that a discretionary fund would be made available aimed at small businesses who were not eligible for the Small Business Grant Fund or the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Fund. Guidance on the scheme was issued to Councils on Wednesday, 13th May.

Tranche 1 for the discretionary grant scheme concluded on Friday 19 June and tranche 2 opened on Monday 22 June.

5.6.2 On Monday 22 June we conducted our first 'scoring'. This determines who was successful in tranche 1 and who didn't score high enough and will be entered into tranche 2. There are three tranches in total running every two weeks. The results are as follows:

- 237 applications were scored
- 79 applicants were not scored for the following reasons: awaiting more evidence, eligibility not yet confirmed, applied after 4pm on Friday 19 June

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- 120 scored applications were successful in tranche 1
- 117 scored applications were unsuccessful in tranche 1 and will be entered into tranche 2
- £668,000 worth of grants will be paid for tranche 1 (£1,328,250 remaining for final two tranches) within a target of 10 working days (from Monday 22 June)
- £1,000 grants awarded in first tranche: 48
- £2,500 grants awarded in first tranche: 40
- £5,000 grants awarded in first tranche: 8
- £10,000 grants awarded in first tranche: 8
- £25,000 grants awarded in first tranche: 16 (capped at 16 as per Devon Framework)

5.7 Suspension of Rent for Teignbridge District Council Owned Business Premises

Figures below show Teignbridge District Council tenants who initially inquired about rent concessions and the actual number of tenants who completed an application form for rent deferment:

- 63 tenants inquired about rent support, 10 of which reside in Newton Abbot Markets.
- 11 tenants have applied for rent deferment, most for a 3 month period with a six month payment plan thereafter.
- No rent concessions have been offered, although Quarter 1 fees are not chargeable for Market Hall tenants.

5.8 Businesses Supported through Food and Health and Safety Team

5.8.1 In addition to providing financial relief, the council has also provided much needed guidance to local business owners and residents to ensure compliance with the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) Regulations 2020.

5.8.2 During the lockdown period the Food, Health and Safety Team dealt with:

- 164 people (either business operators, staff or members of the public) seeking advice on the Health Protection (Coronavirus restrictions) Regulations 2020 and associated government guidance.
- 112 complaints about businesses where we have interacted with the business operator and where required, guided them through the legislation and guidance towards compliance.

5.8.3 The team have also emailed sectors of the business community to provide specific advice and guidance e.g. pubs and restaurants offering takeaway

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services, linking back to our webpages where we have provided more self-serve advice and guidance.

- 5.8.4 The Licensing Team have continued to operate throughout lockdown and have supported the licensed trade by amending or updating licenses where required and providing advice on licensable activities.

6. Maintaining Service Delivery

- 6.1 The council's swift move to a remote working model has meant that we have been able to continue to provide the majority of services in some format whilst being subject to the social distancing rules and other restrictions

Please see appendix 2 for further detail.

- 6.2 The council has continued to follow Government guidance, which has at times been open to differing interpretation. Maintaining service provision and the fulfilment of statutory duties has been a priority for the organisation, with careful consideration given to our duty to the public and to staff welfare. Daily meetings of the Incident Management Team and attendance on peninsular-wide groups such as the Local Resilience Forum have enabled a considered and consistent approach to safe service delivery within the district.

6.3 IT Support and Infrastructure

- 6.3.1 STRATA enabled a rapid migration of users from the office to a home working environment in the early stages of the lockdown. The council moved from 12% of users working remotely to 82% within a three week period.
- 6.3.2 Where officers identified that they lacked the requisite IT equipment to work from home however, the purchasing of new equipment proved to be problematic as global supply chains were severely impacted. Work was therefore undertaken to ensure that equipment could be reallocated to those employees most in need. Ensuring staff have the necessary IT equipment to work from home effectively continues to be a priority for the council.
- 6.3.3 Staff have reported having difficulties 'logging in' to Global Desktop, particularly when using their own IT equipment. This issue appears to be the result of the high demands placed on broadband networks as more people were using streaming and other online services during the lockdown period however. As such, advice was issued to staff by STRATA on how to reduce the stress on broadband when working from home.
- 6.3.4 A benefit of a more agile approach to service delivery has been the significant reduction in postal volumes as new protocols were put in place to enable digitalisation, and restrict the need for the printing of written correspondence and back office documents. Between February and May of 2019, 79,668

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items with an associated cost were printed by the council. This was reduced to 30,645 over the same period in 2020, representing a 62% decrease.

