

Position Statement: Council Response to COVID-19

This document summaries the Council's local response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It sets out the interim Governance Arrangements that have been put in place to enable the Council to take quick and decisive action to effectively manage the impacts of the coronavirus as they arise.

1. Introduction and Context

As a result of the exceptional circumstances facing the country in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council has streamlined its decision-making processes to respond quickly and effectively to situations as they arise in order to meet obligations to protect life, contain and mitigate the impact of the emergency, and to create the conditions needed for an eventual recovery to a new normality.

2. Governance Arrangements

Whilst the Coronavirus was first identified in China in December 2019, the impacts of the pandemic were beginning to be felt within the region and our local economy in early February 2020 with fewer visitors to the region. As the virus spread across Europe during February and March, we started to mobilise our response in line with government guidance. This led on the 16th March to the instigation of our own reporting structure locally within B&NES to enable us to establish our Business Continuity arrangements to protect critical services and set up formally the links into the region through the LRF (Local Resilience Forum¹).

On 23rd March 2020, Bath & North East Somerset Council then declared a Major Incident in line with guidance and delegated authority for all decision-making to the Head of Paid Service. For the duration of the COVID-19 emergency, all decisions that would normally be made by Cabinet or the Leader will be made by the Chief Executive. **Appendix 1** provides a briefing note from Democratic Services setting out the powers the Council has under the Constitution for taking urgent decisions.

An organisation-wide response to manage the COVID-19 pandemic locally was introduced with new Programme Management arrangements and these were initially guided by a revised Business Continuity framework which ensured our focus was on maintaining critical services through three key

¹ A Local Resilience Forum (LRF) is a multi-agency forum formed in a police area of the UK by key emergency responders and specific supporting agencies. It is a requirement of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. It allows responders access to a forum to consult, collaborate and disclose information with each other to facilitate planning and response to emergencies, and produce a Community Risk Register. The B&NES LRF is led by Avon and Somerset Constabulary.

workstreams. These are outlined in more detail below and were set up and operational within two weeks.

- ➡ **Strategic Group (and Local Resilience Forum) - overall decision-making group**
- ➡ **Tactical Group (and Business Continuity) - focus on delivery of business-critical services**
- ➡ **Business Support Workstream - provide support to local businesses**
- ➡ **Community Support Workstream - support and help protect the area's most vulnerable residents**

These governance arrangements allowed us to focus only on supporting the community, as well as monitoring the **financial impacts** of the pandemic and providing ongoing **advice and support to Council staff**. The Council at all stages followed Public Health England (PHE) advice and guidance, having regular meetings to continually review the situation and issuing a **daily briefing** to reassure staff of the steps that are being taken.

Immediate Service Impacts

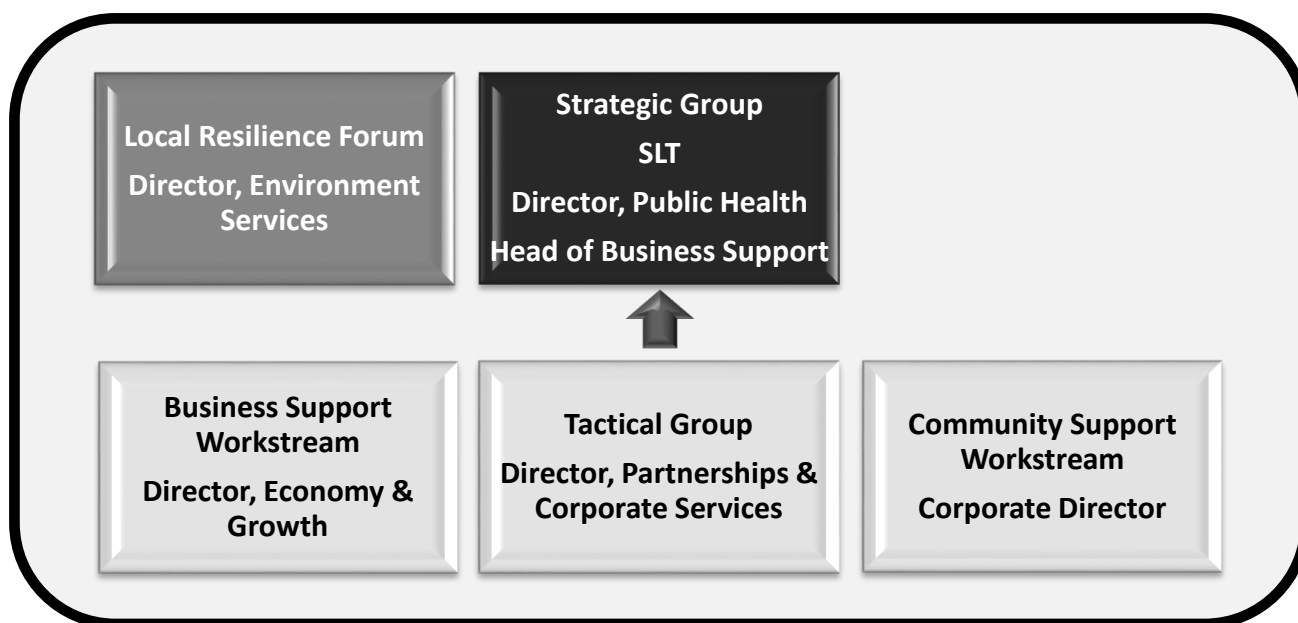
Whilst the initial governance arrangements were being set up, a series of important and significant decisions had to be taken within the first week, which had and continue to have a major impact both organisationally and financially on the Council. These included:

