

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Cabinet
Date:	12 October 2021
Title:	Recovery from and learning to live with Covid-19
Report From:	Chief Executive

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Purpose of this Report

1. This is the eighth in the series of regular reports to Cabinet, summarising the County Council's continuing responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus has now switched to recovery from and learning to live with Covid-19.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

2. Note the position on economic recovery, action taken and the opportunities that arise for the County through the prospects of a County Deal and the potentially game-changing contribution a Deal could make to both the strength and nature of that economic recovery as outlined in the report, as well as an opportunity to secure wider public services reform and enhanced place leadership at different spatial levels.
3. Note the initial County Deal proposal attached as an Appendix to this report which will be further developed through engagement and collaboration with partners for submission to Government in early December.
4. Note that through the implementation of the COVID vaccination programme the link between infection rates and hospitalisation and deaths has been largely broken. Nevertheless, as a society and in our role as the public health authority there is a need to manage rates of infections.
5. Note the contents of this report as a further summary of the exceptional events and recovery actions taken by the County Council concerning the COVID-19 crisis, bearing in mind that this remains a high-level analysis of what continues to be such a substantial and potentially fast changing crisis.

6. Note that the County Council's operational crisis management arrangements are dismantled with a full return to ordinary operational governance arrangements.
7. Note the fuller analyses contained in this report of continued recovery work, through the Collective Wisdom project related particularly to the return to the office.
8. Continue to recognise the on-going exceptional commitment and flexibility of the staff of the County Council as the crisis has progressed.

Executive Summary

9. This report, as its predecessor reports, attempts to provide Cabinet with a general update on the Covid crisis as it is affecting the County Council, as an organisation and for the residents of the county. Clearly every function and service, and every member of staff in the organisation, continue to be deeply affected by the pandemic and continue to sustain the highest levels of professional practice against what have been often extreme, if now more common place, conditions particularly as we now learn to live with Covid-19.
10. As before, inevitably there will be dimensions of this report which will be increasingly out of date immediately after publication. Officers will ensure any such issues are highlighted in the presentation of the report at the Cabinet meeting. This will particularly apply to the latest data on the transmission of the virus, the position of hospitals in Hampshire and the progress of the vaccination programme.
11. This report now has the benefit of a much fuller analysis of the economic impact and longer-term implications of the pandemic. It outlines those issues in more detail and sets out a framework for how the County Council should go about using its scale and influence to contribute to the county's and the sub-region's economic recovery going forward.
12. The report outlines the position on economic recovery and action taken alongside the opportunities that arise for the County through the prospects of a County Deal and the potentially game-changing contribution a Deal could make to both the strength and nature of that economic recovery as well as an opportunity to secure wider public services reform and enhanced place leadership at different spatial levels.
13. The implementation of the COVID vaccination programme and the link between infection rates and hospitalisation and deaths has been largely broken. Nevertheless, as a society and in our role as the public health authority there is a need to manage rates of infections.
14. The report refers to the work of the County Council's Health Protection Board under the leadership of the Director of Public Health and in close liaison with the

Leader-led Local Outbreak Engagement Board. That includes now routine and effective communications channels set between those boards and the leadership of district and borough councils within Hampshire County. While the pandemic will undoubtedly continue, as the crisis elements to the pandemic abate, there will be future consideration about a proposal to merge the role of the LOEB with the Health and Wellbeing Board, to be determined.

15. The report involves a detailed service by service analysis of the work of the County Council in terms of the pandemic. For the sake of clarity and brevity, those issues are drawn out here more on an exceptional basis for issues or circumstances that need to be highlighted
16. Our communications and engagement activity has focused on the easing of COVID-19 restrictions over the summer. This has involved promoting a range of key messages as part of the Government's 'keep life moving' campaign via a wide range of communication platforms. Integral to this has been a focus on encouraging the public to continue choosing the right behaviours to help minimise the spread of infection, while promoting the reopening of the economy and return to a more 'normal' way of life
17. Members are aware that CMT has initiated a project called "Collective Wisdom" to help steer the organisation's operating model as we progress out of the crisis. The title of this project is in recognition of the need for wholesale engagement and problem solving going forward. The report expands on that work so far, focussing necessarily on accommodation changes as we prepare for staff to return to the office through 'New Ways of Working'
18. Once again it is important that this report to Cabinet should pay regard to the continuing and unflagging commitment of the staff and managers of the County Council to sustain the highest levels of performance and service throughout this long and punishing crisis. As the crisis continues so too does the need for this commitment to be acknowledged and applauded.