- 6.3.5 The council also benefited significantly from previous investment into our Digital Transformation Programme. This allowed for the swift development of online Firmstep forms, enabling Teignbridge residents to apply online via our website for the financial and other forms of support made available during the response phase. Crucially, core services were also able to move rapidly to more agile systems of working through the digitalisation of back office forms.

6.6 Support Services

The majority of support services – IT, Finance, HR, have been able to operate remotely with some necessary changes to procedures which allow for social distancing and compliance with Government guidance.

6.8 Democratic Services

During the COVID-19 Lockdown, the changes to delegations introduced by full council in September 2019, proved to be critically important. They ensured that service decisions within policy and budget could be made quickly despite the lockdown restrictions. Additionally, much needed changes were made to local government legislation by Government, enabling virtual council and committee meetings to be held. With the new legislation, during April, the Democratic Services team worked extensively with Strata, East Devon District Council, Exeter City Council and Teignbridge District Council Members to ensure that new meeting arrangements were in place from May 2020. This work included training and numerous remote test meetings. Members were also updated on corporate action through the Members Newsletter circulated at least once a week.

6.7. Frontline Services

Key frontline services such as Customer Services, Revenue and Benefits, Housing Solutions and Private Sector Housing have remained in place, albeit with the majority of staff working remotely, and with access to our customer services centre being restricted in line with social distancing guidelines. The determination of planning applications under delegated authority has continued as has planning enforcement work although service demand was reduced.

Please see appendix 2 for further detail

6.8 Cemeteries

There was no closure to cemeteries although adjustments were made to the numbers of mourners permitted in line with government guidance. The maintenance of sites continued in order to uphold standards given that they

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were operational. The number of burials fluctuated through the period but not significantly when compared to normal levels.

6.9 Waste

Waste collection remained a key priority for the council with service managers reporting higher levels of engagement with recycling services and lower rates of food wastage. Appendix 3 shows that waste collection increased when compared to last year in all areas barring bulky waste collection which was suspended by Devon County Council between 23rd March and 1st June.

This was not the case across the rest of the country. Around 50% of councils reported some disruption to garden waste collections including Torbay and East Devon who suspended their garden collections entirely. Many councils reported disruption to recycling and street cleansing operations. In Teignbridge, service managers have highlighted the positive engagement with the public, and recognition for our key working staff including our waste, recycling and street cleansing crews.

7. Consultation on the Local Plan

7.1 The Local Plan consultation was launched on the 23rd March 2020 and unfortunately coincided with the beginning of lockdown. This is one of the most important documents prepared for the district, and we had to respond very quickly as to how we were going to effectively engage our communities in it without being able to carry out face to face engagement. However, supported by the Government who made various announcements highlighting the importance of planning and place-making in the recovery for COVID-19, and their guidance on consulting on Local Plans whilst social distancing restrictions are in place, we took various steps to ensure a wide-reaching virtual consultation programme.

7.2 The following table shows how we did this, and the responses it generated, against the backdrop of our 2018 consultation which was much more focused on face to face engagement:

	Draft Plan Consultation March 23 – July 13 2020 (15 weeks into a 16 week period) - virtual	Issues Consultation May 2018 (8 week period) – Paper based/face to face
Formal responses	264	114
Website views	2,027	1,311
Social media reach (the amount of people who have seen an ad/post at least once)	51,966	4,357
Online video views (watching for at least 15 seconds)	920	41

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Online video views (watching for at least 15 seconds)	3,540	0
Attendees at community events	-	851
Residents Newsletter	C. 15,000	0
Narrated virtual presentation for town and parish councils	Sent to all town and parish councils	n/a

8. Car Parks

- 8.1 Car parks have remained open with charges being applied. Free parking was given to NHS workers, essential workers, and volunteers performing roles in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. We also took a pragmatic approach to anyone self-isolating who received a Penalty Charge Notice.
- 8.2 Car park usage dropped by around 90% since mid-March, and income was reduced by around 95%. We have promoted cashless paying options included by phone and card. As usage of car parks increases, we will be able to monitor how well cashless payment options are utilised.
- 8.3 Staff continued to monitor car parks during the response phase, and also helped to deliver food parcels to the shielding cohort.

