

## For publication

### Allocation of Staffing Resource during Covid-19 Pandemic

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Meeting:	Community, Customer and Organisational Scrutiny Committee
Date:	10 September, 2020
Cabinet portfolio:	Business Transformation and Customers
Report by:	Executive Director

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<b>Purpose of reviewing the topic</b>	To consider the allocation of staffing resource during the Covid-19 pandemic and the lessons learned for potential future working arrangements and service delivery, taking account of the Council Plan priority: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ 'Providing value for money services'.</li></ul>
<b>Objectives of the review</b>	To contribute to consideration of lessons learned and options for potential future working arrangements and service delivery.
<b>Key Issues for review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lessons for future working arrangements (with or without further restrictions)</li><li>• Alternative options for delivering services if further restrictions required (e.g. Leisure, Arts &amp; Culture, Museum, Tourism)</li><li>• Details of services and numbers / proportions where staff working from home, redeployed, on furlough</li></ul>

## 1.0 **Overview - Covid-19, Workforce (Response)**

- 1.1 Over the last 7-months, the Covid-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented risks, disruption and changes to our working practices, which has directly affected our workforce and service provision. This continues to be the position we face going forward as a Council.
- 1.2 During the initial 'lock-down' period of Covid-19 and following Government guidance, the Council saw offices and facilities having to temporarily close. and many staff starting their period of working from home, redeployment or furlough.
- 1.3 Those staff who could work from home have been able to do so due to the virtual network which has been created, utilising software such as Teams. This has enabled many of our statutory and enabling services to continue to provide support to the Council. Our ICT team have remained fully operational throughout and have been second to none in their response to make this possible.
- 1.4 Our essential / critical workers have continued to carry out their duties within the workplace and community, maintaining and delivering key services. This initially presented the Council with health & safety challenges never previously encountered. The Council's response to this was at pace, developing revised Risk Assessments and ensuring safe working practices were developed and supported, which included providing appropriate PPE and adapting the workplaces for our staff. Our number one priority has always been and remains the safety of our staff and residents.
- 1.5 Where services closed, or work was reduced, staff were redeployed to help in other areas where there were shortages or increased demand e.g. crematorium, careline, community response, democratic services, town centres.
- 1.6 Members of the commercial services team stepped in to help support local pharmacies by ensuring that they could continue to deliver to vulnerable residents. From the end of

April until the middle of August the team delivered more than 10,000 prescriptions

- 1.7 Volunteers from across the council came forward to help with Covid-19 testing in Chesterfield. Our volunteers provided key support to assist Partners in providing the test facility at the Proact Stadium.
- 1.8 Derbyshire County Council led a centralised Community Response Unit, but Chesterfield Borough Council officers were involved in the delivery of this program from day one. This meant helping arrange and deliver food parcels and supporting community and voluntary agencies to provide a range of services, promoting the service and helping ensure it supported our local communities.
- 1.9 Our Business Rates, Asset Management and Economic Development teams prioritised their resources to provide expert advice and support to over 300 local businesses and as a landlord to over 400 commercial tenants, amended rental terms including rent free periods for some and rent deferral arrangements for others.
- 1.10 We have provided £25.9 million in small business grants to 2,218 Chesterfield businesses, administered business rates relief to a value of £18 million to 661 businesses and shared a further £1.05 million with 120 businesses via the Local Discretionary Grants Fund scheme.
- 1.11 Our Democratic Services and ICT teams have worked hard to enable and facilitate virtual Committee meetings in order to allow our democratic process to begin moving back to being as fully operational as possible.
- 1.12 Our Corporate Management Team (CMT) met on a daily basis during the lock-down period to ensure a co-ordinated, tactical response to the pandemic was maintained, shaping solutions to emerging issues, re-aligning resources where they were most needed and supporting service sustainability.

1.13 Members of the Council's leadership team have formed part of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF), Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG), working on the County-wide response to the pandemic, sharing resources and learning, gathering key intelligence to support our Council response and forward planning.

1.14 There have been so many examples of our staff rising to the challenges we've faced through the Covid-19 pandemic, being flexible, learning at pace and always working hard to continue to provide those essential services and go the extra mile for our communities.