Economic Impact and Recovery from Covid-19

19. The initial impact of the worst economic contraction in over 300 years on Hampshire's economy has most likely been greater than nationally, due to its greater exposure to a range of consumer facing services and transport related activities. The impact on Hampshire's economy most likely exceeded 10% of its GDP in 2020 (compared to 9.2% in the UK) which translates to over £6.7bn in money terms.
20. The impact of the pandemic was highly pronounced in several consumer-facing services such as hospitality, non-supermarket retail, leisure, education, and transport. The knowledge intensive services have been far more resilient to the impact of the downturn in part thanks to innovation and the acceleration of existing trends towards digitalisation, automation, and decarbonisation of the economy.

21. Business activity in the second quarter of this year has been stronger than expected with the UK economy expanding by 4.8% on the previous quarter. There have been increases in services, manufacturing, and construction output but consumer facing services and education have benefited the most from re-opening of the economy. However, over the summer months we have seen signs of business activity levelling off amid supply chain disruptions and staff shortages with monthly growth slowing to just 0.1% in July, from 1.0% in June. Nevertheless, the outcome for 2021 is still likely to be stronger than in the most recent official government forecast from March (4% growth in 2021).
22. A preliminary local estimate suggests that economic growth in Hampshire expanded by 5% in the second quarter, faster than the UK average. Lifting of a ban on international cruises should further boost economic activity in Hampshire but about a third of Hampshire businesses still face substantial cash-flow issues which could hinder business investment and growth over the short-term.
23. The impact on the labour market has been significant but far more muted than the impact on output. Claimant count unemployment not adjusted for seasonal factors in Hampshire peaked at 5.3% before falling to 4.2% by June 2021. In the year to December 2020, Hampshire had some 8,700 fewer residents in employment than in the previous year. The initial employment effect Pan Hampshire has been slightly smaller than in the region but larger than nationally. The government job support schemes have continued to prevent mass unemployment in Hampshire and across the country. The two schemes in Hampshire supported around 104,000 residents in employment in July, compared to 184,000 residents in employment earlier in the year. There is still uncertainty around the impact on unemployment as the furlough support is removed in September, but that uncertainty is now much lower than earlier this year.
24. The recovery in Hampshire has been accompanied by a relatively strong demand for labour. Hampshire saw a 14,600 increase in HMRC payroll numbers between March and June (+1.7%) with hiring intentions in July returning to the levels seen before the outbreak of the pandemic. Young and older workers have been hit the hardest by the pandemic, but they are benefitting the most from re-opening of the economy and the return of demand for labour in consumer-driven local services. Consumer-facing hospitality furloughs have decreased by 10,400 Pan Hampshire.
25. Relatively strong domestic demand has been accompanied by rising costs associated with supply constraints and bottlenecks and staff shortages. UK inflation increased to 2.5% in June before unexpectedly easing to 2.1% in July. Inflation is now set to peak well above 3% and maybe nearer to 4% this year.
26. Budget deficit continues to fall faster than expected with Government borrowing in June 2021 down over 19% from last year. Year-to-date borrowing of £69.5 billion is now £19.0 billion below the OBR March forecast.
27. In short, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been enormous but following the gradual reopening of the economy, the headline economic and labour market indicators have suggested that a strong recovery was underway in the second quarter. The more recent official and survey data point to a slowdown in business

activity and growth that has been in large part driven by the supply chain disruptions, staff shortages in several labour-intensive sectors and rising inflation.

28. A new monthly Economic Intelligence Dashboard has been developed for Hampshire County Council to keep abreast of the economic activity and to help inform progress. Attached as Appendix 1 is the Economic Intelligence Dashboard produced in July that includes an overview of the current economic trends and business intelligence (the most up to date at the time of writing). This Dashboard is now the subject of development and review by the Hampshire County Council Recovery Board.