9. Suspended and Restricted Services

9.1 Leisure

Our three leisure centres were subject to Government enforced closure with effect from Friday 20th March, and they remain closed. The closures have resulted in a loss of income totalling £230k per month. There is a residual cost in relation to the buildings of £31,196 per month. One hundred and thirty staff have been furloughed from our leisure centres. Recovery planning for the leisure centres has been hindered by a lack of clarity about how and when leisure can re-open. Plans are in place, however these can only be ratified when guidance is issued. Localised customer surveys indicate a good return to business is probable, however a phased reopening is also likely which will limit our income generating potential.

9.2 Environmental Control

On the 20th March, The Food Standards Agency wrote to all Local Authorities in England and temporarily deferred all food hygiene official controls (inspections, audits, sampling etc.) which required a physical site visit until the 17th April 2020. They then sought and obtained approval from Ministers to permit specific deviations from the direction given to local authorities in the statutory Food and Feed Law Codes of Practice. In essence, the deferral of all planned food hygiene, food standards and animal feed interventions - other

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than those for high risk establishments, or where there are specific legislative requirements on the nature or frequency of controls - for a period of up to 12 weeks from 18 April 2020.

The aim was to allow Environmental Health staff to focus on urgent reactive work and importantly, to minimise footfall in those businesses that continue to operate during the emergency period. This enabled our Environmental Health Team team to focus on assisting businesses to comply with the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) Regulations 2020 and undertake virtual surveillance of high risk food businesses.

9.3 Building Control

Building control ceased on-site inspections between 23rd March and 15th June, with the exception of surveyors continuing to attend a dangerous structures or sites where there was understood to be a risk to public safety. From 15th June there remains a limited on-site inspection service, restricted to high priority cases. Site inspections have been carried out by requesting that customers send in photographs of work to be inspected or, where possible, video inspections have been conducted via Skype, Facetime or Zoom. It is likely that a percentage of future inspections will continue to be carried out using this method and there have been no related customer complaints received to date.

9.4 Resorts and Rangers

Parks and open spaces were not closed in the response phase, however there were restrictions on their use, initially only being accessible for exercise. Use of certain areas such as play areas, skate parks, bowling greens and playing pitches was also prohibited. Social distancing requirements meant that the grounds maintenance contractor stopped work through the initial lockdown period as this was not considered to be essential work in line with government guidance. There are currently no events planned in green spaces and no conservation activities planned on Ranger sites. The water sports concession at Decoy Lake has not opened this year. Restrictions were also in place for resorts, which were also limited for use by people exercising between 23rd March and 13th May, following which people were permitted to sunbathe on the beach and swim in the sea. There has been no daily or weekly beach hut hire or seasonal licences issued. Commercial events and licences have also ceased. From the 1st June, groups of 6 people were allowed to gather on beaches and the RNLI resumed lifeguarding service with effect from 24th June.

9.5 Affordable Housing Delivery

During the response phase, the Housing Enabling and Strategy Team have focused on continuing to negotiate the affordable housing quantum of new developments in accordance with the Local Plan and gaining market intelligence from Housing Association Partners. Our own developments in Newton Abbot have been progressed by securing contractors to deliver the

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schemes and securing and drawing down Homes England funding to deliver the homes at “social” rents. In addition team members have also been involved in setting up the Coronavirus Helpline and dealing with requests for assistance. The Housing Strategy work has not been progressed during this time. Affordable housing delivery via Housing Associations has been stalled during this period.

10. Staffing and Resource Management

10.1 Redeployment and Home Working

As detailed in section 4, staff were temporarily redeployed from Leisure and other service areas, principally to enable the council to respond to the community needs of the shielded cohort. Staff with the requisite skills were also redeployed to the Business Rates Team in order to administer grant applications and resolve disputes.