- ➡ Closing all Council Buildings and sending all staff to work from home (aside from a very small number of critical staff)
- ➡ Moving all services to focus on supporting only critical services
- ➡ Closing all the Council's Libraries
- ➡ Closing all our Heritage Services, Museums and Roman Baths
- ➡ Closing all Leisure Centres
- ➡ Closing all construction sites in the area including our capital schemes
- ➡ Stopping all Car Park Charges and supporting essential workers
- ➡ Stopping all Green Waste Collections
- ➡ Reducing a significant number of services to only basic levels of service provision such as our One Stop Shops

All of these decisions had to be taken at pace to ensure at all times the safety of the community, individuals and our own staff were protected. The implications both direct, indirect and financially however are likely to last for a significant period.

As these initial decisions were taken the rest of the governance structure and workstreams started to develop with extensive multi-agency and cross-service working at a pace and scale not seen before. These are detailed in more depth as follows:

COVID-19 Governance Structure:



These groups and workstreams meet (via tele / video conference) on a regular basis, daily for the first six weeks and then less frequently as the incident changed in terms of its local impacts.

Strategic Group

Lead	Will Godfrey - Chief Executive
Role	Key Decisions on Major Service Closures or Significant Changes to public facing services, Policy Changes and Headline Comms, Liaison with Leader / Cabinet

Tactical Group (and Business Continuity)

Lead	David Trethewey - Director, Partnerships & Corporate Services
Role	Daily updates on Critical Business Services only, decisions on operational issues, service changes, service comms, actions for Strategic and emerging issues Delivering Business Critical Services to the Community, supply chain, maintaining as much of BAU and redeployment and business recovery

Business Support Workstream

Lead	John Wilkinson - Director, Economy & Growth
Role	Direct and indirect support to local businesses, to include sign posting and assessments for financial relief from Government and Council and business recovery

The Business Support workstream has been divided into four distinct project areas:

Business Support	Visitor Economy Recovery	Capital Investment Strategy (including WECA)	Medium Term Place Plan
Duncan Kerr Business & Skills Manager	Stephen Bird Head of Heritage Services	Simon Martin Programme Director, Bath Enterprise Zone	Richard Long Head of Property services
• First point of contact for all business enquiries via info@investinbath.co.uk • Provision of up to date information on Government support • Where further information required seamless transition to specialist team (Landlord & Tenant, Business Rates) • Invest in Bath website	• Identification of critical tourism needs • Development of future sector deal with Destination Bristol, Visit Bath & Visit England • Oversight of Visit Bath • Development of recovery plan with main B&NES attractions	• Assessment of all B&NES capital projects against agreed criteria (stop, pause, continue) • Relationship Management and forward funding strategy with WECA • Relationship Management with other strategic grant bodies (e.g. Homes England)	• Economic Strategy • Strategic Asset Management Plan • Local Plan refresh

Community Support Workstream

Lead	Mike Bowden - Corporate Director
Role	Support to the most vulnerable, Humanitarian Centre, multi-agency support, liaison with Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) / Health & Virgin, direct issues from adults and children social care, and community recovery

Compassionate Community Hub

Bath and North East Somerset is a **Compassionate Community** in which people are inspired and supported to look after themselves and each other. This project has taken on a new importance in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Council in partnership with Virgin Care, the CCG and **3SG**²

² 3SG is a thriving, independent membership network supporting the charity, social enterprise, faith and voluntary sector operating in Bath and North East Somerset.

have worked around the clock to set up the **Compassionate Community Hub**, combining resources to ensure the system can provide sustainable and appropriate responses to meet community needs.

Operating via a dedicated public phone number, the Hub offers advice and support for those who are self-isolating, shielding or simply in need of help. It has access to over 2,400 volunteers (recruited by 3SG), with the 3SG website acting as a virtual hub for the local response to COVID-19. A triage team match calls received to the most appropriate service (or Pod). Through working together in the Hub, we are able to get urgent food parcels to people, co-ordinate someone to pick up medication, support mental health and wellbeing, provide advice on staying active or provide people with support - such as signing up to universal credit.

Colleagues in the Hub are also proactively calling people who are shielding at home to ensure they have access to food and that they are well. The response to this from people receiving calls has been heart-warming. Often, they just want someone to talk to, and some have not spoken to anyone for some time.

The Hub is an excellent example of a strong working partnership bringing together the Council, Virgin Care and the 3SG plus other third sector partners across different organisational boundaries and making a real difference on the ground. To demonstrate the crucial role played by the Hub, the following is a summary of Compassionate Community outcomes and the Council Logistic Pod

4,678 calls from residents requiring support (18 th May)	Completed 972 tasks to help individuals that contacted the Hub for food, medication and befriending (13 th May)	62 emergency medication pick-ups (17 th May)
231 food parcels delivered	Compassionate Community Hub Outcomes and Council Logistic Hub	20 Hearing Aids delivered
95% volunteers offering continued support	40 pharmacies received a total of 240 face visors and 120 full face visors produced by University of Bath	120 goggles delivered (40 from University of Bath and 80 from the Council)

3. **Political Governance and Oversight**

The **Cabinet** themselves are fully involved in all issues and kept informed of all key decisions that are required in a variety of ways:

- ➔ **Informal Cabinet** meet remotely every Monday to discuss key issues and are briefed by the SLT

- ➔ **Daily Briefings** are given to the Leader, Deputy Leader and Housing, Planning and Economic Development portfolio holder by the Chief Executive
- ➔ **Group Leaders** meet remotely every Tuesday to be briefed on and discuss key issues.

