

## Scrutiny Committee

### *Members of the Scrutiny Committee:*

Cllr G Minshull (Chairman)  
Cllr V Clifford-Jackson (Vice Chairman)  
Cllr B Bernard  
Cllr B Duffin  
Cllr J Hornby  
Cllr J Rowe  
Cllr R Savage  
Cllr T Spruce  
Cllr J Wilby

### **PUBLIC ATTENDANCE**

**This meeting will be live streamed for public viewing via the following link:**

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZciRgwo84-iPyRlmsTCIng>

If a member of the public would like to attend to speak on an agenda item, please email your request to [democracy@s-norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@s-norfolk.gov.uk), no later than 5.00pm on Monday 7 September.

## Agenda

### **Date**

Wednesday 9 September 2020

### **Time**

9.30 am

### **Place**

To be hosted remotely at:  
South Norfolk House  
Cygnet Court  
Long Stratton  
Norwich  
NR15 2XE

### **Contact**

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Website: [www.south-norfolk.gov.uk](http://www.south-norfolk.gov.uk)

If you have any special requirements in order to attend this meeting,  
please let us know in advance

**Large print version can be made available**

# **AGENDA**

- 1. To report apologies for absence and to identify substitute members;**
- 2. Any items of business which the Chairman decides should be considered as a matter of urgency pursuant to Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act, 1972. Urgent business may only be taken if, "by reason of special circumstances" (which will be recorded in the minutes), the Chairman of the meeting is of the opinion that the item should be considered as a matter of urgency;**
- 3. To Receive Declarations of Interest from Members;**  
(Please see guidance form and flow chart attached – page 4)
- 4. Minutes from the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held 5 August 2020;**  
(attached at page 6)
- 5. Review of COVID-19 Response;** (report attached – page 10)
- 6. Scrutiny Work Programme, Tracker and Cabinet Core Agenda;**(attached – page 30)

## **Working style of the Scrutiny Committee and a protocol for those attending**

### **Independence**

Members of the Scrutiny Committee will not be subject to whipping arrangements by party groups.

### **Member leadership**

Members of the Committee will take the lead in selecting topics for and in questioning witnesses. The Committee will expect members of Cabinet, rather than officers, to take the main responsibility for answering the Committee's questions about topics, which relate mainly to the Council's activities.

### **A constructive atmosphere**

Meetings of the Committee will be constructive, and not judgmental, accepting that effective overview and scrutiny is best achieved through challenging and constructive enquiry. People giving evidence at the Committee should not feel under attack.

### **Respect and trust**

Meetings will be conducted in a spirit of mutual respect and trust.

### **Openness and transparency**

The Committee's business will be open and transparent, except where there are sound reasons for protecting confidentiality. In particular, the minutes of the Committee's meetings will explain the discussion and debate, so that it could be understood by those who were not present.

### **Consensus**

Members of the Committee will work together and, while recognising political allegiances, will attempt to achieve consensus and agreed recommendations.

### **Impartial and independent officer advice**

Officers who advise and support the Committee will give impartial and independent advice, recognising the importance of the Scrutiny Committee in the Council's arrangements for governance, as set out in the Constitution.

### **Regular review**

There will be regular reviews of how the overview and scrutiny process is working, and a willingness to change if it is not working well.

### **Programming and planning**

The Scrutiny Committee will have a programme of work. Members will agree the topics to be included in the work programme, the extent of the investigation to be undertaken in relation to resources, and the witnesses to be invited to give evidence.

### **Managing time**

The Committee will attempt to conclude the business of each meeting in reasonable time. The order of business will be arranged as far as possible to minimise the demands on the time of witnesses.

