

Dear Members

Resources Scrutiny Committee

A **virtual** meeting of the Resources Scrutiny Committee will be held using **Zoom** on **Tuesday, 9 June 2020 at 2.00pm** to deal with the business as set out on the agenda.

To watch the meeting, please follow the instructions below:-

- 1 Log on to Zoom at <https://zoom.us/join>
- 2 Enter Meeting ID **892 2479 0297** when prompted
- 3 Enter Password **156791** when prompted

Or, to listen to the meeting, please call the following telephone number:-

0131 460 1196

Please note that this meeting will be recorded.

Members are reminded that contact officers are shown at the top of each report and members are welcome to raise questions etc in advance of the meeting with the appropriate officer.



Head of Law and Administration

**RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE -
9 JUNE 2020**

Chair - Councillor R P Cooke

A G E N D A

1 Minutes of 20 February 2020 as published on the Council's Website and in Digest No 265 published on 6 March 2020.

2 Apologies

3 Officers' Reports

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ITEM NO 3(a) **COVID 19 Pandemic** 3 - 20
Stafford Borough Council Response

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Membership

Chair - Councillor R P Cooke

A R G Brown	M V Holmes
R P Cooke	R A James
M G Dodson	R Kenney
A T A Godfrey	J A Nixon
A S Harp	P Roycroft

Cabinet Members:-

Councillor R M Smith - Resources

Councillor J K Price - Environment

Councillor C V Trowbridge - Leisure

ITEM NO 3(a)

ITEM NO 3(a)

Report of:	Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	Tim Clegg
Telephone No:	01785 619200
Ward Interest:	All
Report Track:	Resources 9/6/2020 (Only)

RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

9 JUNE 2020

COVID 19 Pandemic Stafford Borough Council Response

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 To provide an update on the council's response to COVID-19 pandemic.

2 Recommendation

2.1 Scrutiny Committee are asked to note:

- (a) The actions and decisions taken by cabinet and council officers in the response phase of COVID 19 to ensure the delivery of critical services and compliance with government guidance.
- (b) The additional services provided and planned in response to COVID 19, including the community hub.
- (c) The progress in planning for the next two phases ie recovery and reform, which will run concurrently with response.

3 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 The council's cabinet and leadership team took responsibility for determining the council's response to COVID 19 which was subsequently declared a major incident.
- 3.2 The government have given the council new responsibilities and guidance to respond to within short timescales that have not allowed normal scrutiny by members.
- 3.3 The recovery and reform phases of the major incident, set out in the report, will inform the future development and delivery of the Corporate Business Plan.

4 Relationship to Corporate Business Objectives

- 4.1 The response to COVID 19 supports the delivery of all the corporate business objectives. The objectives will, however, be re-visited once the full impact of the pandemic on the borough has been assessed.

5 Report Detail

5.1 Governance:

The council's response has been led by the cabinet and managed by the leadership team. Governance arrangements have been consistent with the council's guidelines for managing a major incident. This has included maintaining decision logs, consultation with cabinet members and a record of all additional expenditure incurred. Cabinet meetings have been held remotely and opposition leaders invited to attend to promote transparency and scrutiny of decision making.

Regular contact has been maintained with Theo Clarke MP and Sir William Cash MP. The Council participates in teleconferences chaired by the Secretary of State, Rt. Hon Robert Jenrick as well as those organised by the West Midlands Combined Authority, regional MHCLG CEO Network and the District Council Network. The council is an active member of the Staffordshire Local Resilience Forum and attends the weekly Strategic Co-ordinating Group and the Strategic Recovery Group.

The council's leadership team took responsibility for coordinating the management response COVID 19 and agreed the following aims:

- 1 To support the borough's residents, especially those who are vulnerable.
- 2 To support the borough's businesses in line with government guidance/funding and reflecting local circumstances.
- 3 To protect the safety of our members and employees in delivering critical services.
- 4 To maintain the council's corporate infrastructure which underpins the delivery of critical services.

5.2 Response:

On 17 March 2020 leadership team reviewed our detailed business continuity plans and agreed how we would maintain services and follow government advice. Our business continuity plans were updated to reflect the needs COVID 19 and have been kept under review.

