



REPORT TO: MORAY COUNCIL ON 30 JUNE 2021

**SUBJECT: COVID RELATED PRESSURES AND SERVICE PRIORITISATION
- UPDATE**

BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. REASON FOR REPORT

1.1 To provide the Council with an update of the assessment of the impacts of the varying degrees of lockdown as a consequence of the national pandemic, including additional Covid-related provisions that are being delivered by Council services, and the affect this is having on staff capacity and service delivery.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Council is invited to:

- i) consider and note the additional COVID related services being delivered; continued pressures that this puts on service delivery as a consequence; and the continued effect on the services in a specific number of areas;**
- ii) continue to acknowledge the expectation of a scaled down delivery of the non-statutory services outlined in Section 4 of this report; and**
- iii) agree to review the situation in September 2021.**

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Council at the meeting on 10 March 2021 (para 9 of the minute refers) considered an update of the assessment of the impacts of the varying degrees of lockdown as a consequence of the national pandemic.

3.2 As Members will recall, the First Minister's announcement on 19 December 2020 moved Moray from tier 1 to tier 4 restrictions from 26 December 2020. Tier 4 restrictions anticipated to last until 29 April came to an end on 21 May when Moray moved to level 2. This followed a period when Moray remained in level 3. The Council has had to review and reset a range of Council activities and services in accordance with updated guidance and directions. This report sets out the pressures as a consequence.

- 3.3 As a consequence of being thrown back into lockdown from January 2021, the Council moved into an enhanced response phase for many activities and services and this, combined with ongoing service delivery, renewal and recovery, improvement and transformation agendas, has created significant pressures on an already stretched workforce.
- 3.4 Although there was some easing during this time, this period of lockdown continued effectively from January to Friday 21 May.

ENHANCED COVID RESPONSE SERVICE PROVISION

Community Asymptomatic Testing

- 3.5 Asymptomatic testing is being provided to staff in schools and ELC settings and to senior pupils which has required administrative and distribution arrangements to be put in place. Mention is also made of the work to establish and co-ordinate the running of two mobile testing units rotating across Moray for general community testing.
- 3.6 Funding for general asymptomatic community testing initially extended to March 2021 has now been confirmed as being extended to March 2022. This is in recognition of what has been termed the third wave, with testing being a major aspect of the controls put in place to manage transmission as the virus continues to evolve. As part of this approach, the council continues to provide support for the fixed testing units which provide testing facilities for those who are symptomatic at Forres and Elgin. This is in the form of parking spaces, traffic management and welfare facilities.

Vaccination Programme

- 3.7 Support continued for the vaccination programme in Moray in terms of the centre located in Elgin. Accordingly, council officers continue to be involved in regular liaison group meetings with NHS and other representatives. Vaccination levels in Moray are progressing well following the initiatives taken to reduce case levels to allow the area to move to level 2 in May and subsequently to level 1.

Humanitarian Assistance

- 3.8 The Council's contact centre continues to undertake the role of Community Assistance Hub and is handling calls to/from those required to self-isolate and who are shielding, offering support as required. .

Business Support Grants

- 3.9 Alongside other agencies the Council continues to administer and distribute business support grants with over £31.75 million to the end of March 2021. Significant additional grant funding has been allocated for Local Government distribution since the January 2021 lockdown began with additional funding distributed in May when Moray was held at level 3 for a week while other areas moved to level 2.

Incident Management Team

- 3.10 As a consequence of the much publicised spike in the prevalence of infection in Moray, under the chairmanship of NHSG Public Health, a Moray Incident

Management Team (IMT) was stood up from 6-25 May. This involved the participation of the Head of Education; Head of Economic Growth and Development; Environmental Health and Trading Standards Manager and Senior Communications Officer in six meetings of the Team during this period. Due to the volume of positive cases at Elgin Academy, a separate IMT was stood up over a similar period and they met on four occasions.