## 2.0 **Overview - Covid-19, Ease of Lockdown (Recovery)**

2.1 Since the easing of lock-down began we have seen new challenges with our workforce e.g. bringing staff back into the workplace, re-opening of the Town Centre markets, retail and hospitality. We've re-opened the Leisure Centres and begun the process of bringing the Public back into the Venues as we work towards getting back to a full programme of events.

2.2 Our buildings and offices have been made Covid secure to ensure we continue to protect our staff and customers. Dedicated task & finish groups, which were formed early at the Covid-19 response stage, have continued to prioritise staff and customer Health & Safety to ensure the right processes, procedures, training and facilities are in place. This has involved close partnership working with our Trade Union colleagues.

2.3 We are gradually moving into the 'Recovery' stage of the Covid-19 pandemic and our planning is increasingly focussing on the months and years ahead. Our Officers from across services are carrying out impact assessments to understand the legacy of the pandemic thus far, what we have learnt as an organisation and developing strategic recovery plans e.g. the Economic Recovery Plan, which was recently approved by Cabinet.

- 2.4 Council Officers are currently working as part of the LRF Strategic Recovery Group to ensure our learning and planning is broad and joined up with our Partners.
- 2.5 The reality is that we have to remain prepared for the likelihood of a new wave of Covid-19 and how this could affect our staff and communities. Our service teams continue to 'scenario plan' for this probability, reviewing other areas of the country affected by local lockdowns, learning and applying this to our risk planning.
- 2.6 Our learning through the Covid-19 pandemic thus far has provided us with opportunities to change some of the way we work for the better. Our staff have had a surge of experience in more agile working and improved use of technology to enable us to work more flexibly. It's the opportunities from our learning that is enabling our services and staff to plan and develop our future working practices.
- 2.7 The following paper highlights the 'lessons for future working arrangements' and 'Alternative options for delivering services if further restrictions are required' for each of our Assistant Director portfolios. The Venues Manager will be addressing these issues in a separate report on the agenda i.e. Arrangements for Reopening of Chesterfield Theatres and Venues

### 3.0 **Lessons for future working arrangements (with or without further Covid-19 restrictions).**

#### 3.1 **Health & Wellbeing**

(Leisure, Community Safety, Private Sector Housing, Environmental Health, Corporate Health & Safety and Community Wellbeing)

All Health and Wellbeing services continued to operate during lockdown, with the exception of leisure centre operations which were required to close on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

Queens Park Sport Centre (QPSC) maintained its support as a venue for local midwifery services throughout lockdown and

was also used as the hub for our support of the emergency food parcel delivery programme for the most vulnerable. Our local response saw leisure and commercial service teams working closely to support the deliveries.

- Agile working has been embraced by all teams and will be a positive feature of the approach to work going forward. There's a genuine desire to help from all teams and a willingness to embrace new opportunities and do whatever it takes.
- Collaboration across teams became common in terms of problem solving and identifying actions. The services had existing strong partnerships which became the building blocks for supporting positive action and intervention. Moving forward building on these partnerships is really important for enhanced outcomes.
- There will be some further work required regarding the ability to take payments away from the normal workplace – information assurance.
- Services have been tested under really extreme circumstances and have on the whole come through. It's important for managers and team leaders to ensure we recognise the value of staff being in contact with their colleagues. Isolation away from the workplace is an important consideration for our colleague's wider health and wellbeing.

### 3.2 **Commercial Services**

(Inc. Waste Collection & Recycling, Street Cleaning, Housing Repairs, Parks & Open Spaces, Markets and Shopping Centres)

Covid procedures were put in place extremely quickly so everyone was safe and to ensure all emergency visits were maintained throughout. Statutory services were maintained in environmental services and parks and open spaces, which were kept open for daily exercise for all to use.