Guidance was issued by the Human Resources Team advising managers that, where temporary redeployment to critical roles involves a substantial change in duties and/ or work location, written agreement to redeployment must be sought from the employee as the council has no contractual arrangement for unilateral redeployment.

As the Government required people to work from home during the lockdown period, where possible, all workers that could work from home were instructed to do so, even where this was not a contractual term. Human Resources advised managers to be aware of their team members’ home environment remembering not all would have a clear quiet area to work in. Managers were advised of the potential need to have to adjust expectations for productivity during this period and allow people to work more flexibly etc. Managers were also issued with detailed guidance in relation to: annual leave, toil and flexi leave; health and safety in relation to work places, sickness and self-isolation, communications with staff, and performance management

Staff have reported some difficulties in working from home for various reasons including:

- the requirement to balance childcare with work;
- lacking a suitable, quiet and comfortable working environment;
- the comparative inefficiency of using one screen compared to two when complete complex pieces of work;
- Wi-Fi connectivity issues;
- being isolated from work colleagues;
- and the difficulty of separating home and work life.

10.2 The Job Retention Scheme

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The Job Retention Scheme was launched by Government on 20th March. We have taken advantage of the scheme and furloughed a significant number of posts in order to enable us to receive funding for staffing costs whilst services cannot operate or are disrupted due to COVID-19 – these are mainly in leisure as a result of the closure of the leisure centres. In April, 140 staff were furloughed, increasing to 211 in May. In April the value of the claim amounted to £112,000 for that month.

10.3. Support for Staff and the Employee Assistance Programme

Recognising the potentially adverse impact of homeworking on some staff members, managers were advised by the Senior Leadership Team of the need to maintain regular communication with employees through phone contact, video calling, email and social media messaging. This support continues to be in place. In addition to providing detailed guidance for managers to support staff during the response phase of the pandemic, the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) was launched by the council in the second week of April. The programme provides:







- Comprehensive telephone helplines available 24/7
- Formal counselling, in the form of face-to-face or telephone sessions (As applicable)
- Online video counselling and online CBT (as applicable)
- Health and wellbeing portal
- Health e-hub app
- Critical incident advice

Human Resources also produced a well-being newsletter at regular intervals during the response phase to help address initial concerns about homeworking and provide staff with good practice guidance on safeguarding their mental and physical health.

10.4 Staff Sickness

Staff sickness levels were lower in April and May of 2020 compared to the previous year as detailed in the table below.

Staff sickness

CSHAH	5.9		5.10		5.11	
April 19	1.54		0.31		1.27	
May 19	2.69		0.66		3.09	
April 20	0.68		0.56		0.89	
May 20	1.45		1.38		1.62	

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11. Communications

- 11.1 Effective communication with staff and Teignbridge residents was, and continues to be, critical to our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the response phase, our Communications Team have utilised multiple platforms to inform a wide range of stakeholders of the latest guidance and support available including; social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, website updates, and targeted press releases.
- 11.2 We have also consistently produced five different newsletters which have been sent to subscribers targeting Business, Landlords, Town and Parish Councils, Staff and Residents to update them on the steps being taken to combat COVID-19 and other service issues.
- 11.3 Our webpages have been a crucial source of information for residents during the pandemic, with 373,157 page views in May alone.
- 11.4 We now have nearly 18,000 users signed up for *MyAccount*, a means by which people to self-serve via our website and keep track of any requests they have made with the council. Around 1000 customers registered for My Account during the lockdown period. This has allowed us to stay in touch with our residents using their email details, and provide them with regular Coronavirus updates.
- 11.5 Between April and May, 7 news stories were released in relation to support that we have provided in response to COVID-19.
- 11.6 Appendix 5 provides key data pertaining to the use of social media platforms in April and May of this year.