Other

- 3.11 Payments equivalent to free school meals payments for those who are eligible on financial grounds have been made during holiday period while pupils do not attend schools and this will continue for the summer break.
- 3.12 Covid related financial benefits are administered by the Money Advice Team, including the flexible food fund and covid hardship payments. An additional temporary resource has been added to the team to add capacity given the volume of cases.

LIVING WITH COVID

- 3.13 Services across the Council have had to adapt to operating in a covid safe environment, which can be more resource intensive, take more time and in some cases be less effective.

Enforcement of Compliance and Surveillance

- 3.14 Capacity has been taken up with responding to requests for advice and guidance on compliance and surveillance of intelligence received from NHS Grampian Public Health; Public Health Scotland and other sources of intelligence received by the Council on an ongoing basis. Police Scotland have also been taking an enhanced role in terms of compliance.

Covid Return Figures from 15 March – 13 June 2021

Number of Business Advice Requests on Covid 19 Compliance	66
Number of Enquiries/Complaints regarding Covid 19 Compliance	108
Open Premises - Interventions with Businesses Initial Assessment of Compliance	310
Open Premises - Interventions with Businesses Follow-up action required to assess compliance	5
Social Media Releases	105
Enforcement Action (number of written warnings issued (inc FPNs)	0
Enforcement Action (number of Prohibition Notices issued)	0
Enforcement Action (number of directions issued	1
Other Comments: Considerable time has been devoted to site identification for pop up MTUs and redeploying the ATS mobile drive through. Several hours spend in IMTs in	

addition to usual partnership working weekly meetings.
It should be noted that the Public Health Communications Group (which includes reps from Moray Council, City, Shire, NHS, Police etc) agreed that the encouraging decline in infection rate figures and relaxation of restrictions provided an opportunity to reduce behavioural messaging. This reflects the reduced engagement experienced through social media resulting from message fatigue and enables Comms to make a greater impact if/when activity is stepped back up to support local outbreaks should cases increase. There is a continued reduction of engagement experienced through social media.
Council officers currently working with Police Scotland conducting joint visits targeting licensed premises that have reports of non-compliance.

Education/Educational Support

- 3.15 To enable schools to continue to operate in a Covid environment there will be ongoing adjustments such as enhanced cleaning, school transport and school meals provision until such time as Guidance is changed. Use of buildings has been adapted and social distancing and hygiene measures are in place as required and these are adapted to take account of the Covid Tiers. Covid measures impact on time available and delivery methods for education.
- 3.16 All children and young people across early years, primary and secondary have returned to their centre or school and while the covid-19 working environment will continue to present constraints on the delivery of some aspects of the curriculum, education has returned to as close to normal as possible. There has been an impact on school attendance from the need for self-isolation arising from Covid infections and test and trace. Alternative arrangements have been put in place for pupils who have to self-isolate, including to support meet the requirements of the alternative certification model for senior phase pupils where necessary. Work to identify gaps in learning due to a second lockdown, reduced participation and engagement as well as impact on attainment and achievement continues. The planned use of Covid Monies to support Education is presented as a separate paper.
- 3.17 Considerable work has been undertaken to ensure that there is robust evidence to support assessments for SQA qualifications by the required date of 25 June 2021. Our secondary teams are well prepared through ongoing assessment and monitoring of learning that has been pursued throughout lockdown and this was supplemented once schools returned. Pupil wellbeing has also been a factor as pupils returned to school, and an increase in demand for support from central Additional Support Needs (ASN)/Inclusion Teams, youth work etc. has been seen. The new counselling service "Exchange" has started with referrals being processed and engagement with young people across latter stages of primary and throughout secondary schools already started. Where requires, this will continue during the summer holiday period.

Welfare and Wellbeing

- 3.18 Community support staff worked with communities to provide support to those who needed it during the pandemic and worked on developing community resilience. Recently there has been excellent progress on the development of

a local community resilience plan in the Lossiemouth area. There have been significantly increased requests to the Council's Money Advice team and a high level of demand continued beyond the period of lockdown as people continue to face the financial impacts of reduced employment.