- Bereavement Services maintained and increased activity supported with redeployed staff. Redeployed staff were retrained and qualified as Crematorium Technicians
- Gas and Electric compliance continued but reduced due to access through shielding and vulnerable tenants.
- Voids work continued to ensure properties available to house the homeless.
- OSD Depot remained open for essential materials and PPE. Stocks were maintained for the majority of the time.
- Additional fleet secured quickly so that van sharing was minimised.
- The introduction of Improvements in “on the job” hygiene is proving a great improvement.
- There is a real focus on working safely with a reminder that Covid is not the only risk to prioritise.
- Agile working was adopted by the teams almost overnight and has meant a more flexible approach to delivery going forward.
- A much improved and constructive/supportive relationship with the Trade Unions has played a key part in the response that can now be a base from which to build future developments.

### 3.3 **Housing**

(Inc. Homelessness, Neighbourhoods, Housing Capital/New Homes, Careline & Support)

There has been absolute focus across the services on H&S inc. Risk Assessments, Trace & Trace etc.

Development and use of digital systems have been a key enabler in maintaining service provision and staff engagement.

The teams have displayed significant Flexibility throughout, with remote working delivering productivity across the service

- The Service has increased its appreciation of Partnership working, both internally and externally.
- Outputs can be achieved regardless of location of staff.
- Experience has increased the focus on mitigation of risk.
- There is a priority focus on building flexibility into new staffing structures and service design.
- Importance of management support and visibility
- Actively promote and encourage all staff to take up the flu jabs and anti-body testing, maintain focus on health and well-being of staff.
- Cross council working has improved and must be maintained.
- Develop more Generic working so that staff are adaptable to meet service needs across the Council.
- Consider how we can encourage and maintain flexibility within the workforce.
- We need to maintain a core of trained staff to redeploy into Careline if required.
- Careline - Servicing no longer carried out face to face, this is now being done by telephone, work was allocated to the staff that were shielding and working from home, to be continued beyond COVID restrictions as it offers service and cost efficiencies.
- Careline - Develop and deliver remote call handling
- Careline - Review delivery of the falls service outside of Chesterfield Boundaries.

### 3.4 **Customers, Commissioning & Change (CCC)** (Inc. ICT, HR/Support Services, VIC, Museums, Transformation))

With the exception of the VIC and Museums, CCC services have been maintained throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. The VIC has now re-opened and it's anticipated that the Museums will re-open during the Autumn.

Early on in the lead into lockdown, ICT Deployed Microsoft Teams across most of the organisation to further enable home and agile working.

The phone system was also migrated to a cloud-based system to improve business continuity and offer improved resilience.

The Call Centre remained open from the start of pandemic, with eventual home working facilitated.

Key projects continued to be delivered e.g. the ICT Improvement programme, which included the development and deployment of the Salesforce, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system in Environmental Services.

A solution to stream Council Committee meetings to the public was also developed, which has supported our democratic activity.

The HR service has provided valuable guidance and updates to staff throughout the pandemic and continue to do so. The service was instrumental in introducing the Furlough Scheme to the Council and maintaining excellent relationships with Trade Unions throughout.

- ICT - We've successfully operated as a service through lockdown. We can continue to work this way indefinitely.
- ICT - We've continued to successfully deliver projects. Although end user training and early support is trickier, it's not impossible.

- ICT - Teams and the cloud phone system have been a real game changer.
- ICT - Utilising Single sign on will reduce the need for users to use the VPN, further improving business continuity.
- Both CBC and Arvato worked far more collaboratively and more pragmatic to achieve the required outcomes.
- Call Centre workforce became more cross skilled with everyone rolling up their sleeves and working on whatever was required (even if outside of their normal department)
- Call Centre - It's now evident the scale of change we are able to implement and proves we have a strong leadership team, and a thoroughly committed workforce.
- HR - Our Business Continuity Plans (BCP) were not strong enough to withstand the pandemic and initially we were firefighting, with many decisions made reactively. BCP plans must be redrafted now to ensure we can withstand the second wave (and the ongoing threat until a vaccine is here).
- VIC and Museums – We need to develop more on-line / digital services to compensate for when buildings and people aren't physically available to handle enquiries.
- HR - Our future operating model needs to reflect the service delivery in each area and the impact of how we deliver those services where working from home isn't an option e.g. streetscene, OSD, crematorium etc.