On 18 March 2020 the leader met with the leader of the opposition, the leader of the Independent group and the chief executive and agreed arrangements to protect the health of members, staff and residents whilst continuing to deliver essential services to the community. The group leaders agreed:

- To protect the health of members and officers, to cancel all scheduled council meetings from now until September.
- To delay annual council until Tuesday 01 September (tbc) and elect the new Mayor and appoint to outside bodies at that meeting.
- That cabinet consider all necessary business that would have gone to council from now until September.
- To invite opposition group leaders to attend cabinet meetings during this period.

COVID 19 was declared a major incident by the Staffordshire Resilience Forum 24 March 2020.

5.3 **Supporting our residents:**

The council has succeeded in maintaining critical services whilst adhering to the government's guidance on social distancing. A business continuity plan is in place for each of the critical services to identify the resources required to keep the service operational, the level of service being provided etc Leadership team has met twice weekly throughout the period and has monitored the delivery of services, addressed issues as they have arisen and kept members of cabinet up to date.

At the cabinet meeting 05 May 2020, the leader and portfolio holders provided an account of service delivery during COVID 19. The meeting provided an opportunity for the opposition group leaders to scrutinise service delivery and the decisions that had been taken during the period. A summary of service delivery is provided in the attached **APPENDIX**.

5.4 **Community Hub:**

The government gave borough and district councils responsibility for coordinating volunteers to support people in the community who are self-isolating, have been discharged from hospital or need help during COVID19.

The council worked in partnership with the county council and Support Staffordshire to implement a community hub which focused on:

- A ward-based model of support to provide safe and well checks and access to wider community support
- Food delivery scheme for residents that can pay and for those that cannot
- Help and assistance for residents to register as NHS shielded

The ward-based model has been supported by officers across the council who have been making proactive safe and well calls, signposting to community groups in the relevant ward and referring residents on to further help and support if required. This has been very successful and is something that we want to nurture and build upon going forward.

To date 6995 residents have been contacted either by phone or letter, with over 3,100 safe and well calls being made, Rising Brook church has given out 6,412 days of food and we have made over 402 Coop food deliveries to local residents.

5.5 Local Outbreak Control

At the time of writing a joint operation between the Council and Staffordshire County Council is being rapidly developed to deliver contact tracing.

5.6 Supporting our businesses:

Government have provided significant support to business through several schemes. The council has been tasked with two grant schemes:

The Business Support Grant - we have achieved:

- 88% number of businesses in scope have been awarded grants (1,839 of 2,144 expected)
- 83% of grant funding distributed (£23 million of the £27.6 m)

Unfortunately there remains a number of businesses who have not responded to invitations to claim despite intensive chasing (by phone, email etc) . The Council is still processing a small number of claims whereby the applicants are not known to us or have not given us sufficient information to pay (bank details), and we continue to deal with these and pursue potential eligible businesses. The Council like many others is unlikely to spend its full allocation and is not allowed to utilise the grant funding not claimed to support other local businesses(subject to a 5% set aside to deliver the Governments Discretionary Scheme.

The new discretionary scheme is aimed at:

- Small businesses in shared offices or other flexible workspaces;
- Regular market traders with fixed building costs, such as rent, who do not have their own business rates assessment;
- Bed & breakfasts which pay council tax instead of business rates; and
- Charity properties in receipt of charitable business rates relief which would otherwise have been eligible for small business rates relief or rural rate relief.

The Council issued its adoption of this scheme on phased basis. Applications were invited from the priority groups from 1 June, with the scheme being widened to other small and micro businesses 21 days later.

Applications are being reviewed by Revenues and Economic Development staff and are assessed according to the level of unavoidable property related cost that the businesses are responsible for and the degree of lost income during the first quarter of the 2020-21 financial year.

5.7 **Supporting our staff:**

Within 48 hours of the announcement of lockdown some 155 office-based staff were working from home with the necessary IT support. At the same time Streetscene adopted new ways of working for staff based at the depot. This was a significant change in the way we work achieved in a very short timescale with great cooperation from all staff and their families.

It was anticipated that there would be some challenges regarding levels of staffing due to employees being unable to work, however, colleagues have been flexible and supportive in maintaining service delivery.

A number of staff have retrained to provide extra support to colleagues in services experiencing higher demand eg development staff assisted with awarding business grants, environmental health officers assisted with “safe and well calls” and members of the elections team used their skills to help with administration in bereavement services.

Staff and members quickly adopted new safe ways of working and meetings held remotely using MS Teams and Zoom have quickly become common practice.