Temporary Changes to HR Policies and Procedures

- 3.19 The Covid pandemic has been an evolving situation and there has been an ongoing requirement to provide guidance and procedures on employment related matters, including considerable pressure on health and safety and risk assessments. Management of employee relations has been a key feature for the HR service with weekly meetings held with trade union representatives. Recent work has focussed on preparing for a possible return from homeworking and the arrangements that might be required to enable this while also observing social distancing which limits numbers in buildings.

ICT

- 3.20 The ICT service has issued devices across the corporate and education digital estate and has experienced a significant increase in requests for support. There will be an ongoing requirement to develop the Council's ICT infrastructure to effectively manage this new digital environment and respond the need for services to be connected to each other and service users remotely. On 12 May 2021, the Council agreed to additional resources to deliver the ICT services necessary in this new environment (para 12 of the draft minute refers).

IMPACT ON NON-STATUTORY SERVICE DELIVERY

- 3.21 The previous report to the council on Covid related pressures highlighted a number of impacts and adjustments on planned work arising from the additional workload and adaptations required to operate in a Covid environment. These are all issues that are reported via service committees now that performance reporting is re-established. While Covid pressures remain in a number of areas, as noted above, there has also been pressure to advance issues that had been on hold or delayed as a result of the pandemic as council services moved to deliver pandemic response, emerging Covid services and provide business as usual services in most areas. As a result while progress has been delayed, most of the issues highlighted previously are now progressing with reporting through the service committees where appropriate.
- 3.22 Updates on the examples from the previous report are provided below:

Corporate and Strategic Planning

- Development of Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) delivery plans – services and partners have struggled to release resources which has extended the timescales for implementation planning – now agreed at Community Planning Board and performance reports catch up due to June Board meeting
- Corporate plan review and development – would be due around March 2021 as part of annual report. More limited work will be possible and timing delayed. Work is underway to bring a report to the August ECOD committee

- Poverty – whilst it was not possible to develop this policy area during the pandemic, this is now an agreed area for investment by the Council. Investment was agreed by the Council on 12 May 2021 (para 13 of the draft minute) and work will progress once appointment made to new post
- Learning Estate Strategy – lockdown has impacted on planned timescales for options appraisal work. This remains a priority area that resources will be focussed on to meet an adjusted timeframe. Project Manager now in post and work being planned
- Schools Digital Strategy – delayed as staff leading this area are deployed to response and recovery of schools - report planned for August ECOD committee. Now likely to be October Committee as information is awaited from Scottish Government about the standard of devices and consultation is not complete. Broadband width continues to be an issue due to the volume of activity in creating an excess of demand which is not supported by available bandwidth.
- Climate Change Strategy Action Plan – although completion and implementation has been delayed in some areas, this is also an agreed area for investment by the Council, with areas for early development having been agreed at the Council meeting on 12 May 2021 (para 13 of the minute refers) as hydrogen and renewables, heat in buildings and the vehicle charging infrastructure in Moray. Recruitment to the Principal Officer post within the Climate Change Team is now ongoing with the two remaining posts to follow.
- Community Safety Strategy Review – Seeking to appoint consultants to progress the strategy.
- Economic Recovery Plan - some aspects were delayed such as the pop up shops which were affected by the shut-down of non-essential retail, but progress continues to be made with a second update provided to Moray economic Partnership in May.

Policy

- Homeworking and Flexible Working – policy and guidance requires development and continues to be scheduled over the coming 3 months - work has progressed to plan for possible return to offices but further policy development is required

Improvement and Transformation

- Additional Support Needs review – Priority area but demands on staff are limiting progress. Support has been secured from Education Scotland and plans are being modified to keep as closely as possible to planned timescales. Additional resources are also under consideration to come forward to the Council. Council has agreed management post and efforts to recruit continue. Business case considered at Transform Learning Board and to come to ECOD committee in August.
- School Business Support review – lead officer has been required to support covid response and recovery. Project delayed but revised plan

in place and agreed by Transforming Learning Board. Resources have been deployed to Covid response and schools return. Work to recommence in August.