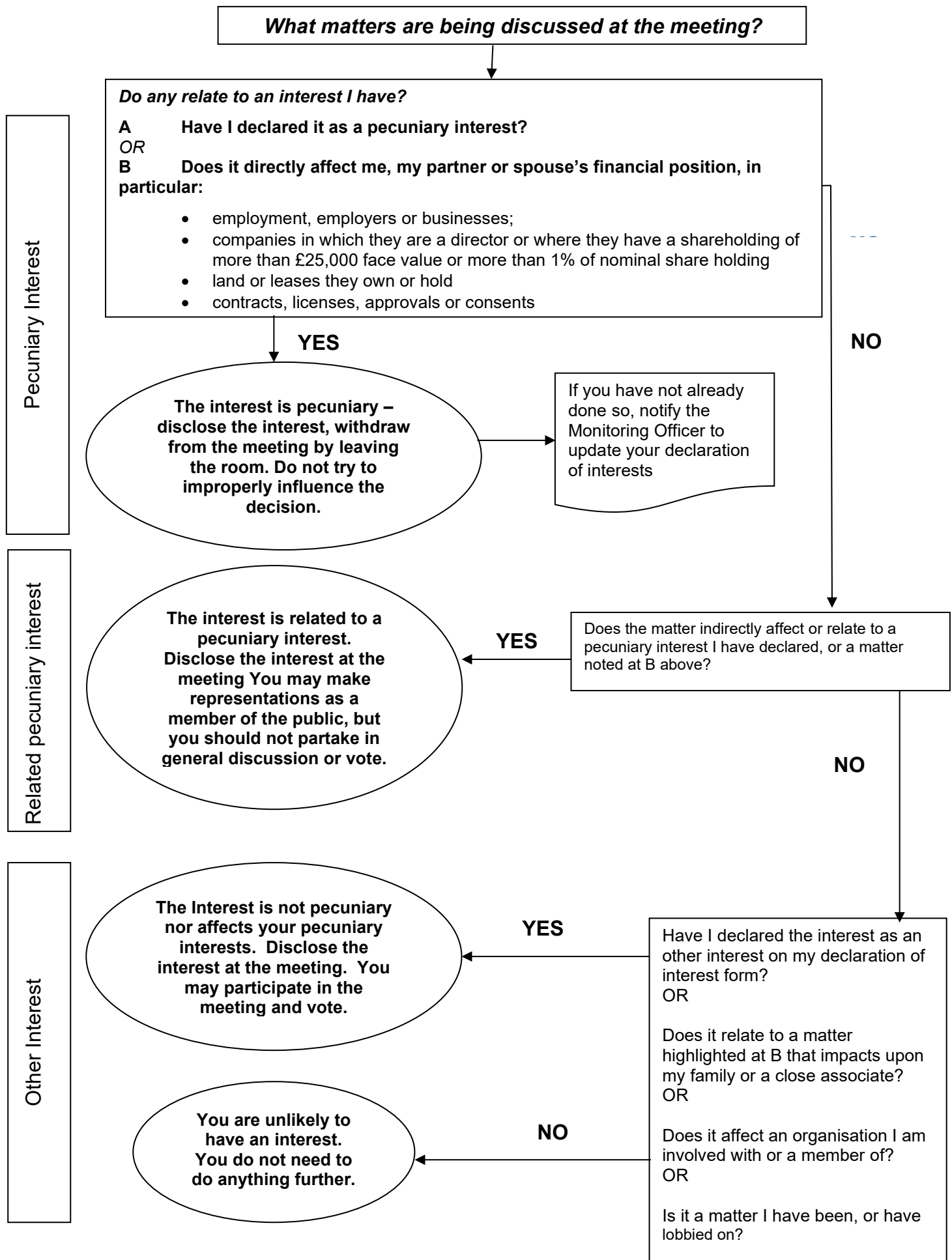
## DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AT MEETINGS

When declaring an interest at a meeting Members are asked to indicate whether their interest in the matter is pecuniary, or if the matter relates to, or affects a pecuniary interest they have, or if it is another type of interest. Members are required to identify the nature of the interest and the agenda item to which it relates. In the case of other interests, the member may speak and vote. If it is a pecuniary interest, the member must withdraw from the meeting when it is discussed. If it affects or relates to a pecuniary interest the member has, they have the right to make representations to the meeting as a member of the public but must then withdraw from the meeting. Members are also requested when appropriate to make any declarations under the Code of Practice on Planning and Judicial matters.

<p>Have you declared the interest in the register of interests as a pecuniary interest? If Yes, you will need to withdraw from the room when it is discussed.</p>
<p>Does the interest directly:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. affect yours, or your spouse / partner's financial position?</li> <li>2. relate to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to you or your spouse / partner?</li> <li>3. Relate to a contract you, or your spouse / partner have with the Council</li> <li>4. Affect land you or your spouse / partner own</li> <li>5. Affect a company that you or your partner own, or have a shareholding in</li> </ol> <p>If the answer is "yes" to any of the above, it is likely to be pecuniary.</p> <p>Please refer to the guidance given on declaring pecuniary interests in the register of interest forms. If you have a pecuniary interest, you will need to inform the meeting and then withdraw from the room when it is discussed. If it has not been previously declared, you will also need to notify the Monitoring Officer within 28 days.</p>
<p>Does the interest indirectly affect or relate any pecuniary interest you have already declared, or an interest you have identified at 1-5 above?</p> <p>If yes, you need to inform the meeting. When it is discussed, you will have the right to make representations to the meeting as a member of the public, but you should not partake in general discussion or vote.</p>
<p>Is the interest not related to any of the above? If so, it is likely to be an other interest. You will need to declare the interest, but may participate in discussion and voting on the item.</p>
<p>Have you made any statements or undertaken any actions that would indicate that you have a closed mind on a matter under discussion? If so, you may be predetermined on the issue; you will need to inform the meeting, and when it is discussed, you will have the right to make representations to the meeting as a member of the public, but must then withdraw from the meeting.</p>

**FOR GUIDANCE REFER TO THE FLOWCHART OVERLEAF.  
PLEASE REFER ANY QUERIES TO THE MONITORING OFFICER IN THE FIRST  
INSTANCE**

## DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF





## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Minutes of a remote meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of South Norfolk District Council, held on Wednesday 5 August 2020 at 9.30am.**

**Committee Members Present:** Councillors: G Minshull, B Bernard, V Clifford-Jackson, B Duffin, T Spruce, J Wilby, J Rowe and R Savage

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillor: J Hornby

**Cabinet Member Present:** Councillor: J Fuller

**Officers in Attendance:** The Director of Place (P Courtier), the Acting Assistant Director of Economic Growth (T Armstrong) and the Senior Governance Officer (E Goddard)

### 1268 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 6 February 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### 1269 REVIEW OF MARKET TOWNS CONFIDENCE CAMPAIGN

The Cabinet Member, Cllr J Fuller, introduced the report which invited the Committee to comment and make recommendations on work undertaken during the Confidence Campaign within the market towns. The Acting Assistant Director for Economic Growth highlighted key considerations which arose from the Campaign.