Staff have been supported with:

- Help when changing to remote working.
- Health & Wellbeing – newsletters/information on range of subjects including mental health and wellbeing and signposting to external agencies
- Actively engaging with known vulnerable individuals on regular basis
- Instigated ‘Your Health Hub’ to provide support, information and guidance for employees and managers on wide range of subjects and self-learning opportunities
- Health and safety – enhanced new risk assessments to enable key service areas to operate.
- Appropriate supplies of PPE for different occupations and tasks.
- HR – centralised process for managing/referring employees & contracted partners for new COVID 19 testing arrangements
- Centralised information on employees isolating including high risk & vulnerable employees in line with Government Guidance, including carers
- Supporting managers to manage effectively whilst working remotely
- Adapted payroll processes to deliver payrolls remotely (SBC/CCDC/LDC)

5.8 **Financial impact:**

The council has incurred significant additional expenditure as a result of COVID 19 and the role given to it by government, whilst our income has plummeted.

Additional cost pressures for the period April to June are forecast to be £340,000 and includes:

• Vulnerability Hub - Provision of Food, PPE etc	£72,000
• Additional cost of Homelessness Service	£132,000
• Financial support to Leisure Contractor re unmitigated costs	£27,000
• Administration of Business Support Grant	£35,000
• Provision of additional burial capacity	£ 7,000
• Local Plan additional costs	£30,000

Reduction in sources of income for April is forecast to be £1,112,000
Income from sales, fees and charges is forecast to be down by £975,000 the shortfall includes car park income £550,000; market £67,000; regulatory services £132,000; planning fees etc £180,000 and recycling credits £37,000

Collection rates for council tax and business rates show an initial reduction of £28,000 (SBC share) per month but is likely to increase on an ongoing basis

Investment income is forecast to be down by £19,000 per month

The overall financial impact for the period April to June is forecast to be a minimum of £1.5 million.

The impact post lockdown is difficult to forecast with both a continuation, be it on a reducing basis, of the above issues and the emergence of indirect costs including the costs of social distancing measures required for council buildings etc. The support for the leisure contractor, under open book arrangements, is also likely to continue in the recovery stage as their income is gradually restored.

The overall impact for the year of Covid 19, assuming the lifting of lockdown and start of recovery by the end of June, is forecast to be some £3.8 million. To date the council has received £1.4 million leaving a minimum deficit for the year of in excess of £2.4 million

5.9 **Communications:**

A communications plan was produced before 'lockdown' to consider the particular challenges of COVID 19 and the leadership role of the borough council and the need to be transparent.

We introduced dedicated webpages to ensure people could:

- Quickly and easily find the latest COVID 19 advice from trusted sources
- Find out how the council could help vulnerable / isolated residents working with our partners and how residents could provide community support
- Get updates to our services – such as bin collections or business support

The information has been promoted through newspapers, radio, social media, letters, emails and sharing with partners.

Members have received regular updates from the chief executive, including information on changes to services, government guidance and news from partner organisations.

In a similar way staff have received bulletins from the chief executive, human resources and weekly updates from the press and communications manager. Heads of service and senior managers have held regular meetings via MS Teams. The regular “floor walks” by the chief executive will resume shortly by video call.

5.10 **Planning for recovery:**

Having dealt with the immediate response to COVID-19 and the government led lockdown, it is now time to consider how the borough council, working with partners and key stakeholders, maintains the resilience of critical services, reintroduce other services (where appropriate) and plans for longer term recovery of the borough.

In order to plan effectively we need to agree the priorities over the coming months and to consider re-aligning resources to deliver these. We need to imagine how the pandemic will change our residents’ lives, businesses and the council as an organisation. This work needs to be informed by a full review of the council’s strategic risk register.

This work will be informed by four work streams:

- Economic Recovery
- Financial Recovery
- Community Recovery
- Organisational Recovery

The recovery process will be in three phases with phases 1 and 2, response and recovery, running concurrently and we need to assume that COVID-19 is endemic in the population.

Phase 1: Response - As described above and in the attached **APPENDIX**.

Phase 2: Recovery - Living with COVID-19

Re-design service delivery and organisational work-practices to account for Covid 19 being endemic in the population.
Engage partners and communities in imagining a better future for economic, social, environmental and cultural life of the borough.
Support the recovery of the local economy.
Design and deliver operational and transformational recovery for the Council.