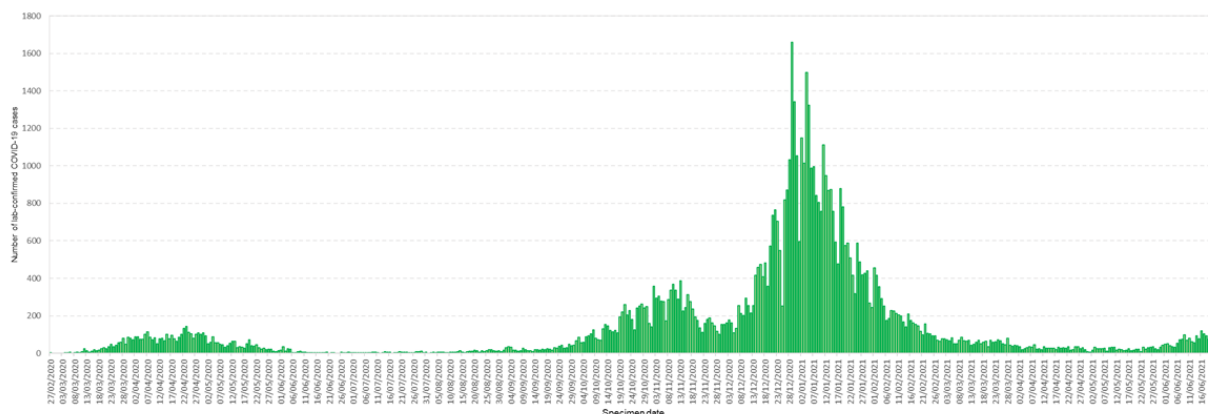
County Deal

29. On 15 July the Prime Minister finally lifted the veil of uncertainty on the future of devolution as part of his 'levelling up' speech. This was combined with a letter from the Secretary of State MHCLG on the same day.
30. As part of the proposals, there was an announcement made about County Deals. As a result, the Leader of the Council has written to the Secretary of State expressing a formal interest in becoming one of the early pilots for a County Deal.
31. As part of following up, initial positive discussions took place with senior officials on 6 September. The dialogue with senior officials included the neighbouring unitary authorities of Southampton City Council, Portsmouth City Council, and the Isle of Wight Council, as well as representation from all eleven District authorities, represented by Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council. At this stage, the County Council has set out its ambition in the form of leading an open and transparent process to secure the optimum Deal.
32. Whether the County Council is part of the early pilots, or not, County Deals will be an opportunity for all areas, especially once the Levelling Up White Paper is published, as anticipated in the Autumn.
33. A County Deal has the potential to provide the opportunity for Hampshire County Council to strengthen the economic recovery across Hampshire as a whole, build medium term economic strategy and deliver its major strategic economic initiatives and programmes, as well develop new ones. It also provides the opportunity for major public services reform as well as the scope to secure new functions, powers and resources and enhance place leadership at regional, sub-regional and local levels. As part of developing the proposals a Hampshire County Deal Prospectus outlining the case is set out in Appendix 2. This Prospectus is the basis for consultation and sets out the ambition, priorities and options for taking forward a Deal. Following the period of consultation, a more detailed case will be produced for negotiation, subject to the views of Central government. This detailed business case will be presented to Cabinet on 7 December and if required an extraordinary County Council meeting will be convened thereafter in December.
34. As a result, the County Deal provides new focus and opportunities against which to accelerate economic recovery, strategic capacity and place and public service leadership for all the residents of Hampshire and its surrounding areas.

Living with COVID

35. Following the implementation of the COVID vaccination programme the link between infection rates and hospitalisation and deaths has been largely broken. Nevertheless, as a society and in our role as the public health authority there is a need to manage rates of infections.
36. Through the pandemic we have seen rates rising and falling in line with the timing of increasing national control measures and subsequent easing. The current 7-day rate (04.10.21) for Hampshire is 358.8 per 100,000 compared to an England rate of 340 per 100,000 which is rising due to the easing of restrictions, schools returning and the rapid spread of the delta variant. It is also essential that the community, with the County Council's leadership, continues to manage infection rates, outbreaks and supports the continued rollout of the vaccine programme.
37. The modelling predictions set out a rise in cases in the Autumn, this has found to be correct. The rise in hospital cases is also in line with modelling predictions at a lower rate than wave 1 and wave 2. However, each wave of cases is different and a watchful eye on the data needs to continue.

Rates of infections



Health Protection Board and Local Outbreak Engagement Board

38. The arrangements for oversight, management and community engagement are now securely in place in the County Council, with the Director of Public Health continuing to chair the Health Protection Board which now meets on at least a monthly basis. This remains important due to the situation as outlined in this report.
39. The Leader chairs the Local Outbreak Engagement Board as a political sub-committee of this Cabinet which is also joined by members of the County Council's main opposition party, representatives from district councils and an NHS non-executive director.

COVID programmes of work

40. Testing of symptomatic people remains a priority for management of the pandemic locally, although responsibility for the delivery of the majority of the

testing programme remains at a national level. The Council continues to have the lead role in the organisation and oversight locally.

41. A well developed programme of asymptomatic testing is in place to support early identification of disease in people. This also now includes a Community Collect model where people can collect tests kits from community pharmacies for home testing.
42. With the emergence of variants the County in conjunction with Public Health England takes forward testing actions where there are variants without a clear link to another case or travel.