Members noted that work within the market towns commenced on 9 May 2020, in line with Government advice and guidelines, and the Committee was invited to make suggestions which could encourage visitors to the market towns and enhance the economy in light of the pandemic.

It was noted that residents were anxious about leaving their houses during the pandemic and the Council needed to create a safe environment for people to feel confident in going out. Members' attention was drawn to the collaborative work

between South Norfolk, Broadland and Breckland Councils which created the 'Confidence Campaign', allowing the councils to act quickly and in a unified manner.

Members thanked officers for their quick response in organising and implementing the Confidence Campaign, in order to reopen the market towns following lockdown. The Committee noted that the Council's overriding priority was to protect visitors and residents.

Members voiced concern over the abuse directed at Council officers when marshalling the market towns. Officers were praised for their contributions to the Confidence Campaign, with many going above and beyond to create safe and controlled environments in the market towns.

During discussion, a query was raised regarding the liaison between officers and the local members and some members of the Committee felt that this had been limited, however, the local member for Diss felt that there had been adequate communication between officers and members within his area. The Committee acknowledged that within the tight timescales, the Council did not have the capacity to liaise thoroughly with all interested parties, including all town and parish councils and businesses.

Members were pleased to note that officers had responded quickly to feedback received and had made amendments to traffic restrictions and changes to road layouts, when felt appropriate.

The Committee was informed that South Norfolk's approach to restrictions was different to that of Norfolk County Council's; the use of natural plant boxes was favoured as opposed to orange barriers, which made the market towns more attractive.

The Committee discussed how the Council could best involve local traders in the event of a second wave of COVID-19 and a suggestion was made that an online trader group could be established. Members welcomed this approach, noting that it had potential to create stronger relationships between the Council and traders. It was also suggested that a Task Group could be established to consider how the Council could effectively communicate with traders in the market towns.

A further suggestion was made regarding the possibility of tripartite meetings involving district councillors, county councillors and businesses, to set future strategies, whilst acknowledging lesson learnt. It was also felt that such a group could consider further support and training for businesses.

Officers agreed to consider all the above suggestions further.

In response to queries regarding how the campaign was financed, officers explained that the Government had allocated some funds that had been used for signage and implementation of traffic restrictions within the market towns. The Council's Emergency Committee had also allocated £100,00 to the Confidence Campaign from the Council's budgets, and monies from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) had been made available to support the safe reopening of high streets and other commercial areas. Members were made aware of the restrictions in place when spending this funding.

The Acting Assistant Director for Economic Growth explained that there were still some ongoing costs, relating to the traffic marshals in Harleston to assist in the closure of the Thoroughfare, and the watering of plant boxes. It was noted that the watering of plant boxes was due to end in September and costs had been minimal as watering had been undertaken by volunteers.

A member raised concerns over the implementation of the Test and Trace systems in the area. He noted that visitors would need to provide honest information for it to work and queried whether the Council could do more to promote it on its communication channels.

The conversation turned to Council-owned car parks in the market towns, and the decision to recommence charging. Several members felt that the removal of car parking fees would encourage more shoppers into the towns, boosting the local economy. A member suggested the potential introduction of two-hours of free parking during the COVID-19 pandemic, which they considered would encourage residents to regain confidence in going out and shopping local. Members were keen to propose that Cabinet reviewed the parking charges in the market towns.

A brief discussion followed where it was noted that the car parking charges did not provide profit to the Council, with any surplus being used for maintenance and the upkeep of the car parks. The Cabinet Member reminded members that charges were in place to encourage the churn of car parking spaces and that free parking could result in spaces being used by workers and commuters, making it harder for shoppers to have access to spaces.

The Cabinet Member advised that the largest shopping space in the District was the Longwater retail park in Costessey. Members noted that as the retail park was privately owned, the Council had not been involved in plans to ensure that it was operating in a Covid-safe environment.

He also advised Members that footfall in shops was generally down nationally by 20-30%. It was difficult to measure this in South Norfolk, however it was believed that the downturn within South Norfolk was generally less than the national average.



It was

**RESOLVED:**

1. To note the contents of the report; and
2. To recommend that:
  - a. Officers consider the suggestions put forward by the Committee and provide feedback at a future meeting in six months' time.
  - b. Cabinet considers future free parking in the Council's car parks during the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to encourage continued local support of the market towns.

**1270 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND CABINET CORE AGENDA**

The Committee noted the work programme and cabinet core agenda.

(The meeting concluded at 10.50 am)

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Chairman

## **REVIEW OF COVID 19 RESPONSE**

**Report Author(s):**

Hannah Ralph, Assistant Director - Chief of Staff  
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**Portfolio Holder:**

Cross-cutting Portfolios

**Ward(s) Affected:**

All wards

**Purpose of the Report:**

This report provides an overview of the Council's  
response to Covid 19 and key reflections and learning  
from this response.