Phase 3 – Reform - Rebuild local economy, environment, society and cultural life of the Borough in line with agreed vision; work with those residents hardest hit to reskill and secure employment; deliver key strategic projects and programmes to reflect our aspirations for our society, environment and economy.
Support development of a new funding settlement for local government.

Leadership team and cabinet will maintain oversight of the working groups. It is proposed that resources scrutiny will provide strategic oversight of the recovery planning work, with other scrutiny committees looking at specific work areas relevant to their remit.

In addition to our own local plans for recovery we will also work within the context of the Local Resilience Forum's (LRF) plans for recovery. The LRF has established a Recovery Coordinating Group which will operate in parallel with the Strategic Coordinating Group which is overseeing the COVID-19 response. The chief executive, supported by the head of development, represent the borough on this group.

5.11 **Conclusions:**

The council has succeeded in delivering the four aims in response to Covid 19 set out in 5.1 and has commenced planning for the recovery and reform phases.

Covid 19 is unlike other major incidents. The battle rhythm is different with the response phase lasting months rather than days and the recovery phase (which is now beginning) having to run at the same time. In addition to the work of response and recovery we continue to deliver the services people expect, but in a very different context (living with Covid 19) with new risks and new rules about social distancing as we move out of lockdown.

A key issue for our recovery planning will be assessing the capacity of individuals and teams to deliver the ongoing response and continue to meet people's expectations of service delivery.

Our staff team have responded to the challenge of the last three months magnificently. Many of them have gone above and beyond what is reasonable to expect of them. They have been resilient, hard-working, flexible and quietly compassionate in ensuring the success of our response and continuing to deliver key services to our residents and businesses.

Members too have been supportive and patient and have readily learned new skills such as meeting via Teams and Zoom. The role of members in shaping the recovery and reform phases of Covid will be vital, as will nurturing the increasingly important relationship with our communities and the parish councils and voluntary and community organisations that serve them.

6 Implications

6.1 Financial	These are set out in the body of the report
Legal	None
Human Resources	These are set out in the body of the report
Human Rights Act	N/A
Data Protection	N/A
Risk Management	The impact of Covid 19 will be considered in the forthcoming Risk Register

6.2 Community Impact Assessment Recommendations	Community Impact Assessment Recommendations: COVID 19 has impacted on all sections of our community. Vulnerable groups and individuals have been identified for assistance, as set out in the report. It is likely that the longer-term impact will be unequal with the poorest people in the borough hardest hit as a result of economic recession and resulting austerity measures and this will be reflected in our recovery planning.
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Summary of Council service delivery Covid 19 - Resources Scrutiny 09/05/20

Overview:

The council adapted quickly to ensure that:

- Essential services are maintained
- The health and wellbeing of the public and staff are protected
- Businesses are supported
- We work effectively with our Local Resilience Partners, stakeholders & MPs
- The financial and organisational sustainability of the council is protected
- We communicate effectively with members, staff and residents
- Housing colleagues have found accommodation for our rough sleepers and continued to support vulnerable tenants in the most challenging of times.

Financial Management:

The financial impact of Covid 19 are dealt with in the covering report.

Creditor Payments

To support businesses the 28-day payment period has been suspended and payments are now paid automatically following authorisation of invoices
Remote working and resilience procedures are in place to ensure that the payment of Housing Benefits is ensured

Final accounts

The deadline for publication of Draft Statement of accounts has been amended to 31 August (from 31 May) and Audited accounts to 30 November 2020 (31 July)

The Council is working to the original timetable of 31 May reflecting the need to ensure resources are dedicated to Financial Recovery including Corporate Monitoring; Financial Planning and the Budget process.

Financial Management - General

The service is fully operational with activities reflecting the Financial Cycle.

Cash flow management

- Treasury Management & Investment
- Bank reconciliation -
- Statutory Financial Accounts
- Financial Planning - Impact of COVID19 -
- Financial support to all services

- Systems Admin
- Debtors Management
- Statutory Vat and Tax Management -
- Statistical returns (including monthly COVID19 returns)
- The procurement of a new Financial Management system is ongoing

Revenue and Benefits

Business Support Grants

- Revenues Service is responsible for administration and distribution of the Governments Business Support Grants Scheme and information on this is included in the covering report.