Tracking and Tracing

43. Case testing investigation and contact tracing are fundamental public health activities in the management of all infectious diseases. This involves working with an individual (patient or resident) who is either symptomatic or asymptomatic and has been diagnosed with an infectious disease. The aim is to identify and provide support to people (contacts) who may have been infected through exposure to the infectious individual. This process prevents further transmission of the disease by separating people who have (or may have) an infectious disease from people who do not.
44. For Hampshire County the contact tracing programme continues successfully and since August the programme has changed as people who are fully vaccinated don't need to isolate. The programme checks vaccination status to provide correct information and ensure contact know what course of action is required.
45. The call handlers ask positive residents if they have any welfare needs (medicines, food etc) and will refer to relevant wrap around services. Call handlers will also establish whether positive residents are eligible for isolation payments.

Vaccination

46. The development and rollout of the vaccination for covid-19 is the most effective public health measure to prevent illness and transmission of the virus. The programme is led by the NHS with strong input and supportive leadership from The Council. Latest data at time of writing (and to be updated verbally at Cabinet) was that around 75% of the Hampshire over-18 population has received first vaccination. With 58% having had two doses.
47. The programme continues to see a number of changes. The latest developments include vaccination for 12–16-year-olds and a booster programme alongside the annual flu programme.
48. A programme of work continues on inequalities to ensure those groups least likely to take up the vaccine can be engaged with. There is some variation in uptake across Hampshire, unsurprising given the size and complexity of the

county, due to a number of factors including demographics, with the younger populations and some communities being more hesitant to taking up the vaccination.

Adults' Health and Care

49. The Government introduced legislation on 17 July 2021 specifically requiring staff working in Care Quality Commission (CQC) registered residential care or nursing homes to have had both COVID-19 vaccines by no later than 11 November 2021 to help protect both the workforce, as well as the many vulnerable people being cared for. This is now the law and means that anyone working in any care home, and those visiting any CQC registered care home in a professional capacity (including maintenance or other contractors), must be fully vaccinated by 11 November 2021. The legislation and guidance set out criteria for exemptions to this requirement, but these are extremely limited. Individuals will be required to provide evidence of vaccination status (or exemption) on arrival at each site, as has been for the requirement for a negative Lateral Flow Test result in recent months. For vaccination, this must be evidenced using the NHS Covid Pass available via NHS COVID Pass - NHS (www.nhs.uk). Consequently, Adults' Health and Care is coordinating a response and working closely with the NHS to support the residential provider market alongside working directly with HCC Care. Overall, across Hampshire around 1,200 (circa 6%) of the total staff in this sector and any temporary agency workers as well as contractors will need to be vaccinated to continue employment. Activities continue to encourage vaccine take-up and we estimate that the actual number of unvaccinated care staff will number 1,000. The programme of work covers the communication and information aspects, human resource policy and practice as well as substantial changes affecting data and records. There is currently no impact on other HCC directly delivered care sites, though impacts are inevitable in the coming period, as they are for the whole sector locally and nationally. It is important to note that Government has recently commenced a further consultation to extend the mandatory vaccination of staff across the wider health and social care sector.
50. In addition, the 2021 Flu Campaign is imminent. Flu vaccination is important as more people are likely to get flu this winter as fewer people will have built immunity to it during the COVID-19 pandemic, they are therefore more likely to be seriously ill and getting vaccinated with protect everyone who is vulnerable to both COVID-19 and the flu. Flu vaccine - NHS (www.nhs.uk).
51. Over the past 15 months we have distributed nearly £60m of grant out to the care sector through successive rounds of Infection Prevention and Control funding and other national grant schemes. Distribution of funding has included payments to care homes, the domiciliary care, care homes, Extra Care and supported housing facilities, mental health services, carers, day services and people receiving a personal budget. This is the equivalent of £2,381 for every person receiving care in their own home, and every care home bed across Hampshire. Furthermore, as reported in previous reports to Cabinet additional payments were made by HCC for commissioned care, totalling some £17m in the last financial year. However, the Government financial grants have now all been distributed and there is currently no further

indication of any future rounds of care sector grant. Hampshire County Council will continue our practice initiated at the beginning of the pandemic to pay provider at the beginning of the month, in advance, to maintain cash-flow for providers and reconcile payments and activity, fully, retrospectively.