## **Recommendations**

Scrutiny is asked to:

- 1 Note the response of the Council to supporting the district's communities and businesses during the Covid 19 pandemic.
- 2 Endorse the key learning identified in the report and make any recommendations regarding future action.

## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is for members to consider the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and make any recommendations arising. The report covers the governance arrangements to support the council's response, the support provided to residents and key financial implications. A review of the Council's market towns economic response has been presented as a separate report to Scrutiny.

## **2 GOVERNANCE**

- 2.1 **County wide response– Norfolk Resilience Forum, Strategic Coordination Group and Tactical Coordination Group**

## **Action taken**

- 2.1.1 In order to respond to the impact of Covid-19, the Norfolk Resilience Forum's (NRF) emergency arrangements were put into place to manage the public sector response, which the council supported, as well as leading its local response.
- 2.1.2 The NRF comprises of the Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG), the Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG) and a number of Delivery Groups (DGs).
- 2.1.3 The SCG's primary purpose is to set the strategic direction, drive the priorities, influence and understand regional and national governments, departments and partners. Its role was to ensure that the response to the near-term crisis is appropriately balanced against the longer-term consequences from it.
- 2.1.4 The TCG is the engine-room of delivery, driving the outcomes required to ensure a successful resolution for the County, both short and longer term. The DGs were key to delivering their respective plans in a collaborative and effective way. They provided the TCG with intelligence and insight and ensured action happened on the ground.
- 2.1.5 The Multi Agency Fusion Group (MAFG) was involved in the county's response. The group provides the focal point for the fusion of multi-agency and multi-activity information. Through this fusion the MAFG provided an accurate and timely assessment of the current situation, an analysis of trends and also conducted longer term modelling to inform transition of response to recovery across Norfolk. The principal output of the MAFG was the production of accurate, timely and integrated data and analysis to inform decision-making.
- 2.1.6 A number of council officers heavily supported the work of the county response, including the Managing Director who chaired the Tactical Coordination Group and the Director for People and Communities who co-chaired the Community response delivery group. The council was also represented on the SCG by the Director of Place and on the TCG by the Assistant Director for Regulatory.

## **Assessment of response**

- 2.1.7 The Council was quick to respond and engage with County coordination response. The leadership role that a number of South Norfolk Council and Broadland Council officers took on during the response meant the council was well-placed to influence and lead the county response, as well as respond to local needs.
- 2.1.8 Officers participated daily, sometimes 7 days a week, in the county response groups to ensure that key information was being disseminated and shared across the partnership and that key plans and information was passed to relevant teams across the council.
- 2.1.9 The SCG and TCG also helped support the coordination of communication of key information to residents and businesses on the latest guidance and developments, allowing for a coordinated voice across the county.

## **Learning points**

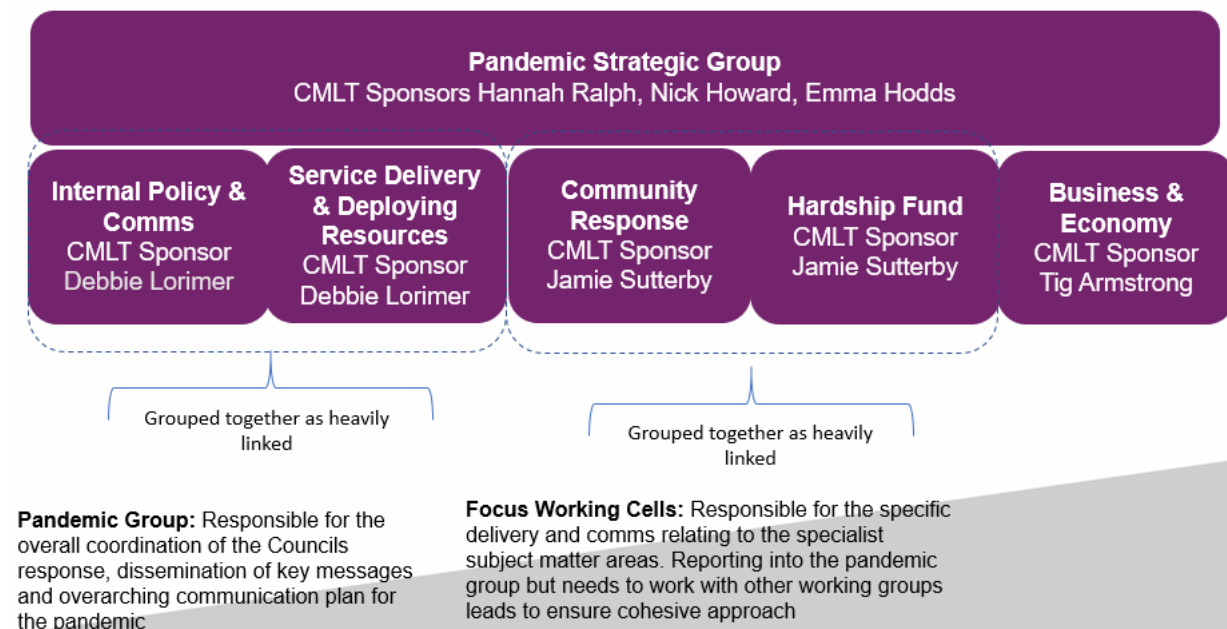
- 2.1.10 The involvement of key council officers in the SCG and TCG meant that the council was able to effectively influence the county-wide response, whilst also ensuring that the Council was able to respond effectively to the latest strategies, plans and information. Nonetheless, for future responses the Council may wish to consider resource options and substitutes to ensure the long-term resilience of officers to both support the county and direct council response.