Business Rates Relief

- The Council have awarded a further £22 million of Business Rate Relief to businesses as part of the Governments, 100% rate relief to the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality sectors. The scheme has been extended to Nursery (childcare)
- 2,455 Businesses in these sectors have had no rates to pay - the was applied relief applied automatically

Housing Benefits and Local Council Tax Support

- The number of claims for, and notifications of changes to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction has trebled compared to expectations.
- Priority is being given to specific hardship cases and no recovery action is being taken until the backlog of claims have been processed
- A specific hardship fund for Council Tax via the Local Council Tax Support Scheme is available. Detailed guidance from the Government has been received and discounts will be applied to Council Tax bills.
- Up to £150 reduction will be made to the bills of residents who already receive Local Council Tax Reduction.
- The Council have already increased its support to the scheme with a new discount scheme applying for 2020-21 Council Tax representing a 6% real terms increase.
- The Council has enhanced its online facilities to check eligibility and make a claim

Human Resources

Information is included in the covering report.

Property Services

- Established centralised procurement process for PPE
- Remote monitoring of all mechanical and electrical plant for council buildings (including those operated by Freedom Leisure) resulting in reduced energy costs.

Audit, Risk, Procurement and Civil Contingencies:

These services are continuing to be delivered during the lockdown. The focus is on providing advice and support to Leadership Team in managing the response and recovery phases of the pandemic.

Corporate Business and Partnerships

- Planned and implemented the Community HUB and continue to provide on-going support for it as part of the response and recovery phase of Covid-19
- Represented the Council on Vulnerabilities and Voluntary Sector and Safeguarding Groups of the SCG
- Stafford in the World was cancelled - looking to reschedule for 2021
- Planning a virtual awards ceremony honouring great work in our community
- Working with our partners to tackle issues of community safety and anti-social behaviour, including implementing a new local MARAC process and running a virtual vulnerabilities HUB.

Corporate Business

- Transformation programme and Corporate Business Plan to be refreshed in light of covid-19
- Performance reporting procedure changed to concentrate on key areas of delivering for the community and planning recovery
- Service level agreements have been paid early to organisations concerned about surviving financially during Covid-19
- We are continuing to monitor safeguarding referrals

Economic Development and Planning

Development Management and Planning Support

Government required the council to continue to:

- Consider planning applications
- Run virtual planning committees
- Apply updated legislation for takeaway food provision

- Carry out site visits which started again 27 April with appropriate PPE and risk assessments in line with Public Health England in place. Those visits requiring entry to buildings are being managed proportionately
- Prioritising economically important schemes that will support the recovery of the local economy
- Investigate urgent enforcement cases in line with Public Health England guidance
- Deal with appeals as received. The Planning Inspectorate cancelled appeal site visits and informal hearings due in March but newly made appeals are being allocated and shared with local planning authorities. Responses are being managed remotely.
- Hold virtual Planning Committees which are now scheduled for every 2 weeks (rather than the normal 3)
- The volume of new applications received for January to March was consistent with the same period last year. New applications received during April were slightly down on 2019 however since mid-April the number increased to normal level
- 98% of applications decided in both March and April were dealt with in time

Forward Planning

Government Requirements - Neighbourhood Planning Referenda

- Stone Neighbourhood Plan referendum set for Thursday 7 May 2020 has been postponed, based on the Government's Coronavirus Act 2020.

Impact on New Local Plan Process

- The New Local Plan Issues & Options consultation was extended until 21 April 2020 to enable more time to respond due to changed working practices

Economic Growth - Business Support

- The Economic Growth Team supported the Business Rates team in identifying and contacting local businesses eligible for Small Business Support Grant, operating the Business Rates phone lines and agreeing the criteria for the Discretionary Grants Scheme.

Strategic Projects Updates

Future High Streets Fund

- Government has announced a relaxation to the bidding deadline of 30 April until 5 June
- Additional information has been requested to demonstrate how proposals will react to the changing economic climate

Potential Garden Settlement - Meecebrook

- Visioning work took place week commencing 3 May using Microsoft Teams
- Technical studies have been commissioned in line with the agreed programme

Ironman

- This year's event scheduled for 7 June 2020 has been cancelled. Due to likely weather conditions revised date from Autumn onwards was not feasible
- Next year's event has now been confirmed as taking place on 13 June 2021