### 3.5 **Economic Growth**

(Inc. Strategic Planning, Building Control, Economic Development, Innovation Centres, Visitor Economy))

All services across Economic Growth portfolio have continued to operate virtually, including Planning Committee.

The Planning service has operated remotely with site visits continuing to be undertaken.

The team have continued to lead on building control response across Derbyshire, including ensuring COVID emergency response to dangerous structures

The team have supported the re-opening of the Town Centre in stages (markets, retail and then other non-retail) and also the Innovation Centres in a COVID secure way

- Team all tech enabled and can work flexibly
- We haven't been able to stop and reflect – we have been too busy reacting and delivering at a pace. We need space to reflect and work out what has gone well/what hasn't.
- Managers need to be supported in how they manage staff remotely – identify good practice when staff are remote working. We need to be able to evidence when performance issues are present.
- When we return to the workplace, we need to think carefully about how we do this in an open plan environment – if more than one person nearby on same Teams call you get feedback etc.
- Communications is key, the team is losing its synergy over time, we have been dealing with the perfect storm and the short-term responses we need to make.
- We've been learning to work from home but have also been exceptionally busy, so the extra effort to keep in touch is sometimes not possible to achieve.
- Chats on social media like 'Whats App' are more friendly and have been great to get team chats going in between normal Teams meetings.
- It's really hard to manage the appointment of new staff and ensure they are effectively embedded into organisation. The team have had a new starter through this period who luckily is a self-starter, if this wasn't the case and they needed more support, it would have been difficult whilst working remotely or with a rota system.

### 3.6 **Policy & Communications**

(Inc. Policy, Corporate Strategy, Communications, Democratic Services, Member Support)

The Policy & Communications team have been working both from home and maintaining an essential presence within the Town Hall. They've played a key role in supporting virtual Member meetings.

Maintaining effective communications throughout the Covid-19 pandemic has been critical to staff, Members and the Public. There have been daily press releases, covering a multitude of key messages, Member Newsletters and regular staff updates.

The team have played a key role in co-ordinating the Community response during the pandemic e.g. delivery of food parcels and working with the County Council, Voluntary Sector and other key Partners to support our Communities.

- The team worked at 'pace', maintaining effectiveness and kept learning as they progressed and adopted it.
- There has been strong Partnership working – built on established relationships.
- Comms. Team have had a massive volume of demand placed on them and have delivered above and beyond.
- Feedback from Residents has been positive with regard to the daily press releases.
- Staff response and compliance to the H&S processes and demands has been exemplary.
- There's been an increased understanding of each other's contributions during the pandemic – we've increased appreciation of each other's work.

## 4.0 **Alternative options for delivering services if further restrictions required**

### 4.1 **Health & Wellbeing (H&W):**

- Lockdown proved certain services could remain accessible to customers if restrictions are re-applied albeit in a different way.
- The rapid roll out of new forms of ICT has enabled services to continue to deliver for our communities. Digital innovation has been instrumental in a number of partners working differently to ensure a timely outcome for customers e.g. use of video to support the Disabled Facility Grant home assessment process.
- All H&W services are reviewing approaches to work to ensure that they can adapt to any further restrictions to try and minimise the impact on our residents.

### 4.2 **Commercial Services**

- All services currently being delivered can continue to be delivered in a Covid environment.
- Restrictions in availability of staff through isolating or shielding may mean some services need to be reduced or delayed, especially in some specialist areas.
- Cohort of redeployed staff who have been retrained may need to be further redeployed for key services such as bereavement services.
- There may be sporadic issues with the availability of materials such as concrete and plaster which will impact on ability to deliver some work but wherever possible stocks are being retained. Some products cannot be stockpiled as suppliers are limiting it or it goes off.