The **Council Leader** is very active in co-ordinating key partners in the response to the incident and this included:

- ➔ Established regular **special COVID-19 pandemic phone conferences** with key partners such as the NHS, local voluntary sector and the Universities
- ➔ Speaking regularly through **WECA with the other local Council Leaders**
- ➔ Established a new **Economic Recovery Board** with key businesses and business groups
- ➔ Actively **lobbied local and national politicians** to make the case for the Council and its issues in relation to its financial position
- ➔ Undertook several **local and national press interviews** (see Section 6) highlighting the Council's response and its financial difficulties.

4. Financial Impacts and Emergency Funding

Impact on the Council's 2020/21 Budget

We face a huge challenge in the scope and scale of our recovery. The financial impact of coronavirus due to the extra expense and income loss added together is currently predicted to lead to circa £43m shortfall in revenue funding for Council services this year. This is broken down as follows:

B&NES Position	£m	Comments
Loss of Income	35.9	Our income is at risk and we are under the most pressure from commercial income including our Heritage Services (Roman Baths), Parking and Commercial Estate which makes up around £30m of this figure.
Increased Expenditure	9.8	We are anticipating increased costs in supporting our most vulnerable in Social Care and responding to COVID-19 implications such as sourcing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for the region and keeping services such as Waste collection operating with new demand pressures.
Collection Fund	7.5	Due to the economic impacts of COVID-19, it is anticipated that our Council Tax and Business Rates collection will fall with fewer people and business able to pay.
Government Grant (see <i>Emergency Funding below</i>)	-10	The B&NES allocation of the £3.2bn of Government grant funding has given us £10m to meet new expenditure pressures, however this will not mitigate our projected reductions in income. Further support from government will be

B&NES Position	£m	Comments
		essential to enable the Council to manage its 2020/21 Budget.
Projected Deficit	43.2	

By comparison, the overall net budget for the Council to deliver all of its services is £118 million. While we welcome the government's announcement of funding which totals £10m for our area, it will not meet the pressures we are facing. Our key messages are:

- ➔ We are being transparent about the challenge we face and the difficult decisions we will have to take. In fact, we have taken the unprecedented step of the Council Leader and Chief Executive writing to all households in the area explaining the situation.
- ➔ We are facing a "double whammy" - increased costs and drastically reduced income due to the collapse of our visitor economy. We have the highest dependency on income from things like Heritage services of any of our neighbouring councils.
- ➔ Local government is central to helping deal with this crisis and the recovery from it, but to do that government needs to honour its commitment to fund it.

We are exploring our options to reopen both the Council and Bath and North East Somerset for business however it is important to stress the fluidity of the situation. We will need to consider the impact of social distancing on any future operating in the short term, which will shape how and inform when we believe we can offer a safe environment to restore Council services and restart the economy.

Emergency Funding

The table below summarises the emergency funding announced by Central Government to support the COVID-19 response by local authorities:

Funding / Payment on Account	National Allocation	B&NES Allocation
COVID-19 Emergency Funding Initial allocation (19 March)	£1.6bn	£4.64m
COVID-19 Emergency Funding Second allocation (18 April)	£1.6bn	£5.36m
Hardship Fund	£0.50 bn	£1.29m
Business Support Grants	£12.33 bn	£46.1m

Emergency Response Fund: On 19 March 2020, the government announced £1.6 billion of additional funding for local government to help them respond to coronavirus pressures across all the

services they deliver. A further £1.6 billion in funding was announced on 18 April 2020. **B&NES received a total of £10 million** (COVID-19: funding allocations).

MCLG also announced on the 14th May an extra £600 million to be made available for infection control in care homes, through local authorities. We are awaiting further detail on the allocation to the Council.

In response to the COVID-19 restrictions and emergency measures put in place the Council has incurred significant costs in securing PPE supplies and providing supplier relief to ensure that key services can continue to be delivered to residents. The table below shows our estimated use of the £10m COVID-19 revenue grant:

Estimated Expenditure Pressures	£'000
Adults Social Care	2,474
Children's Services	644
Environmental, Leisure and Regulatory services (including Mortuary capacity & Community hubs)	1,002
Transport Services	716
Housing (including homelessness services)	261
Contractual liabilities resulting from delayed construction	1,130
Capitalisation of revenue costs	3,773
Total Estimated Expenditure Pressures	10,000

Hardship Fund: £500 million funding to provide council tax relief in 2020/21 to vulnerable people and households to help those affected most by coronavirus. **B&NES received £1.29 million.**

Business Support Grants: The Government announced support for small businesses, and businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors in the form of two grant funding schemes in 2020/21, these were to be administrated by each local authority:

- ➡ **Small Business Grant Fund** - all businesses in England in receipt of Small Business Rates Relief will be eligible for a payment of £10,000.
- ➡ **Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund** - all businesses in England that would have been in receipt of the Expanded Retail Discount (which covers retail, hospitality and leisure) with a rateable value of less than £51,000 will be eligible for the a cash grant of either £10,000 or £25,000 dependent on the rateable value of the property.