Stafford Station Gateway

- As with Meecebrook, technical work is being progressed as far as possible

Charnley Road Play Area

- Completion works were paused at the end of March but have since restarted

Health and Housing

Housing Options

- 'Everyone in' campaign from Government requires those who are roofless to be provided with emergency accommodation for the lockdown period, on lockdown the main hotel chains closed; Agreement reached with one provider to supply rooms only to SBC and to provide 3 meals a day to guests. All rough sleepers and sofa surfers who presented housed initially in 3 hotels.
- Challenge of keeping guests with multiple needs in accommodation, safeguarding concerns regarding mixing vulnerable groups in emergency accommodation; Tenancy sustainment officer providing high levels of daily support (with appropriate PPE). Shared understanding of who is being placed where to minimise risk and joint working with the police.
- Reduced availability of accommodation across all sectors. Agreement reached with Stafford and Rural Homes to prioritise domestic abuse and other emergency situations in partnership with SBC;
- Initial increased demand from core groups, including those being discharged from hospital, moving on from approved premises, care leavers and those leaving supported accommodation.
- Targeted work ongoing with private landlords to source new accommodation.
- Temporary accommodation units kept available for emergencies.
- Housing advice and homeless applications completed remotely with no major issues;

Key statistics / Performance data

- 50 roofless applicants provided with Covid 19 emergency accommodation, 15 of those have been successfully moved on.
- Increase in relationship breakdown partly due to lockdown situation
- Forecast increase in homelessness caused by domestic abuse yet to materialise.

Housing Standards

- Risk of viral transmission to staff and residents in carrying out housing standards inspections of domestic properties has led to a change in the investigation process and creation of a temporary enforcement policy
- Staff remain in place to respond to imminent risks of serious harm, with appropriate PPE and risk reduction strategy in place.

Disabled Facility Grants

- Works on site were made safe in w/c 23rd March
- Works on site suspended for non-urgent cases; many contractors have closed or furloughed staff
- Millbrook Healthcare case worker home visits suspended for all non-urgent cases
- Case workers completing triage by telephone and video call where available, continuing to progress cases to grant approval stage if possible
- Where grants are approved, contractors are issued with contracts for works, to enable them to plan start on site dates when restrictions are lifted
- New referrals and enquiries are coming through, no urgent requests to facilitate adaptations for hospital discharge
- All Millbrook staff currently working; majority from home. Contractors mostly closed.

Operations

Bereavement Services

- New safe systems of work developed
- Compliance with National Guidance with regard to the closure and subsequent re-opening of the Crematorium, social distancing requiring the mourners in the chapel to be restricted to the immediate family only, spouse/partner, children and cremated remains interments and scatterings
We have increased our hours to manage an increase in activity.
- The use of our web casting has increased as numbers of the congregation have been capped to the immediate family only. The cost has been reduced - enough to cover our own costs.
- The surcharge for funerals held on a Saturday or Bank Holiday has been waived.
- It is evident that the bereaved have suffered more than usual in not being able to say their farewells as they may have wished. Post lockdown it is important they we offer the opportunity for additional memorial services for those that wish to return for the strewing/ interment of cremated remains

CCTV

- Crime within the town has greatly reduced including theft and violence due to the reduced number of shops being open and the closure of pubs and nightclubs.
- Town centre radio link is very quiet as many shops / venues are closed.

Contact Centre

The Contact Centre has remained fully operational with staff working from home.

Neighbourhood Services - Leisure and Cultural Activities contract and Victoria Park Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Project

- Government guidelines led to the full closure of all sites that Freedom Leisure operate on behalf of Stafford Borough Council on 21 March 2020 and the suspension of works on Victoria Park HLF Project on 31 March 2020.
- Robert Woodhead Limited resumed work at Victoria Park on 27 April 2020 with a COVID-19 specific safe system of work in operation including a reduced workforce with strict social distancing measures in place.
- Updated Government guidance led a partial re-opening of Rowley Park on 19 April 2020.
- Freedom Leisure are preparing remobilisation plans for the restart of activity.
- The vast majority of the local Freedom Leisure workforce have been placed on furlough.
- A local core team have remained employed with Freedom Leisure since the site closures to ensure essential facility checks and maintenance are completed.
- A national core team have remained employed with Freedom Leisure to strategically manage the organisation and to safeguard for the future.
- Regular dialogue continues to take place between the Council and Freedom Leisure to safeguard the future provision of the service.
- The Council have agreed to cover unmitigated costs for Freedom Leisure, with an open book agreement and subject to monthly review.