52. The most current pressing issue for services is maintaining safe staffing levels. A combination of a diminished labour market causing recruitment difficulties, the age demographic of the care workforce and the effects of people feeling exhausted by the pandemic causing them to choose to exit the service, and the challenges of a fully vaccinated workforce for various reasons, usual absence and attractions of other economic sectors (such as hospitality) has created a challenging environment. These factors when combined with low occupancy in many care settings, which is a national issue, means that future consolidation of care home settings across our Hampshire care home economy, as we head into the autumn and winter, seems inevitable. To the huge credit of the sector, we have seen few care home closures over the last 18 months, but these are now happening nationally and locally and further consolidation of care settings, including for our own directly provided services, are inevitable. Alongside this domiciliary care services are under extreme pressure, and we are seeing significant challenges in some parts of our geography to secure timely ongoing support for people. Activity has also increased markedly in terms of safeguarding initial referrals (up some 30%) in comparison to previous years.
53. Beyond the care sector provider challenges, detailed above, services to maintain positive admission avoidance and discharge support around our acute hospitals have for the last three months never been busier. The NHS elective care waiting lists, more people generally coming forward to all health and social care services and the overall capacity and service fatigue issues are all major risks as we head into the autumn and winter. Indeed, we have seen hospital attendances rising exponentially, a probable consequence of activities around COVID vaccinations and 'usual' access to community services, including primary care, having not been available. The recently announced Winter Pressures funding for the NHS announced by Government is welcome and will continue to support dedicated commissioned services.
54. Alongside responding to recovery and increased service pressures we have also seen additional, new calls upon services. For example, the Afghan evacuee response has prompted a huge response, from Adults' Health and Care and other colleagues / partners. Again, the activity and resource being required to safely and appropriately provide a range of welfare and associated support to these Home Office programmes, bridging hotels and long-term resettlement, cannot be underestimated.
55. However, the overall challenges faced by the sector; more people coming forward with health and social care needs and the extreme staffing challenges being faced to respond to both those already receiving support and those needing support are all creating an environment of heightened service continuity risks and sustained pressures. Staff and managers across the entire department and whole sector continue to demonstrate exemplary resilience and commitment to supporting our residents.

Schools and Children's Services

56. The DfE has recently published guidance to all educational settings setting out arrangements for the new academic year. The contents are summarised well in the guidance to parents which can be accessed at the following link:

[What parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-years-providers-schools-and-colleges)
57. The local authority will not be issuing separate guidance, as the information and expectations are already clearly set out within the DfE materials. Webinars were set up for late August / early September for early years settings, schools of all phases and colleges so that the guidance could be exemplified, and educational leaders had an opportunity to explore best practice with the School Improvement Team and Public Health colleagues.
58. The priority for September is for schools to revert to providing face-to-face, high-quality education within an environment which is as 'normal' as possible, enabling flexibility in curriculum delivery and the most effective teaching and learning modes, not least interaction in person with others. We know from the previous school closures and returns that children have relished the opportunity to be with their friends again, learning from each other, playing and socialising with each other, being a physical part of a community again. We know that school leaders and their staff have found bubbles and other such measures to be restrictive of some aspects of good teaching and learning and so now is an opportunity to revisit best practice, with a fresh start at the beginning of a new academic year.
59. Schools need to continue to have a risk assessment/mitigation plan in place, including for example good hygiene, cleaning regimes, ventilation, and testing arrangements. Beyond that, there is also an expectation that additional measures are planned for on a contingency basis in response, for example, to an outbreak.
60. The home to school transport service runs approximately 1,300 transport arrangements each morning and afternoon supporting over 3,000 students with special educational needs (primarily in taxis and minibuses) and 9,000 mainstream pupils (mostly in coaches and buses). Many children with SEN are clinically exceptionally vulnerable.
61. Since March 2020, the service has been significantly affected by lockdowns, Covid cases and self-isolation requiring daily reconfiguration of transport arrangements. Support was provided to the transport sector to ensure the viability of the market. During lockdowns, home to school transport arrangements were extended to vulnerable and essential worker children.
62. From September 2021, home to school transport arrangements will be operating without restrictions or the additional Covid capacity that has been in place since March 2020.
63. Secondary phase schools have organised summer schools for pupils in the summer holidays and these complemented the County Council's extensive

Holiday Activity and Food programme which was rolled out across the summer – see Executive Member for Children Services decision day on 8 June. Initial evidence suggests these have been well received by children and young people.