The Council has approximately 3,062 eligible businesses in the Bath and North East Somerset area and has redeployed staff from non-critical service areas to assist with processing applications for business support grants. Latest figures (13/05/20) are as follows:

- ➔ The number of registrations received is 3,136, which is higher than the Council's estimate due to the fact not all of the claims will be eligible.
- ➔ The number of grants processed has now passed the 2,500 mark, leaving circa 500 to pay, this indicates around 83% of eligible cases have been processed.
- ➔ The grants processing team are assessing first time applications within two days of their receipt.

Type of Grant	Amount of Grant	Eligible Cases (estimate)	Grants Processed for Payment	Percentage of Grants Processed	Amount Paid
Small Business Grant	£10,000	1,858	1,752	94.3%	£17,520,000
Retail, Hospitality & Leisure Grant <15	£10,000	388	251	64.7%	£2,510,000
Retail, Hospitality & Leisure Grant >15	£25,000	816	540	66.2%	£13,500,000
Overall Totals	-	3,062	2,543	83.05%	£33,530,000

5. Performance Management

Incident Reporting and Data Sharing

A comprehensive **COVID-19 Incident Log** was set up to record all key issues and decisions to ensure they are acted upon and a detailed account is retained for future reference, evaluation and feedback. The IT team has set up a **SharePoint³ Coronavirus Co-ordination Group** to enable easy and accessible sharing of documents, information and data among key officers. All of the information regarding the Council's approach, response and key decisions relating to the pandemic can be found in this group.

Sitreps⁴ provide daily or weekly updates to the Tactical Group about Business-Critical Functions, all of which are saved in SharePoint and recorded on the incident log where necessary. A summary of the COVID-19 Incident Log for March and April 2020 is shown below:

Tactical Group Incident, Issue and Decision Data		
Logs / Decisions	Mar-20	Apr-20
Business Support Logs	62	103

³ SharePoint is a document management and collaboration tool developed by Microsoft that is used for internal purposes to assist with bringing an organisation together.

⁴ A sitrep (Situation Report) is a form of status reporting that provides decision-makers and readers with a quick understanding of the current situation, i.e., a clear, concise understanding of the situation, focusing on meaning or context, in addition to the facts.

People's SLT Logs	18	21
Other Logs	394	280
Total Logs Recorded	474	404
Strategic Decisions	31	51
Tactical Decisions	27	56
Total Decisions Recorded	58	107

Council Demand and Performance

Any supporting performance and intelligence data relating to the incident is held in the **COVID-19 Strategic Dashboard**, which provides up-to-date data feeds in four key areas of focus - **Corporate Health, Business Continuity & Business Support, Community Support** and **Cases & Capacity**.

The dashboard is reviewed on a weekly basis by the Strategic Group and is always available with “live” data for consideration by all key Officers to aid decision making. The table below outlines several examples of changes to service demand as a result of the COVID-19 incident and provides a snapshot of how some services have been affected.

Metric	Before COVID-19		During COVID-19		% Change
	Period	Demand	Period	Demand	
New clients - Community (Adults)	April 19	1396	April 20	1346	-4%
New clients - Residential (Adults)	April 19	804	April 20	738	-8%
Contacts to Children's Duty Team	April 19	869	April 20	468	-32%
Children's Social Care Assessments	April 19	85	April 20	89	5%
No. of children in primary and secondary provision	N/A	N/A	April 20	586	-
No. of children in early years provision	N/A	N/A	April 20	315	-
Schools open in last 7 days	N/A	N/A	29/04/2020	63	-
Early years providers open in last 7 days		203	20/04/2020	74	-64%

Metric	Before COVID-19		During COVID-19		% Change
	Period	Demand	Period	Demand	
Waste Cleansing - Fix My Street Reports	April 19	566	April 20	404	-29%
Fly Tipping - Fix My Street Requests	April 19	171	April 20	153	-11%
Building Regulation applications	April 19	99	April 20	33	-67%
Land Charges Searches	April 19	199	April 20	90	-55%
Weekly daily average Planning applications	April 19	29	01/05/2020	17	-40%
Waste Collection Tonnage	April 2019 Week 1	449	April 2020 Week 1	561	+25%

Adult Social Care

Demand for adult social care has remained relatively constant with nearly 1,350 people supported in the community in April 2020 compared to nearly 1,400 in the same period last year. The number of people supported in residential and nursing homes has dropped from 804 to 738 over the same period.

The Council's Adult Social Care teams have been working particularly closely with all providers across the health and social care sector. In addition to its governance response to COVID-19, until recently there have been daily B&NES Compassionate Community Hub conference calls with Council and CCG officers, Virgin Care, Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership (AWP), Primary Care Networks, B&NES Enhanced Medical Services and GPs, other agencies have also joined. The Hub has received daily updates on the number of reported symptomatic and positive COVID-19 cases (including both service users and staff affected) and on the staffing capacity of each agency to ensure services are functioning effectively and are able to support vulnerable people.