### 4.3 **Housing**

- Embrace additional digital solutions.
- Re-allocation of available staffing resources to continue.
- Interim and longer terms plans for service delivery & office accommodation; we are well equipped to continue to improve.
- Reduce paper files even further and aim to be 100% digital.
- Homelessness - demonstrated that we can continue to deliver an effective service during lockdown and have improved delivery to meet the needs of some customers with complex needs.
- Neighbourhoods - enabling video conferencing alternatives to MS Teams to meet customer needs.
- Housing Capital Prog. - with correct dynamic risk assessments in place there is no reason to stop delivering the programmes of work.
- Careline - Revert to home working for all ILS delivery.
- Careline - Develop the Red/Amber/Green system into a hybrid system for customer contact using a combination of telephone and face to face contact. This will streamline services and allow resources to be directed at customers with the highest level of need.
- Careline - Closure of communal rooms in sheltered schemes and community rooms.
- Careline - Stop non-essential visits to sheltered schemes.

### 4.4 **Customers, Commissioning & Change**

- ICT - There will be increased opportunities when Arvato comes back in-house. e.g. potential to consolidate call centres now the phone system is more stable.
- ICT - Opportunities for further Automation through Artificial Intelligence.

- ICT - More online services – payments, chat bots for other services.
- Call Centre – We need to move to more hybrid office / home working
- Call Centre – We need to develop and encourage more online applications and implementations
- HR - We need to start documenting the new normal and amend/adapt our Council / service operating model. We need to agree what the new normal is, amend policies and then work with managers on the cultural piece this gives rise to.
- HR - We need to ensure that our digital transformation supports not only the financial asks but also the resilience and service delivery risks that Covid presents.
- HR - We need to make sure we retain a governance process for decision making to avoid slipping into crisis mode when it should be business as usual.
- Museum - we could develop an online museum with virtual tours etc.

#### 4.5 **Economic Growth**

- Potential for some Development and Growth Teams to be based at the new Enterprise Centre in order to provide a business facing focus.
- From a planning perspective, more is needed on developing document management systems.
- We need better performance management systems to monitor workload/staff activity – currently relying on trust.
- We have meeting rooms at Town Hall – can we use these for Teams meetings? Should we turn one into a Teams pod with sound proofing? Are there smaller spaces in the Town Hall that can be designated team pods?

- We need rota systems to ensure we can return within limitations of space – needs to be online/diarised so people know who is in when so they know whether to come in or not.
- If we work at home, we need to think of alternative and Covid safe keep in touch team days – use the spaces at Market Hall and Winding Wheel that are bigger, meet outside etc.

#### 4.6 **Policy & Communications**

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Wave – need to start shaping how we’re going to respond to this ASAP.
- LRF groups are talking about the Winter Effect – need to build this into our planning for worst case scenario.
- We need to access more data/info. to use for scenario planning/decision making.
- We need to be more realistic with capacity – too much commitment to sustain what we’ve been doing so far.
- On reflection – Covid-19 Response has identified further issues about capacity across the organisation which will need addressing during future workforce planning.

#### 5.0 **Details of services and numbers / proportions where staff working from home, redeployed or on furlough**

- 5.1 Details and figures relating to the numbers of staff who have been working from home, redeployed or on furlough have been recorded by HR throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 5.2 The most up-to-date figures will be presented to the Community, Customer and Organisational Scrutiny Committee at the meeting on 10 September to support discussion and these will be circulated for reference.

5.3 The figures will be broken down by category (e.g. furlough) and Assistant Director Portfolio, in line with the format followed in this paper.

## 6.0 **Summary**

6.1 There are many lessons learnt already through our organisational response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Many of these present common themes shared across services e.g.

- Effective use of ICT/Digital enablers to support home and agile working.
- Development of virtual or online options for service delivery.
- The appetite and readiness of teams to embrace change and be prepared to go the extra mile.
- Development of more generic skills and cross discipline working for staff to provide increased opportunities and resilience.

6.2 There are some developing ideas for new ways of working and embedding these into our services and culture. However; a key priority is clearly the organisation being prepared to address the future uncertainty that the Covid-19 pandemic presents.

6.3 Corporate Management Team are in the process of scenario planning with service teams in order to be prepared to address this uncertainty, using the lessons we've learnt to date.

### **Document information**

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<b>Background documents</b> N/A	
<b>Appendices to the report - N/A</b>	