## **2.2 Council officer governance to manage council response**

## **Action Taken**

- 2.2.1 At the start of March an officer Pandemic Strategic Group was set up, as a silver response to the Covid pandemic. During the initial and main phase of the pandemic the group met daily to update on progress, review government policy changes and TCG and SCG directives, agree urgent actions, review risks and review communication plans internally and externally.
- 2.2.2 Feeding into the Covid Coordination Response Group were three working group cells which covered governance (including internal policy and comms and service delivery and deploying resources), Community response (including the Hardship fund) and Business and Economy. Diagram 1 sets out the officer representation and leadership on these different groups.

**Diagram 1**



## **Assessment of response**

- 2.2.3 The council was quick to set an organisational governance framework to coordinate the councils strategic and operational response to the pandemic.
- 2.2.4 The governance arrangements of a core coordination group and specialist working cells enabled effective coordination cross-organisationally, as well as focussed activity tackling specific priorities and issues such as economic growth and the community response.

## **Learning**

- 2.2.5 A central coordination group was an effective means to keep oversight of key issues and ensure the council remained on track in its response and should be enacted again if a second wave were to take place.
- 2.2.6 Focussed working cells enabled focussed plans and activities in response to specific issues and should be enacted again if a second wave were to take place.
- 2.2.7 Potentially more resilience could be given to coordination groups by having sub leads who shadow and step in if required to provide more long-term resilience for key officers involved.

## **2.3 Emergency Committee**

## **Action Taken**

- 2.3.1 The Leader of the Council and the Managing Director commenced conversations regarding standing up the Emergency Committee in mid-March, as the country prepared to go into lockdown.
- 2.3.2 Following the announcement of the Prime Minister on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, the Managing Director decided to convene this Committee, with its first item of business being to review the Terms of Reference.
- 2.3.3 The key aspects that required addressing were linked to it previously being envisaged that the Emergency Committee would be convened in the recovery phase following a disaster. The Covid pandemic brought a different challenge and it was key that the Committee continued to allow the officer delegations to be in place to enable the day job to get done, whilst drawing to itself the powers of Full Council, Cabinet, Development Management and Licensing. It was also ensured that the decision to stand down the Emergency Committee would be at the discretion of the Managing Director, through consultation with the Monitoring Officer and the Leader.
- 2.3.4 As the situation evolved at the second meeting it was decided that the Committee would indeed draw to itself the powers of Full Council and Cabinet, however Development Management would continue albeit with a smaller membership and that should a Licensing Committee need to be convened it would be so. All other Committee meetings were suspended. This meeting also confirmed the awaited regulations to enable until 7 May 2021 the ability for all Council meetings to be held virtually and proposed the required updates to the Council Standing Orders.
- 2.3.5 As the technology was evolving, the first couple of meetings were held via Skype for Business and a recording of the meeting was made available on the website to ensure the public and press could still have oversight of council business and decision making. As the technology available emerged and improved through the Covid pandemic, the Council were then able to hold the meetings via Zoom technology, which brought with it the ability to live stream the meetings to our You Tube channel.
- 2.3.6 There were five fortnightly meetings held of the Emergency Committee, which had cross party representation, with an informal meeting held the week in between.
- 2.3.7 Key items for discussion at the formal meetings were:
- Financial Implications of COVID
  - Business Grants and Hardship Fund
  - Recovery
  - Economic Recovery Plan
  - Review of 2020/21 budgets
  - Leisure Services Recovery Plan
  - Discretionary Grants Scheme
  - Review of Portfolio Holder Responsibilities and Policy Committee's
- 2.3.8 The informal meetings in between were requested to ensure that the Committee was up to date with all the work that was being undertaken at the time.

## **Assessment of response**

- 2.3.9 Members responded well to the decision to convene the Emergency Committee, with all members of the Committee attending each formal meeting and many other Members also attending to observe the conversation and decisions being made, they were also provided with the opportunity to ask questions. The informal meetings were also well attended by Members.
- 2.3.10 Officers also responded well to weekly reports, whether it be for a formal meeting or informal meeting, with regular updates being provided alongside the inordinate amount of

work that was being undertaken to respond to the pandemic. The emergency committee did draw on some key officers time to support it, and consideration should be given to the resource implications of this.

- 2.3.11 As the technology improved the meeting evolved with it, and the Committee Services Team ensured that the best option for hosting meetings was fully tested before being used for these meetings. The team also embraced the ability to live stream once this had been tested, thus ensuring the Council was able to continue with decision making and be open and transparent in doing so.
- 2.3.12 The response also led to the Leader assessing the split of work for Portfolio Holders and increasing his membership of the Cabinet by one and establishing a new Policy Committee to oversee how the Council will respond in a commercial, customer focused way through recovery and beyond.