There have been routine updates from the Hub about the response and support provided to shielded and vulnerable people. It has been an example of real collaboration between 3SG, Virgin Care, the CCG and the Council. The Hub has also shared the latest Government guidance and discussed issues of concern to enable all organisations to provide a joined up and united response to the needs of the population. Key areas of work range from:

- ➡ Enabling swift discharge from hospital by remodelling the way discharges are carried out in accordance with new guidance; this in turn has achieved the goal of freeing up the RUH and community hospital bed capacity in anticipation of a surge in demand
- ➡ Supporting care homes, who as we know through national reporting, have been struggling with the impact of this

- ➡ Ensuring agencies have the right PPE; this has been reported nationally as a struggle and in B&NES there has been a generous response from agencies by way of mutual aid - this being where providers share PPE between them thus ensuring staff and service users are protected.

We have devised a supplier relief offer for providers that has included a funded advance to help with cashflow and continue to assess individual claims for relief. We provide a weekly newsletter to providers with the latest updates and have held webinar sessions, as well as being in contact sometimes daily but at a minimum weekly to see how things are. We have ensured that via Virgin Care and AWP all service users have been contacted and reviewed and there has been routine contact with Direct Payment users to ensure they are still able to get the care and support they need.

The Coronavirus Act did bring in a number of easements to the Care Act 2014 however the expectation has been that we will continue with business as usual whilst observing social distancing requirements. Providers have endeavoured to do this to the best of their ability and remained in touch and undertaken assessments creatively. Inevitably a small number of services such as day services for adults with learning disabilities have not been able to open however staff have been either redeployed to support other teams or they have been in contact with the service users in other ways to ensure they are safe.

We did see a drop in safeguarding adult referrals in March however during April these rose again with 100% of planning meetings taking place on time. We have continued to raise awareness of safeguarding and have a weekly newsletter that goes out to the B&NES Community Safety and Safeguarding Partnership. Whilst still ensuring we have sufficient bed and staff capacity in case of a second surge, we are also starting to plan for recovery and are mindful that more people may need care and support going forward.

Children's Social Care

Although contacts to children's social care have dropped by 32% (468 in April 20, compared to 869 in April 19) the number of social care assessments has increased slightly, from 85 to 89. The Council has also held its first online child protection conferences. Up to 50 children are seen face to face on a weekly basis.

Established an alternative operating model for the lockdown period, including a virtual duty team and home visiting team, with staff rotation to maintain resilience; risk assessing children known to the service in light of lockdown measures in order to prioritise contact and school attendance, and supporting vulnerable families impacted by lockdown in a range of creative ways.

Education

63 schools and 74 early years providers (down from 203 normally) in B&NES were open in the week leading up to 29 April. There were 586 children in primary and secondary schools and 315 in early years.

Working with schools and academies and early years settings to co-ordinate arrangements for access for critical workers and vulnerable children, and for preparations for re-opening; arranging distribution of government-provided laptops for vulnerable children; and establishing an online portal for delivery of music lessons; This is alongside the delivery of statutory services for vulnerable learners and children with Special Educational Needs and Disability, and all core education business functions, admissions, schools capital and finance etc.

Public Health

- ➔ Liaison with PHE, advice to senior leadership team and the wider health and care community on the expected progress of the pandemic and interpretation of national statistics and guidance
- ➔ Supporting the planning for excess deaths
- ➔ Local coordination of testing, tracking and tracing system (major area of focus for coming months)
- ➔ Supporting care homes with advice and training in infection control
- ➔ Developing detailed local policies on, and advising on, use of PPE
- ➔ Supporting local response to increased risks of domestic abuse
- ➔ Running a public health rota to answer questions from the public and other stakeholders
- ➔ Major input into setting up the “food pod” element of Compassionate Communities Hub and other work on food poverty during crisis
- ➔ Advice to drug and alcohol, sexual health and children’s early help services on changing offer to meet COVID-19 challenge
- ➔ Support to Council comms team with public health content of messaging
- ➔ Liaison with LRF.

Environment

- ➔ ‘Fix My Street’ requests for waste and cleansing service requests has reduced (-29%) compared to April last year. There has also been a small reduction (-11%) in service requests regarding Fly Tipping.
- ➔ On the first week in April, 561 tonnes of recycling were collected. This is a 25% increase (over 100 tonnes) compared with the same week last year.
- ➔ The April 2020 Google Mobility study suggested that residents responded to lockdown with an 87% reduction in retail and recreation travel and a 60% reduction in workplace travel.

Homelessness

We have 70 households currently in temporary accommodation, of these 48 have been housed due to COVID-19.

Planning and Development

There has been a 40% drop in the average number of planning applications received each day, compared to the same time last year, reductions have also been seen in Building Control Applications (-67%) and Land Charges searches (-55%).

One Stop Shops and Libraries

- ➔ During April, there were only 1,290 visits to the temporary spaces in OSS/Libraries - 95% down from 2019 as the building is closed other than for essential services to the vulnerable. Top 5 enquiries - Make a payment; Bulky waste; Welfare support; Curo; and Council Tax.
- ➔ During April, **180 Welfare support Retail Food Vouchers** were issued to the vulnerable in the temporary spaces in OSS / Libraries, an increase of 56% from 2019.
- ➔ Library e-books uptake **increased by 30%**, e-Audio by **11%** and e-Magazines by **22%** during April.