64. The number of childcare settings closing in Hampshire has remained consistent with pre-Covid levels for group settings (for example, pre-schools and nurseries) - there were 28 closures in 2019 and 27 in 2020. However, there has been a significant increase in the number of childminders closing during the pandemic – up from 57 in 2019 to 103 closures in 2020.
65. Children’s Services continue to support the childcare sector, prioritising support to recruitment into childcare roles; though development and learning resources; Covid information; and also through financial support through sustainability grants.
66. It should also be noted that children’s social care services remain extremely busy with the average number of referrals into the service consistently reaching 1100 per week, about 20% up on the pre-Covid period. Those referrals include increasingly complex and difficult casework at least some of which has been masked during the crisis if not caused by it.
67. However, as we enter the period of Covid recovery, this increased activity is now mainly at the front door in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and in the social work assessment teams. In the first twelve months of the pandemic numbers of children coming into care had increased though this has since stabilised; numbers of children on child protection plans had risen but have since started to reduce; numbers of open cases had increased but are now broadly static. This suggests the rise in referrals appears to (rightly) reflect professional anxiety for vulnerable children and the need for social workers to assess and quantify the risk, rather than longer term demand for higher cost services such as placements for children coming into care.

Culture, Communities and Business Services

68. Since 19 July 2021 all CCBS services have been fully operational. However, the legacy of the Covid lockdowns and the changes in public behaviour as a result of the pandemic have had a significant impact on some services.
69. The Countryside services have seen a significant increase in the numbers of visitors to country parks, but the use of the Rights of Way (ROW) network has reduced from the lockdown peak. The intensity of use of the ROW network during the lockdowns has left a legacy of degraded surfaces. An additional £0.5m funding has been put into ROW maintenance to address the most urgent issues.
70. The Registration and Coroners services have seen significant Covid-related pressures since 19 July. The number of weddings over the late summer period severely tested the resource constraints of the service, with a record 150 ceremonies over the late August bank holiday weekend alone. There is a backlog of birth registrations which is slowly being addressed. The coronial service has a significant backlog of inquests (postponed or delayed by Covid) and the staff are carrying very high caseloads. The re-organisation of Trading Standards is

progressing well, and a new structure is on target to come into place in the new year.

71. The Traded Services have largely recovered to pre-Covid levels of income and customer numbers. The recovery of HC3S is linked to schools returning to largely normal operations. The second half of the summer term was a particularly difficult trading environment for HC3S in schools with large numbers of pupils sent home and staff being 'ping-ed'. It is hoped that target uptake numbers will be achieved during the autumn term to ensure trading stability for this service. County Supplies is expressing concern about the availability of HGV drivers and there are also supply line shortages of some products. The service is considering ways to future-proof the HGV delivery arrangements which will include smaller vehicles, which will also assist in carbon reduction targets.
72. The Hampshire Outdoor Service was severely impacted by Covid with the majority of its school operations closed throughout the last 18 months. School trips 'unlocked' in the summer half term and the centres have been welcoming booked school groups since that date. Bookings from schools for the coming year look strong – assisted by the confidence schools gained from 100% refunds during Covid, which not all in the sector chose to do. Utilisation of the Centres during school holidays has been far stronger this year and has been a particular focus of work. Children's day activities and public 'pay and play' facilities have seen very good uptake, as has camping using the 'Pitchup' web facility as a booking medium.
73. Emergency planning has now stood down from most Covid related activity but has been very active in supporting the Afghan resettlement scheme. Library Services now have a full offer, and all libraries are open to their new (post T21) hours. The Records office is operating normally. Scientific Services continues their service during Covid, in particular managing to support the major police testing contracts which require extremely high levels of quality control to enable court evidence. The Hamble Harbour master reports considerable, ongoing, levels of anti-social behaviour around the harbour and is fully co-operating with the community police team including the use of body cam arrangements.
74. The Facilities Management team have continued to support the management of major Council meetings throughout the Covid period. They are now supporting the return to the office of many staff at HQ and elsewhere with new office layouts and furniture to facilitate 'hybrid' ways of working.
75. Construction and property related services did not stop during the pandemic and some major school capital works, including two new primary schools have been delivered successfully during the pandemic. The capital programme is significant and challenging, made more so by the shortage of construction materials and the upward pressures on costs and deliveries.
76. Overall CCBS services have weathered the pandemic well and are making a good recovery. The challenges that remain are essentially the 'new normal' of our trading and service environment and we are adjusting as necessary. In the longer term it is the potential impacts of Brexit and the supply and skills shortages that we are beginning to see that may well be greater and more far-reaching.