Licensing and Enviro-crime

- The processing of licensing applications and Licensing Sub Committee is now be done remotely,
- Environmental Crime & Enforcement has continued unchanged except Interviews under Caution.

The split between incidents has changed with more fly-tipping in rural locations over urban in Stafford/Stone. Evidence is pointing to more offenders coming from outside the borough ie Stoke, Telford and Walsall.

Markets

- Stone and Stafford Farmers Markets, the Wednesday Market, Makers Market and Walking Streets have all be cancelled from 23 March 2020.
- Stafford Indoor Market has been closed since 23 March 2020.
- 2 of our Indoor Market traders - a Fruit and veg trader and the Butchers continue to use their market stalls as a base for deliveries.
- A WhatsApp group for the traders was set up to keep in touch and keep communications open, a text service has also been implemented for those traders who don't have the app.

- Security checks, cleaning and maintenance of the Indoor Market continue to be made.
- Stone Farmers Market to re-start in June, to be held in Westbridge Park, in line with government guidance.

Parking Services

- Parking enforcement ceased on the 16 March and charging on all car parks was suspended on 23 March due to three key factors 1) insufficient resources to collect, count and bank cash at that stage 2) public safety concerns from contact spread of the virus from machines and cash.3) Activity dropped significantly with lockdown.
- A decision was made to close Waterfront on Friday 27 March due to low usage
- At all stages we have acted on government and British Parking Association guidance and in fact we have been ahead of the game in particular on the provision of free parking for NHS and critical care staff and reduction of enforcement.
- All car parks are listed on www.nhs-freeparking.co.uk enabling NHS staff and other critical care workers to find free parking locations quickly and easily. The Civic, South Walls and Riverside are advertised as key worker car parks. Other provision has been made for parking of Police vehicles on North Walls/Mezzanine as required and details of car parks made available to HMP.

Regulatory Services

- Programmed food hygiene and health and safety inspections have been suspended in accordance with FSA and HSE guidelines,
- Service requests eg noise complaints - no visits to premises, contact via telephone only,
- Responsibility for enforcement of the new Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 sits with the Regulatory Services Team - working with the local police and licensing team to ensure that those businesses which should be closed are staying closed. Provided monitoring information to DEFRA, OPSS (Office for Product Safety and Standards),
- Air quality monitoring suspended until further notice following DEFRA guidance.

Streetscene including Pest Control and Open Space Officers

- The front-line nature of Streetscene activity meant that working from home was not an option for the majority of the employees.
- New risk assessments and safe systems of work to ensure compliance with Government Guidance. These measures related to home visits to vulnerable residents to undertake pest control, adoption of single operation of vehicles and plant, social distancing within Riverway Nursery and issuing of suitable PPE.
- Ensuring effective communication with staff, including those working from home to ensure that they continued to be involved and to assess well-being.
- Ensuring the continuing delivery of services with a reduced workforce. All services have continued to be delivered albeit at a reduced level in some areas
- Streetscene staff have supported Bereavement Services, Veolia and Housing.

Waste and Recycling

- A temporary reduction in the Veolia workforce led to the Civic Amenity visits, garden waste and bulky items collection services being temporarily suspended from 24 March 2020. The garden waste service resumed on 27 April 2020.
- Veolia have ensured services continue by sourcing agency staff, adapting working practices to maximise safe distancing, PPE use, cleanliness and hygiene.
- Six members of the Council's Streetscene team have been inducted on to waste and recycling services to act on standby.
- The new blue bag recycling service has been implemented. At the end of April 2020 the overall tonnage of dry mixed recyclable materials sent for processing had increased by 22% compared with the tonnages at the start of March 2020.
- As more of our residents are at home, we are seeing an increase of 15% in residual waste since the beginning of March 2020.

Technology

It enabled some 155 staff to be able to work from home within 48 hours of lockdown and have provided the equipment, software and training to enable all meetings to be held remotely.

Law and Administration

- Democratic Services have been working closely with Technology to administer the delivery of virtual Cabinet and committee meetings.
- Legal services provided remotely including the provision of advice, completion of contracts and agreements, and the conduct of prosecutions which can be decided on paper through the single justice procedure.
- 2020 Elections have been postponed to May 2021. Elections officers have continued to complete electoral registration work, while also providing cover for colleagues in Bereavement Services.
- Officers across the department have also been carrying out work through the Community Hub making safe & well calls and delivering food parcels.

Communications: information contained in the covering report