Information Technology

- ➔ There were 92,629-page views to the Council website and **73,083** unique page views have been made to the Council's **COVID-19 webpage** (the second most visited page, after the homepage) - see next page.
- ➔ On average **1,500 staff** have been successfully **connected and working remotely** each day during lockdown.
- ➔ 250 additional tokens / passwords and over **230 items of kit issued** to support homeworking during lockdown.
- ➔ **4,800 contacts** have been made to the **IT helpdesk** during lockdown supporting homeworking.
- ➔ During April, **411 Zoom meetings** took place with almost **2,800 participants** lasting on average 43 minutes.
- ➔ During April, **3,131 Skype video meetings, 21,594 Skype calls** and **85,596 instant messaging conversations** took place.
- ➔ During April **4,920 calls were made to Council Connect** and **5,786 calls to Switchboard**, both almost **50% down** from April 2019.

The following news stories provide specific examples of support and activity that the Council has provided in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. They are extracted from the Council's press releases to show the decisions and actions that have been taken and shared over the last few months:

Council Tax Hardship Relief Scheme

Bath & North East Somerset Council has made an urgent decision to reduce council tax liability to lessen people's financial burden at a time when they may already be on a reduced income due to stay-at-home measures. The Council's Deputy Leader, Richard Samuel, made the decision which authorises officers to immediately reduce the council tax liability for all working age recipients of Local Council Tax Support during 2020/21 by the lower figure of their remaining liability for that year, or £150. In many cases, this will reduce the amount residents have to pay to nil.

Supplier Relief Scheme

The Council is thanking its suppliers for continuing their services during the coronavirus pandemic and alerting them to a scheme that will help them to continue operating during this challenging time. The supplier relief scheme, supported by Government, is being offered to companies which supply goods and services to the council to ensure that essential services for residents continue. The council is

working with its suppliers to help them to keep operating in the normal way wherever possible and is offering support via the relief scheme on a case-by-case basis, including faster payments, contract alterations and time extensions.

Compassionate Community Hub (see update on p5)

A new community hub is helping the most vulnerable people in Bath and North East Somerset access critical support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Co-ordinated by B&NES 3rd Sector Group with support from Virgin Care in B&NES, Bath & North East Somerset Council and the NHS, the hub has made hundreds of referrals to experts and volunteers from people needing help with food, mental health, wellbeing and welfare. The hub works closely with food banks and volunteers to ensure people can access direct support when they need it.

Temporary facilities at Haycombe Cemetery

Work to install dignified temporary facilities is set to get under way at Haycombe Cemetery and Crematorium in Bath. In these difficult times the council has had to plan for a temporary expansion of facilities to help serve Bath's Royal United Hospital and to meet the needs of local funeral directors. Temporary units will be screened are being installed in line with national guidance.

Business Grants Online Form (see update on p8)

Businesses which need to access urgent financial help from the Government due to the coronavirus can do so using an online form set up by the Council. Our Invest in Bath business support service has a dedicated team to provide targeted help to companies during the pandemic and the new online form aims to speed up the process so that most payments will be made within a few weeks.

Set up Virtual Library

The Council has set up an exciting virtual library to help children and adults keep their love of literature going while libraries are closed during the Coronavirus pandemic. The virtual library launches on Monday (30 March) and will have dynamic, changing content each weekday to suit all ages via the library service's social media accounts. Mornings will be dedicated to children and will offer links to education, creative learning, fun facts, rhymes, stories and crafts. Afternoons will focus on adults by sharing a range of e-books and e-magazines alongside tips on literacy, finding reliable online information, jobs and income support and how to access help from partner services. Book groups haven't been forgotten and every Friday afternoon customers will be signposted to virtual book groups, recommendations and reviews by both staff and other readers.

Free e-bike Loans for Key Workers

Bath & North East Somerset Council has loaned free e-bikes to key workers at Bath's RUH to help them travel easily on essential journeys during the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. The ten bikes are part of a fleet of 35 that are being offered to employers of key workers to help them travel quickly and sustainably at a time when public transport has had to be reduced. The council is now calling for other employers of key workers to come forward and borrow the remaining 25 bikes that are available.

Virtual Council Meetings to start

The Cabinet will hold its first public meeting ‘virtually’ on May 29 as part of its response to keeping council business running during the COVID-19 outbreak. The Council’s first virtual meeting is the Planning Committee on Wednesday May 6 at 2pm. All meetings will be open to the public to watch and the Council is making sure that all necessary training and safeguards are in place so that meetings will be effective. The Council has prioritised holding the most urgent meetings remotely, for example planning and licensing and it anticipates scheduling in at least two further virtual meetings in May and then additional meetings in June and onwards. It is keeping public participation under review and assessing how members of the public and other interested parties can be involved in virtual meetings, with appropriate safeguards in place.

Virtual music lessons keeping the beat going in Bath and North East Somerset

Hundreds of children missing out on school-based music lessons during coronavirus are carrying on playing and singing thanks to online tuition set up by Bath & North East Somerset Council in partnership with Musictutors.co.uk. The Council’s music service team has arranged a safe, bespoke online teaching platform that allows pupils to enjoy lessons virtually with their usual tutor in real time. More than 500 children have already signed up to the service with the number of applications increasing daily.

6. Communication

Information and Advice to Residents, Communities and Partners

Effective communications are vital for supporting and managing sensitive and rapidly evolving situations such as Covid-19. Our aim throughout has been to be a clear, readily available and trusted information source to local people and businesses about Council services and our response, reinforcing national messages, providing reassurance and signposting to where further help is available, particularly for the most vulnerable.