### **Learning Points**

- 2.3.13 The frequency of the meetings and demands of the meeting would need to be reviewed if the Emergency Committee were to be convened again. As these were weekly (formal & then informal) officers spent considerable time preparing reports for the Committee. It would need to be assessed if this is the best use of officer time, particularly when the pandemic was at its peak and as some reports became an update / briefing, rather than needing a decision.
- 2.3.14 The frequency of the meetings also heavily impacted on the Committee Services Team at a time whereby some were redeployed and some also didn't have the IT equipment needed to facilitate remote meetings, resulting in the manager of the service being the only resource available.
- 2.3.15 The Council very quickly went back to the normal Committee timetable, once the Emergency Committee was stood down, with an extra Full Council meeting added in and a new Policy Committee quickly needing to be serviced. Consideration could be given regarding this level of meetings with some Councils across the country still having not gone back to a full calendar of meetings.

## **2.4 Our organisational new way of working response**

### **Action Taken**

- 2.4.1 When the Prime Minister announced the country's lockdown there had already been some preparatory work undertaken to enable the Council to be on the front foot:
- the senior management team had been split: the house / the lodge / working from home, this enabled senior manager cover at each site, reduction of potential cross contamination between sites, and an element of resilience through the home workers should either site be badly affected by the virus
  - All office-based staff were allocated a primary site and would no longer be travelling between sites, to assist this the use of video conferencing commenced in earnest
  - Work had commenced on the IT equipment that staff had to assist with home working, many staff already had softphones through the MITEL system and a proportion of staff already had laptops. However remote technology was not available to all staff.
  - Proactive communication were provided to staff to ensure that when they heard the Prime Minister briefings, they were clear on what the Council's stance was, communication continued on a daily basis throughout the key period
- 2.4.2 When lockdown formally commenced staff liaised with their managers to ensure that they had the resources they needed to work from home. It became apparent when working through this that there will still significant IT resource gaps and the council had to make the decision to enable staff to take their desktop home, or work from home and await the right equipment to be provided.

- 2.4.3 All staff were also allocated into either tier 1 (workload critical and increasing due to the pandemic), tier 2 (workload critical during pandemic) and tier 3 (work not currently needed / on hold). The Council were then able to redeploy those tier 3 staff to the critical services during the response phase, such as work with the communities' team and working at the depot. All leisure services staff were also redeployed during this time.
- 2.4.4 The Council moved almost overnight from 71% of our overall headcount working in the office, to about 12% working in the office, with the remainder being provided with the equipment to work from home.
- 2.4.5 It was important to ensure that staff had all the right equipment to work from home, those with laptops and softphones already were quickly mobilised, any remaining laptops were quickly distributed. Those with desktops took longer to mobilise as a detailed rollout programme was needed to enable this type of equipment to work from home.
- 2.4.6 DSE assessments were also encouraged for all staff based at home to ensure that any additional equipment such as chairs, mouse, keyboard, raiser could be provided. A system was soon introduced to ensure that any equipment being removed from the office was logged out so that the asset inventory could be maintained.
- 2.4.7 The need for secure remote access increased almost overnight and exceeded what was in the existing set up and licensing arrangements. A quick response was needed to increase and improve the remote connections to the servers, in the interim shift patterns were required for staff who needed to remote in to access systems and work, this worked well but was not sustainable. The IT team then enabled the ability to handle 300 concurrent users, when prior to the pandemic the system was able to manage around 100 concurrent users.
- 2.4.8 The need for video conferencing (Zoom) was tested, in the early days there were security issues with the solution, these were rapidly resolved by the supplier and then approved by the Cabinet office for use. At this point, and once the Council was clear that this would work, the solution was rolled out to all staff, thus supporting team meetings, individual meetings, general catch ups and committee meetings to be held in the virtual environment. To support this a live streaming solution through You Tube was also developed.
- 2.4.9 The need for systems to store key customer data was identified and customer online forms, which needed to be established at quick speed.
- 2.4.10 Although not initially straight forward the pandemic forced us to quickly pivot to evolve a new culture and way of working that supported having remote teams working from various locations across the region.
- 2.4.11 Elements included within this were:
- Working as a remote team
  - Taking customer calls from home
  - Virtual all staff briefings
  - E learning
  - Virtual team building/bonding
- 2.4.12 This new way of working has already begun to embed, and some are seeing a real benefit to the potential this could unlock, both for our staff and for our customers.
- 2.4.13 As the pandemic continued the importance of regular staff wellbeing checks and support were identified and staff welfare has been a key focus during this time. There has been a number of staff wellbeing surveys, there has also been the launch of the A to Z wellbeing campaign for our staff with a range of tools and techniques for maintaining their wellbeing during this time as well as beginning a mental health first aider scheme.

## **Assessment of response**

- 2.4.13 The importance of promoting the wellbeing of staff was an important element in the councils' response to the pandemic from an organisational basis.
- 2.4.14 The wellbeing survey is continuing regularly and it is apparent that staff have the desire for a hybrid approach to working, with some of the time office based and some of the time being home based. This approach brings many benefits for both the employee and the employer and is something that the Council is keen to encourage and ensure that we have the technology and office base to enable this.
- 2.4.15 The approach taken to remote access has enabled the Council to operate, however this solution will be reviewed as part of the IT infrastructure upgrades to ensure that a long-term solution is enabled.
- 2.4.16 As can be seen there has been some significant investment in IT, and much has been done at pace to solve some immediate issues and technology challenges such as mobilising the workforce remotely. The pace at which the team was able to respond to the need of the workforce has been a credit to the Council.