12. The Financial Position

- 12.2 The COVID-19 pandemic has had a catastrophic impact on the income of the council. The initial effects were felt towards the end of the 2019/20 financial year and significantly in the 2020/21 financial year. Initial estimates of lost income were in excess of £12 million. The Government has provided funding of £1.4 million to date and we await clarification of what further funding will be provided. A monthly return is sent to Government to highlight the pressures. We currently anticipate a budget gap of £6.9 million in 2020/21. We are looking at how we may make savings going forward and the utilisation of reserves to help reduce the deficit in conjunction with the clarity around what further funding may be received from Government to help support local services and the local economic recovery plan.
- 12.3 The most significant loss of income is from fees and charges. This is currently predicted to be just under £6 million with the largest losses being suffered in car parks and the closure of our leisure centres. Making accurate predictions of future receipts is difficult and dependent upon lockdown release measures

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and reaction to this by the general public. There is also concern about our other income streams – in particular rents receivable if there are significant closures and potential loss of business rates. Higher levels of unemployment may reduce the income we receive from council tax and a rise in council tax support. The slowdown in house building will have an impact on estimated council tax growth and any potential future receipts we may get from the New Homes Bonus or its equivalent

- 12.4 It is not clear how Government will support us going forward. At the start of the pandemic the Government had asked us to 'do whatever it takes' to react to the situation. District councils are in a more vulnerable position compared to County or Unitary councils due to the level of income from other sources. As a result of this continuing uncertainty we have undertaken an exercise to find £1.5 - £2.0 million in savings to reduce the budget gap in 2020/21. The Government have intimated that we will need to share the pain, but there is no clarification what that would mean for this year or next. We have now identified savings in excess of £2.0 million which could be used to reduce the gap.
- 12.5 The savings include a freeze on recruitment for this year in relation to vacant posts unless externally funded, elimination of any contribution from revenue to capital to support the capital programme, savings in travel and fuel, partly due to changed working patterns and a reduction in the predicted price of fuel. Other savings include reductions in repairs and maintenance, savings which naturally occur as a result of services not operating e.g. leisure centres, training and numerous ledger spends.
- 12.6 As stated above, we have also taken advantage of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and furloughed a significant number of posts in order to enable us to receive funding for staffing costs whilst services cannot operate or are disrupted due to COVID-19 – these are mainly in leisure as a result of the closure of the leisure centres. In April the value of the claim amounted to £112,000 for that month.
- 12.7 We will continue to work through all BEST2020 savings suggestions to deliver further savings where possible and re-visit those that may have had their progress delayed by COVID-19.
- 12.8 We require need to have urgent clarification from Government on what their level of funding will be and a framework for identifying actions, savings and reporting so that we can realign our budget accordingly and make the necessary savings to meet the 'new normal' of the next 2 years as recovery takes place. This includes an early understanding of any funding reforms that Government may make to alter our Medium Term Financial Plan.

At present we are planning to produce a revised budget in September for members to review and agree subject to relevant clarifications from Government.

13. Moving from Response to Recovery

- 13.1 During most emergency and/or major incidents there is a relatively clear transition from response, which is led by the Police as part of a multi-agency response, through to recovery which usually lies with the Local Authority
- 13.2 All the evidence during this pandemic points towards an extended response phase with the potential for further spikes in infections. This is reflected regionally in the approach taken by the Recovery Coordination Group (RCG), and nationally in terms of the staged and conditional plan to relax restrictions on movement and contact.
- 13.3 What appears increasingly likely, regardless of the duration, is that the council will emerge into a very different economic landscape that will have direct impacts on the community that we serve.
- 13.4 In view of this, it is important that we take a strategic approach to recovery to ensure that we learn from the response, understand the new challenges we face and emerge as an organisation that is fit for purpose and financially sustainable.
- 13.6 Teignbridge District Council has taken, and continues to take, a prominent role as a key participant in a range of regional strategic and tactical groups established in response to the pandemic. This ensures that we're at the forefront of Devon and peninsular-wide recovery planning, and we adopt a consistent approach in collaboration with key partners.
- 13.5 The council set its ten year Corporate Council Strategy based on the needs of the community in January of 2020. We recognise that the inevitable outcome of recovery will be a review and potential realignment of the council's priorities and objectives based on changing need. Initial work in this area is already underway through a review of the T10 projects and performance measures.
- 13.7 It is important to stress that the scope of recovery will be reliant on the financial position in the short and the longer term. Therefore the approach needs to be informed by this, and the potential for a prolonged period of instability. The plan needs to be dynamic and flexible, and will undoubtedly develop and change over time.