A wide number of ways of getting key messages out to people has been and will continue to be used including:

- ➡ The introduction of dedicated web pages, regularly updated, have been created to help the communities of Bath and North East Somerset understand and manage the impacts of the coronavirus in their day-to-day lives. The **COVID-19 website** is accessible from the homepage on the Council website and includes the following types of information and support:
 - Latest information and advice on the coronavirus, i.e. what people need to know and where they can access help
 - Residents' letter from the Leader and Chief Executive
 - What people need to know to stop the coronavirus spreading
 - Help for vulnerable people with support and advice from the Compassionate Community Hub (see Section 8 for more details)

- Changes to Council services and how to make payments during the outbreak
- Help and support for communities, businesses, parents and carers.



A dedicated **COVID-19 email address** (Covid19incidentcomms@bathnes.gov.uk) was also set up on the 14th March for people to ask questions, request updates, seek additional help etc. It is managed by the Council Connect team and by the beginning of May, it had received over 1,500 enquiries. They are all recorded where appropriate on the log and signposted for appropriate action where necessary.

- ➔ There has been a 17% increase in subscription to the Council e-connect newsletter from 3,305 subscribers to around 3,850 at end of April 2020. The weekly newsletter is now sent over 40,000 email addresses, focusing on public health messages, changes to council services and help available such as the Compassionate Communities Hub. We have received positive feedback about the usefulness and clarity of the newsletter. A dedicated stakeholder newsletter was also produced in conjunction with Public Health, which focused on providing access to NHS and government guidance.
- ➔ Early provision of “flash briefings” on key topics such as community response, business support and help for parish councils.
- ➔ Regular contact with parish and town councils to help co-ordinate the response. To provide even greater reach into localities, the Council also posts to the **Nextdoor** neighbourhoods site, which has more than 12,000 members in Bath and North East Somerset.
- ➔ Regular updates through its Newsroom web pages including to elected members and town and parish councils. Key performance information compared the 39 days pre-lockdown (13th February to 22nd March) with 39 days post lockdown (23rd March to 30th April), and there has

been 25% more traffic during the incident than previously. News items have covered a wide range of topics ranging from the Compassionate Communities Hub to updates on waste services and how to get support for your local business. We have also set out our online provision during lockdown such as our virtual library and highlighted domestic abuse services under the campaign “At Home shouldn’t be At Risk”

- ➡ Daily social media posts - Twitter following of over 19,000 and also reach into Facebook and Instagram. Our tweet on the provision of hand sanitiser from the Glastonbury Festival had a total reach of over 235,000. We have also regularly used social media to highlight the ground-breaking work of the Compassionate Communities Hub.

We have also been acutely aware that not everyone is online. Local radio has been a particularly useful outlet during this period, and we have worked closely with BBC Radio Bristol to get key messages out - for example through their “make a difference campaign”. The Compassionate Community Hub has been regularly publicised on BBC Radio Bristol and BBC Radio Somerset and the Council also secured radio advertising about the Hub on The Breeze. In addition, the Council Leader has a ten-minute slot on BBC Radio Bristol’s breakfast show every Tuesday to talk about the Council’s response to COVID-19 including public health messages. Community radio such as Somer Valley FM have also been very useful local outlets.

However, in order to ensure all households receive key information, the Leader and Chief Executive wrote to 84,336 households in Bath and North East Somerset providing information about the Compassionate Communities Hub helpline, the availability of business support and highlighting the financial challenges faced by the Council, as set out further in this statement. Highlighting this issue has increasingly become the focus of communications activity so that local people and our partners understand the scale of the financial challenge facing us.

As well as using this wide range of communications channels, Council staff have kept fully in touch with local communities and partners. Community engagement team and other council staff have worked as part of the Compassionate Communities Hub during this period, liaising with local third sector groups, parish and town councils and others, as well as providing direct practical help where needed. A newsletter setting out the latest information from the Hub is now distributed through the Interagency Network. Councillors have also been provided with information mapping out the local community activity in their area to help the most vulnerable.

Working with partners has been crucial to our response. Early on, the Leader convened a teleconference with partner agencies including the RUH, CCG, Curo and the Police to co-ordinate the local response in Bath and North East Somerset. This group has been convened regularly during this period and has recently been joined by our two Universities whose support will be crucial for our recovery.

7. Council Staff

Lead	Amanda George - Interim Director, HR & OD
Role	Advice and Support to Council Staff, primarily on Business Continuity Workstream

The key resource of the Council is its staff. In response to the pandemic, many changes have been required to enable staff to continue to operate as effectively as possible and to ensure they could continue to support local communities, businesses and partners.

With a few exceptions such as IT and Social Worker duty teams, all office-based staff were asked to start working remotely from home in March, in accordance with government guidance. This placed considerable pressure on the IT team to ensure that the technology infrastructure and appropriate IT resources were available to ensure the success of remote working. This was completed successfully and enabled up to 1,500 members of staff to work remotely.

The HR Service have been responsible for implementing a number of key responses including:

- ➔ Staff redeployment scheme
- ➔ Changes to pay and policy related activity (see below)
- ➔ An approach to organisational development and staff wellbeing
- ➔ A revised approach to staff communications and daily staff briefings
- ➔ A vacancy management procedure.