Economy Transport and Environment

77. Efforts are continuing to be made to actively steer and support Hampshire's economy as the Government's route map out of Lockdown is implemented, a central thread of this is to position Hampshire as an economic place leader. Examples of how this is being done are outlined below:
- Developing and preparing for the launch of the Hampshire Story Ambassador programme, which engages and showcases Hampshire's leading businesses and academic assets, building on the successful place marketing of the Hampshire Story to date.
 - Capitalising on the UK's staycation plans through the Council's Visit Hampshire website, both in terms of holidaying in Hampshire and attracting day trippers from London with targeted advertising in collaboration with eight of Hampshire's leading attractions. In addition, Visit Hampshire's first television commercial (jointly funded with six Hampshire local authorities) has been broadcast on Sky channels during broadcasts of the Hundred cricket competition.
 - Levering the macro changes to work location patterns emerging in a post-covid world through targeted joint marketing campaigns (funded by district councils) to attract businesses and workers away from London. Either with workers staying more local and using our high streets, or businesses developing a hub and spoke model with satellite offices in regional locations.
78. Transport journeys continue to recover to pre-Covid levels. Across Hampshire's roads, vehicle traffic levels have returned to being at or just under pre-Covid levels. However, the pattern of journeys has changed to some extent, with the morning peak hour being less pronounced and inter peak hour traffic generally higher than pre-Covid levels. Bus services are operating at 95-100% pre-Covid levels, with passenger levels at 70% and steadily climbing. Rail passenger numbers are also at 70% and rising.
79. The Highways Service has managed to remain operational throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, albeit with some changes to frontline activities. There has been a need to adopt new controlled working practices, primarily for safety and welfare reasons, but also as a consequence of changes in working and travel patterns where more people have been working from home, e.g., more parked in residential areas impacting on drainage cleansing and pothole repairs. To mitigate issues, temporary payment mechanisms were introduced early in the response phase, in line with Government guidance, to assist the construction sector (including highways) to remain operationally and commercially viable. These measures have recently been scaled back as things gradually return to normal. Covid has subsequently created significant financial pressures across the Highways service through 20/21 and into the first half of 21/22, although these have largely been recovered through Government and internal corporate support mechanisms. Service demand has remained exceptionally high through this summer period, at a time when it would normally be expected to reduce slightly.

80. Other highway related areas such as on-street Civil Parking Enforcement are now operating at near business-as-usual levels, and particularly since town centre shopping areas have opened up again. The school crossing patrol service is now fully operational (vacancies excepted) at all school sites where a patrol is normally provided. As with the Highways service, the delivery of capital projects has slowed at times because of the need for social distancing and other site precautions. Whilst some controls remain in place however, most site-based activity is now at or near BAU levels.
81. Covid has generated a number of legacy pressures which are continuing to have a detrimental impact on the highways and construction sectors, namely the availability of key materials – for example sand, cement, stone, some bituminous products and timber – whilst there is also a shortage of UK HGV drivers, the latter issue affecting all business sectors and not just construction. These ongoing issues are being actively monitored and managed within ETE through strategic collaborative arrangements with the County Council's service delivery partners, e.g., Milestone Infrastructure Services.
82. Increased home working during Covid resulted in increased tonnages of waste at the kerbside leading to higher costs associated with storage, processing, and disposal of the materials. The lockdown and other pandemic measures also resulted in the annual recycling rate reducing by approximately 4%. Whilst the clear expectation is that these changes are temporary, particularly with the forthcoming national changes to the waste system to encourage greater recycling, there is a risk that if these changes are sustained the behaviour change could become long term or permanent. The Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) network has now been fully re-opened with revised parking layouts to improve accessibility, and restrictions on numbers of visits per week lifted from early October. The booking system currently in place until April 2022 is being reviewed over the coming months ahead of any decisions on the position after January 2022. The booking system has delivered significant improvements for customers and enables demand control such that there is no queuing at peak times and therefore no impact on the local highways network and businesses and residents near HWRCs.

Corporate Services

83. The majority of Corporate Services staff provide support to the front-line Departments and the majority have been working effectively from home since the beginning of the pandemic.
84. Recovery activity has been centred on providing help, support, and guidance to Departments in areas of HR, wellbeing, and finance in response to the rapidly changing environment and government announcements.
85. More recently, significant effort across the Department has been put into considering what our accommodation and equipment requirements are to support our new ways of working and a return to the office of staff from 13 September. The IT Department have also been supporting FM and Property Services colleagues in 're-stocking' the offices with IT kit and other equipment to facilitate the phased return to offices across the whole of the County Council.