14. Governance Structure and Key Objectives for Recovery

- 14.1 Appendix 5 sets out the governance structure and high level framework for recovery, with the key themes which have been identified as being critical to the recovery process. The structure will support efficient operational decision making whilst allowing for member oversight and involvement, and for strategic decisions to be escalated where needed.

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- 14.2 The structure will also service as the vehicle for developing a recovery plan, and a review of our Council Strategy.
- 14.3 Appendix 6 sets our key draft objectives for the plan. These objectives, which may well change in time, will initially help underwrite the development of options under the main themes within the framework.

15. Main Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/ Governance	Y	<p>As a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, the council has a duty to plan and prepare a response to an emergency, or provide support to those who do.</p> <p>The 'Response' phase is primarily led by the police whilst the 'Recovery' phase is led by the Local Authority which, for Devon as a whole, will be Devon County Council through the Recovery Coordination Group (RCG) and relevant sub-groups.</p>
Financial implications to include reference to value for money	Y	<p>The council's estimate is that we could see a reduction in income and increased expenditure totalling over £6.9 million in 2020/21. Whilst the Government funding received so far (£1.4 Million) is much appreciated, it is only 20% of what the council estimates it will need.</p> <p>The council will continue to lobby the Government to that we receive the appropriate level of funding to be able to plan confidently for the future. Each month, Councils complete a national return that informs the Government of how much COVID-19 is hugely affecting the finances of Councils. It is hoped that the Government will act with further funding when they have this national picture.</p> <p>Options will be presented to Members for a revised</p>

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		Budget for 2020/21 during September 2020.
Risk	Y	<p>A number of risks need to be highlighted:</p> <p>Failing to respond to the pandemic is likely to have long term impacts on the council and the community it serves. Moving focus from response to recovery too early may result in a lack of capacity to deal with the acute impacts of the pandemic on the health and wellbeing of residents with in our community.</p> <p>Failing to prepare appropriately for recovery could significantly increase the adverse impacts of the pandemic on individuals and business within our community.</p> <p>Acting in a disproportionate manner and directing resources away from other key service areas may have adverse impacts in a number of areas including delivery of statutory services, customer satisfaction, vulnerable people and the financial sustainability of the organisation.</p>

16. Groups to be consulted

None for the purposes of this report.

17. Witnesses to be called

None for the purposes of this report.

18. Timescale

N.A.

19. Conclusion

- 19.1 As previously stated, the council has played a vital role in responding to the global Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic by continuing to deliver core services whilst also re-aligning staff and resources to respond to the emerging needs of the community and Government initiatives. Maintaining these high standards, under unprecedented and challenging circumstances, has taken a

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herculean effort on the part of officers at all levels of the organisation, and we must ensure that their welfare remains a priority.

- 19.2 We need to build on, and find appropriate mechanisms for, capturing the learning from the 'response' phase of the pandemic. We must continually review our preparedness for a potential return to stringent restrictions. Complacency is not an option.
- 19.3 The council continues to play a leading role, alongside partners, in responding to the short, medium and long term impacts of the pandemic, and engagement with our communities should be at the forefront of our recovery efforts. We must engage with, and listen to, the communities whom we serve, and continue to do so, understanding that the full extent of the economic shock caused by COVID-19 has not yet been realised.
- 19.4 We urgently require clarity from Government however on what funding will be made available to offset the catastrophic loss of income which we have suffered over the last three months, as the scope of our recovery efforts will be contingent on our level of financial stability.

20. Appendices:

APPENDIX 1: COMMUNITY SUPPORT HUB WEEKLY STATS
APPENDIX 2: CORE SERVICES PERFORMANCE AND DEMAND DATA
APPENDIX 3: RECOVERY GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE
APPENDIX 4: RECOVERY AND RENEWAL OBJECTIVES
APPENDIX 5: COMMS DATA

Tony Mansour
Recovery Project Lead (council-wide)

Wards affected	Relevant to all council wards.
Contact for any more information	Tony Mansour/ Neil Blaney
Background Papers (For Part I reports only)	None
Key Decision	
In Forward Plan	Yes
In O & S Work Programme	Yes