Below are some of examples of **changes to staff pay and policies** undertaken in response to the COVID-19:

- ➔ **Carers Leave** - initially extended to 19 April to cover the Government's first three-week lockdown. Staff now require people to use a mixture of annual leave / unpaid leave / flexible working to cover their caring responsibilities.
- ➔ **Annual Leave** - Request that people who are available for work but cannot work (due to service closure) to start using annual leave that they accrue each month (normally 2 days per month).
- ➔ **Enhancements** - Decision to cease paying enhancements (e.g. non-standard working rates / first aid etc) for anyone who is not working.
- ➔ **Shielded List** - Staff on the national shielded list were recorded (this was a very small number)
- ➔ **Casuals** - Pay a % retention payment to people who have worked regularly over past 12 weeks
- ➔ **Furlough** - Collating information about who is available for work / unable to work and consider putting them on furlough
- ➔ **Honoraria** - Any COVID related requests for additional payments to be put on hold so that they can be reviewed
- ➔ **Vacancy Management** - Created an approval to recruit process joined up with the finance team.

- ➔ **Employee and Manager Guidance** - Continued to be updated and provided a link from the daily communications

A lot of work has been undertaken around **staff wellbeing and engagement** to ensure staff look after themselves and are communicated with to ensure they are kept up to speed with the latest developments and messages from the leadership team. Some examples of the work include:

- ➔ **Remote Working** - Guidance and E-learning created
- ➔ **Supportive Conversations** - Organisational Development team reached out to managers down to group manager level to offer a call to provide additional support, advice, guidance or resources to help them and their teams
- ➔ **Comms Message** - Now sent 3 times a week; working with managers and staff on staff stories
- ➔ **Wellbeing Information** - Continue to develop five ways to wellbeing and promote on the intranet and via the comms messages
- ➔ **Working well from home** - information about workstation set up and risk assessments available on the intranet
- ➔ **Staff Engagement Group** - Established - first meetings, virtual coffee with the CX
- ➔ **Stress and Resilience** - First virtual course completed
- ➔ **HSWB** - The team has been in contact with managers regularly and giving bitesize briefs in terms of H&S
- ➔ **Leading together group** - Zoom call planned Monday 18 May, led by Chief Executive
- ➔ **All staff briefing** - Workplace call planned for the start of June, led by the Chief Executive.

Staff Survey

A staff survey was commissioned in April⁵ following the significant changes in Council working practices in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Its primary purpose was to review staff health and wellbeing, and to establish how they were finding working remotely:

Working Status

- ➔ At the point the survey was completed, 82.5% of respondents stated they were working from home. Prior to the COVID-19 lockdown, just under one third of staff worked from home at least one day a week, with a further 30% never working from home.
- ➔ Approaching 90% of the respondents have a suitable place to work from home and the necessary IT equipment to do so, however less than two thirds fully understand how to use the available communications technology.

Support and Communication

- ➔ Most respondents agree that they feel supported by and have enough contact with their manager. This includes support to balance caring and work responsibilities.
- ➔ Daily communication messages are largely on point with regards the level of detail.

⁵ The survey was undertaken between 22/04/20 and 06/05/20 and received a 59% response rate (1,260 responses).

Physical and Mental Wellbeing

- ➡ Only half of the respondents rated their mental wellbeing as good or better, with anxiety about the people they care for and their longer-term future the top reasons.
- ➡ Less than two thirds of respondents feel they are getting adequate levels of exercise, have an effective work / life balance or are getting enough sleep.
- ➡ More than three quarters have a plan to organise their day.

Internal Recovery

We are looking at how we can start our internal recovery and are undertaking the following activities:

- ➡ Evaluating options with our buildings
- ➡ How to redesign our buildings to bring people back to work safely
- ➡ Safe working practices
- ➡ Carrying out risk assessments
- ➡ Identifying how many staff need to come back urgently (wellbeing or cannot work from home)
- ➡ All other staff remain at home for the present time
- ➡ Ensuring staff have the right equipment and workstation set up.

Appendix 1 - Decision-Making under Covid-19 using the Constitution

Unless specified, these emergency processes do not require a notice period and cannot be called in (see commentary for further details).

- 1. Emergency and urgent decisions outside the policy and budget:** If Council cannot meet, under the Constitution, the following can take decisions:

- i. the Chief Executive under Part 4 (G) Rule 5, using the Officer Decision process

Or

- ii. Cabinet Members or Officers, under Part 4 (C) Rule 4, using the Single Member or Officer Decision process, with agreement of relevant Chair of PDS and advice from CE, MO and CFO.

It is recommended that Group Leaders are consulted at the same time.

- 2. Urgent non-executive decisions covered by the policy and budget:** If the Council or Committee cannot meet, under the Constitution:

- i. the Chief Executive or Director, under Part 4 (G) Rule 3, using the Officer Decision process, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee and the Group Leaders (for Council matters)

- 3. Urgent executive and key decisions covered by the policy and budget:** If Cabinet cannot meet, under the Constitution, the following can take decisions:

- i. a Single Cabinet Member, under Part 4 (G) Rule 4 and Rule 15, using the Single Member Decision process, if all councillors and the relevant Chair of PDS have been informed, 5 working days' notice has been given and advice of MO and CFO obtained.

It is recommended that Group Leaders are consulted at the same time.

Or

- ii. a Single Cabinet Member, under Part 4 (G) Rule 4 and Rule 16, using the Single Member Decision process, with agreement of the relevant PDS Chair and advice from CE, MO and CFO.

It is recommended that Group Leaders are consulted at the same time.