## **Learning Points**

- 2.4.17 In terms of IT, although much progress has been achieved in a short space of time, we now need to undertake an assessment on the long-term needs and ensure that the planned investment takes account of the new ways of working and enables this. The IT that has been implemented stands the Council in good stead for a mix of home and office working, and more steps forward in this regard are needed.
- 2.4.18 Laptops have proven to support agile working and the Council now needs to look to a programme of investment to move more staff to this solution in the long-term. Any investment would need to be managed alongside the replacement programme that is already in place.
- 2.4.19 Virtual meetings have proven to be extremely effective, however we have only just scratched the surface with the potential that this can offer, and work is now needed to further improve this opportunity.
- 2.4.20 Whilst the foundations are there now for a mix of working from home and the office, we need to ensure we learn from recent events and ensure we then pivot the organisation to be resilient, adaptable and future focussed.
- 2.4.21 Longer term consideration needs to be made to investment in customer data storage and online transaction systems to simplify and expediate the mobilisation of customer responses.

## **3 Community Response**

### **3.1 Community response – our approach**

- 3.1.1 The response was successful in meeting the needs of residents throughout the lockdown period in terms of providing access to supplies and resolving hardship issues associated with the pandemic. The first phase of the response mainly focused on older people who were immediately isolated and were unable to go out for food and prescriptions. This group were largely protected financially but were disadvantaged socially and through health issues. The second phase saw an increase in hardship from families, who were furloughed and were in financial hardship.
- 3.1.2 The council used our existing help hub model to scale up quickly, utilising the infrastructure to create an online / phone system to enable residents in need to contact us and request



support. The help hub has its own contact system in place and a network of partners to support residents who needed more than basic supplies.

- 3.1.3 During the crisis, we proactively supported over 40 groups (across South Norfolk and Broadland) and over 4000 volunteers. These groups, some of which were already set up, some set up as a response to the crisis (mutual-aid groups), helped to identify and support our vulnerable residents, demonstrating the power of local community involvement. This ability to galvanise community support was invaluable in our response. We worked with the wider County network to deliver food supplies to residents and delivered prescriptions (over half of all calls) initially through our own volunteers but during the later phase through the county scheme. The Council also purchased a range of food supplies which help provide an emergency response and enabled us to ensure that no individual or family went without food, even for one night, which included weekends.
- 3.1.4 The Council's Housing and Benefits functions were able to scale up quickly to take calls and support people who were in financial hardship. We were able to reduce the burden on Council Benefits claimants by offering up to £150 off their Council tax bills as well as supporting people financially to bridge the gap before universal credit took over.

### **3.2 Community response – the impact**

- 3.2.1 The Council quickly stood up a community response to the crisis and had a working model in place within 10 days to support residents. During the COVID response the Council received over 20,000 calls to the help hub for support, with over 9,000 calls to the Housing and Wellbeing team. We proactively called over 5000 shielded residents to check to see if they needed support and delivered over 4000 parcels. We supported 40 new and existing community groups to help their local communities, with over 4000 volunteers engaged.
- 3.2.2 The team is currently dealing with a 25% increase in workload as we support residents who continue to be affected by COVID or have placed issues on hold to cope with the first wave. We predict a continued upwards trend in domestic abuse cases, which will include financial abuse as finances tighten.
- 3.2.3 The team is continuing to see a 50% increase in demand on housing and benefits staff resources and our temporary accommodation costs based on existing demand and this is likely to continue for over 12 months. A second wave would likely have a more significant impact than the first wave and we are likely to see 24 month recovery period.

### **3.3 Community response - Planning for a potential second wave**

- 3.3.1 Planning is underway for a potential second wave in the autumn/winter 20/21. Work is currently taking place within the Norfolk Resilience Forum to identify worse case and most likely scenarios for Norfolk and the response required to address each (including resource), along with anticipated and concurrent challenges.
- 3.3.2 Regardless of scenario, operational management of the community response will sit with same team as in the first wave (Communities, Help Hub, Housing and Wellbeing). A second wave model would likely see districts councils providing the 'front door' to residents to contact to enable local response, using the Norfolk Vulnerability Hub to diverting food /financial request to Norfolk Assistance Scheme, prescription pick-ups to Voluntary Norfolk and general vulnerability to the relevant County services. Weekend calls will be dealt with as a joint approach with Norfolk County Council to differentiate between safeguarding and vulnerability and practical assistance.
- 3.3.3 We are constantly reviewing our procedures to make sure our temporary accommodation is utilised in the best and safe way. We successfully met demand and separated our accommodation to make sure capacity was made available. We will be working with other districts to encourage a coordinated approach to temporarily accommodation. There is an

expectation there will be a significant demand on housing services if a second wave was to occur. Evictions have been put on hold until 24 August 2020 from rented accommodation. This, coupled with the impact of the furlough scheme and families inability to pay rent will likely significantly increase the amount of individuals and families who are at risk of homelessness.