- Leisure Services business plan – lockdown impacts on this service area so that it is not possible to progress some aspects until services can resume. Work will continue where possible in the meantime. Work is advancing on the business plan and progress is being reported to Transform Learning Board
- Leadership development – work is continuing at reduced pace, with reduced options and restricted capacity from managers to participate. Work continues to be delayed due to workforce issues.
- Best Value Audit Review Action plan – progress is being made but more slowly than anticipated in a number of areas. Progress has been made on a number of areas including performance management and the transformation programme
- PAMA – there was some delay in progressing this while service demand relative to Covid adjustments continued to evolve but reports on the overarching PAMA corporate review as well as the Office review are separate items on the agenda. The Stores and Depot reviews require further work and will be reported as soon as possible.
- Asset Management Change Management Plan - progress was again delayed but barring the education asset management aspects of the plan which are being reviewed to dovetail with the school estate management function within Education Resources and Communities, the final stages of the plan are now being implemented.

Performance

- Performance Management Framework (PMF) – performance team have been providing various data and reported for covid and as a result reviewing the format of performance data has been delayed. All service performance reports are now up to date for 2020/21 and will proceed as normal. A new format of reporting has been established to ensure effective implementation of the PMF.

Other

- Customer services change management – review of access point service delivery has been delayed – recent appointment to manager post will now enable this to progress
- Finalising management structures and recruitment in number of services – management capacity was absorbed during response and recovery with progress being made pre-lockdown 2 and stalling again. This area is moving forward at a slower pace than originally planned. Progress has been made through change management plans for a number of areas including communities team, learning estate and leisure and culture.
- Employee Engagement – this has been re-prioritised and is being re-activated with a focus on mental health but there will be reduced options for delivery of some aspects. Culture Working Group met in June and noted plans to re-activate work in this area. Section in Interchange to recognise staff is in place and employee well-being survey is underway.

- Workforce data analysis to inform planning – on hold at present and will resume when capacity allows. This team remains under pressure and progress is delayed. It is intended to prioritise this services area for the service efficiency project agreed in relation to the IMP with a view to relieving some pressure by ensuring processes are as efficient as possible.
- Training – priority is being given to maintaining areas such as social work training and to moving material online where possible, however, other aspects will be slowed as a result e.g. project management This remains an area to be recovered as there has been an impact from workforce issues
- Web development – ICT resources have been and continue to be focussed on response with reduced capacity in this area. There remains work to be caught up in this area
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act (RIPSA) – annual reporting considered by Council on 12 May.

4. IMPACT ON SERVICE DELIVERY GENERALLY

4.1 A number of service functions have been impacted by the following Covid related factors:

- Restrictions in relation to how normal business is conducted – such as limitations on travel, physical distancing, and new regulations on the operation of certain sectors e.g. construction sites; non-emergency access within Council housing; economic recovery plan actions involving non-essential retail
- Restrictions on productivity caused by reliance on virtual working methods
- Ability of service users to engage with services remotely and consequential impact of virtual methods on effectiveness of communications and engagement activity, for example with Council tenants
- The movement of staff to new Covid related activities – such as over 20 staff deployed to the new Covid Emergency Business Support and Grants function leaving elements of normal business which are not urgent on hold to create capacity.
- The impact of test and trace on officer time involved in administration and impact on services, particularly education.