86. HR have worked, with EHCC approval, alongside Departments and Trade Union representatives to implement our new 'Open Working Policy'. The policy places a continued emphasis on service delivery and performance requirements at the same time as affording our staff more flexibility in their working arrangements.
87. Early indications are that the policy is being well received however we continue to monitor its efficacy over the months ahead.

Communications and community engagement

88. Since the last report, communications and engagement activity has focused on the easing of COVID-19 restrictions over the summer. This has involved promoting a range of key messages as part of the Government's 'keep life moving' campaign via a wide range of communication platforms. Integral to this has been a focus on encouraging the public to continue choosing the right behaviours to help minimise the spread of infection, while promoting the reopening of the economy and return to a more 'normal' way of life. Examples are outlined below:
 - Continuing to encourage residents to take up their **COVID-19 vaccination** when it is offered. Including promoting the importance of being fully vaccinated for best protection, the extensive NHS walk-in offer available over the summer, the extension of the programme to 16-17 year olds, targeted messaging to younger cohorts up to the age of 29, providing the Hampshire County Council Vaccine Champions Programme with weekly communications broadcasts for onward promotion, as well delivering targeted communications to County Council staff and the private care sector on the introduction of the compulsory vaccine for those whose work involves entering care homes.
 - Supporting the rollout of vaccines to younger age groups through focus groups with young people aged 18-24 and 16–17 years that led to improved understanding of the motivations behind take-up as well as vaccine hesitancy.
 - Reminding people of the importance of **regular asymptomatic testing** and continued adherence with **symptomatic testing**, as well as promoting the changes to the associated self-isolation rules. Social media postings promoted 'every test matters', alongside news media and social media campaigns to encourage regular testing without symptoms - 'Test-Record-Repeat'. These initiatives also urged use of Community Testing, Pharmacy Test and Collect, as well as workplace testing.
 - Using the **Hampshire Perspectives** online residents' forum to monitor people's confidence and attitudes as COVID-19 restrictions eased, and to understand the rationale behind participation/non-participation in the regular asymptomatic testing programme which informed the development of communication campaigns.

- **Ensuring messages remain relevant** throughout the summer period and keeping the public informed of key changes. Including a comprehensive campaign relating to the return to school and educational settings, with communications aimed at both parents/ carers, as well as staff, promoting pre-event testing for summer festival-goers, mental wellbeing support post exam and pre-return to school and university, and holidaying safely.

Staff returning to the office

89. Through the deployment of MS Teams and other associated equipment the majority of our staff have worked continuously throughout the pandemic, whether that be in 'public facing' roles or in back-office functions from their homes.
90. In line with Government Guidance, we ensured that our Eil Court Office accommodation was safe for staff to return to from 19 July, if they wished to do so and there has been significant investment in 're-stocking' of offices to replace IT kit and other equipment that is now in staff's homes, funded from a £6m Covid Recovery Fund agreed by Cabinet over the Summer. As anticipated, we have seen a small increase in the number of staff working from the office since that date but always intended to wait until September before mandating any return.
91. All Departments have been developing plans with their staff, in support of service delivery, to ensure that new hybrid ways of working are ready for full implementation from September onwards, with each Department having different 'go live' dates for their new arrangements.
92. We are currently exploring ways in which we can monitor the use of the office and wellbeing and productivity of our staff as our new hybrid ways of working are embedded.

Conclusion

93. This Covid report to Cabinet is presented in a new format reflective of the shift from response into recovery and learning to live with Covid. Restrictions were largely lifted through the summer and the County Council's crisis management mechanisms were wound down accordingly. Following the implementation of the COVID vaccination programme the link between infection rates and hospitalisation and deaths has been largely broken. Nevertheless, as a society and in our role as the public health authority there is a need to manage rates of infections. While the phases of the pandemic may be changing now in welcome ways, the impact, on the community and on HCC, will remain profound for years to come. The Collective Wisdom project is preparing the organisation for new ways of post-pandemic working and the work on economic recovery and in particular the opportunity presented through the County Deal initiative are core to the way forward for the community as well as the economy. All of these points noted, there will remain a strong emphasis on constant vigilance, subject to whatever roadmap decision is taken by Government in the very near future.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes/no
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy, and independent lives:	yes/no
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	yes/no
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes/no

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation).
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it.
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it.
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

See guidance at <https://hants.sharepoint.com/sites/ID/SitePages/Equality-ImpactAssessments.aspx?web=1>

Insert in full your **Equality Statement** which will either state:

- (a) why you consider that the project/proposal will have a low or no impact on groups with protected characteristics or
- (b) will give details of the identified impacts and potential mitigating actions