4.2 These relate to operational matters which are being managed as permitted by the Covid lockdown rules, maintaining adherence to legal requirements, and keeping under regular review. Adjustments will be made as the restrictions and impacts of the pandemic lessen so that services can return to normal or near normal as soon as possible. The areas currently under pressure include:-

- Non-critical adaptation of houses for people with a disability – occupational health capacity issues and the significant work needed to tackle the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing given delays in respective programmes
- Food hygiene and health and safety work – Environmental Health Team have no capacity

- Economic Development work - there is a backlog of work now that key grants including discretionary grants have been distributed and ongoing new grants such as levelling up and community renewal are absorbing much of the capacity freed up meaning that some backlog will continue. Areas such as progress with the museums service trust development must still remain on hold

5. OTHER IMPACTS

5.1 There may be possible distortion of performance data as a consequence of the pressures on service delivery as follows:

- Statutory Performance Indicators that may be adversely affected given the restrictions Covid has placed on service delivery.
- Ability to maintain levels of performance which will be reflected in the next round of performance reports.
- Potential to affect the delivery of major programmes such as the Improvement and Modernisation Programme and Best Value Action Plan.
- Progress on service plan actions
- To date, there has been no material increase in the number of complaints due to reductions in service capacity to deliver business as usual functions.

6. ADDITIONAL PRESSURES ON SERVICES

6.1 As Council services have returned to deliver as close as possible to business as usual it has been necessary to retain some Covid response services and to develop other new services as set out above. These additional responsibilities are not always resourced and even when they are it can be challenging to secure additional skilled staff at short notice and for an undetermined temporary period. Therefore, there remain considerable pressures on council services at this time.

6.2 In addition, services such as Education, Social Work and Money Advice are seeing the impacts of Covid on the community leading to additional demand for council services such as additional support needs for pupils and financial support. The Council has also been required to administer and manage a considerable number of funds and services at short notice, such as the summer of play, support for Covid resourcing in schools and the Family Pandemics Payment (FPP). While these are welcome, they are additional burdens and responding at short notice places additional pressures on staff and services and at times may not enable the most considered approach to the planned use of funds.

7. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

The implications are addressed in section 4 of this report.

(b) Policy and Legal

The Council has to operate within the nationally imposed legal restrictions and this has impacted on service delivery across a range of functions.

(c) Financial Implications

Throughout the response to the pandemic and the lockdown etc, financial implications have been the subject of separate reports to Members, either in the form of freestanding reports such as on 17 June and 1 July 2020 or as part of the regular monitoring reports to Members on financial planning.

(d) Risk Implications

The 4 harms of Covid are the direct health impact of the virus, other health impacts, societal impacts, and economic impacts. All pose a significant risk to the Council's overarching strategic objectives; to the delivery of core services; and to the health and wellbeing of our staff and the wider public.

Some of the work that has been delayed or put on hold may have been targeted at managing risks (e.g. learning estate, workforce actions) and it is possible that some of these risks could escalate or new risks could arise as a result of slower progress. Where possible, priority is being given to continuing to progress actions in these areas, as noted above, in order to mitigate the risks.

Finally, there are implications for budget management, both in terms of additional pressures and also lost income making it particularly difficult to predict service budget out-turns. It is not possible for all eventualities to be predicted or mitigated fully.

(e) Staffing Implications

The resource implications set out in this report largely relate to staff capacity. However, it should be noted that the national pandemic has impacted on the ability to generate income across a range of areas and this is reflected in more detail in the unaudited annual accounts and revenue outturn which is being considered separately by the Council.

(f) Property

There are no direct implications in this report.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

Council services have a critical role in supporting businesses and the wider community through the pandemic and this in turn has a positive impact on communities and poverty across Moray. Reduced capacity to deliver a small number of services will not have a differential impact on rural communities or on those with protected characteristics.

(h) Consultations

This report has been prepared in consultation with CMT and Heads of Service.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 Although the trajectory of response to the pandemic is altering from lockdown to vaccination and test and trace as the means of suppressing

the virus, this continues to require multiple contingencies to be considered and regularly reviewed, particularly whilst the nature, duration and impact of a third wave is unclear.

8.2 Council services therefore continue to adopt a flexible and responsive approach and attempt to mitigate risk as much as possible whilst maintaining a reasoned expectation of what can be delivered in the current circumstances as they continue to develop.

Author of Report: Roddy Burns, Chief Executive
Background Papers:
Ref: SPMAN-1108985784-628