### **3.4 Assessment of approach**

- 3.4.1 The council undertook an incredible effort to ensure those that were most vulnerable within our communities received the support they needed, be it food or medical supplies, financial support, or vital housing.
- 3.4.2 This response was made possible by the redeployment of staff, particularly aided by the council's leisure centre team (as the leisure centres were closed due to lock down restrictions). In addition to this, the council's extensive network of volunteers, members and town and parish councils were also quick to mobilise and work in partnership with the council to ensure that those who needed help were given the support they needed.
- 3.4.2 A core working group of managers coordinated daily during the initial lockdown period to ensure key activities were delivered and to ensure understanding of the latest government policy changes and developments. This moved to twice weekly as the operating model became established and changes in government policy reduced.
- 3.4.3 The council also worked effectively with Norfolk Resilience Forum's community response cell, providing a coordinated approach, whilst also ensuring local needs were effectively met and that residents had access to council staff to provide support.
- 3.4.4 The help hub infrastructure already in place in South Norfolk enabled a quick and efficient scaling up to respond to the needs of our communities and within 10 days we had an operational COVID community response. This infrastructure combined a front facing help hub, with its own systems and staff, with a strong understanding and networks within our local communities. The ability to adapt our structures, the investment in the quality of our staff, and the resilience two councils, one team has brought, enabled us to react to changing circumstances which was a cornerstone of our response. The response was backed up by a countywide approach which by the nature of size and complexity took time to mobilise. This infrastructure supported our local response through various workstreams including food distribution and coordinating the shielded person response.
- 3.4.5 The model that was created demonstrated that a local response to identify and react quickly to residents needs, supported by a partnership approach was the most effective way to deal with the crisis. Our ability to redeploy leisure staff made the coping of an increase in demand much easier to deal with. These staff were able to deploy quickly, without having pressures from existing roles to deal with.
- 3.4.6 The circa 5000 proactive calls the Council completed as part of a countywide response took a considerable amount of resource to complete. However, under 5% of calls resulted in any action being required, compared to over 90% of action taken in reactive calls. Although a useful exercise, this demonstrated that putting in resources into reactive contact is a far more effective use of resource.
- 3.4.7 Alongside the local community support, a national call for volunteers proved to be effective in the number of people who volunteered. This was managed across Norfolk by the County Council and Voluntary Norfolk. Whilst contributing to the overall response. the time and resource to process these volunteers proved a slower response to supporting the community, with a system coming into being during the latter half of the initial crisis, being managed by the library service. The local district networks of volunteers therefore proved more responsive and provided quicker mobilisation.

- 3.4.8 During the crisis we provided 78 residents with safe, temporary accommodation. Many of these were sofa surfers, who could no longer stay at a property, rather than street homelessness. This is double the number we would expect to house in the same period last year. A second wave could increase demand and we will need to work with other districts to coordinate purchasing of additional temporary accommodation in a second wave to reduce duplication.
- 3.4.9 The community response went to seven days a week as soon as the crisis started which proved invaluable at the start with circa 150 calls in the first weekend in March, this has dropped to only one weekend call for all of July. During the second month of the crisis, Norfolk County Council created a countywide single number seven days a week. Whilst this caused issues at the start with two numbers, this settled down and a mechanism was established to pass information from one team to the other, and ensure a local response was given. Weekend calls continued to be important, although now the requirement is negligible this service will be temporarily stood down in August but will be stood up again if required.

### **Learning**

- 3.4.10 The redeployment of leisure centre staff was key to the successful community response and therefore, in the event of a second wave, consideration should be given to utilise volunteer networks and wider resource to support the community response, if leisure centres do not close as part of a potential second lockdown.
- 3.4.11 Guidance and policy was continuously changing and adapting as events developed both at a national and county level. The importance of excellent links with the SCG, TCG and wider partner colleagues was key and should continue in any future scenarios.
- 3.4.12 The district links to local community groups and volunteers networks was invaluable and enabled the council to effectively and quickly understand local need and provide support to those who were vulnerable.
- 3.4.13 Effective working across partners and volunteers was central to the success of the community response and excellent communication and coordination is essential to any future response.

## **4 FINANCIAL IMPACT ON SNC**

### **Action Taken**

- 4.1 The financial impact on SNC of Covid 19 had, and still has, the potential to be very significant. Information was also changing on a very frequent basis, often daily, as new announcements were made by Government.
- 4.2 An initial rough estimate of the potential financial impact on SNC was carried out by the Director of Resources, and shared with the MD on 17 March.
- 4.3 The Assistant Director Finance then took the lead on monitoring the financial impact. He was supported by one of the Finance Business Partners.
- 4.4 Covid 19 Budget Monitoring information was produced and presented to CMLT on a weekly basis from 7 April 2020. The frequency of this monitoring has now reduced to every other week.
- 4.5 Reports were also produced for Members as detailed in the table below.

Date	Member Meeting	Subject
13 May 20	Informal Emergency Committee	REVIEW OF 2020/21 BUDGETS Initial Points for Discussion
22 May 20	Emergency Committee	REVIEW OF 2020/21 BUDGETS Impact on Income Budgets and Saving Options
27 May 20	Informal Emergency Committee	REVIEW OF 2020/21 BUDGETS Initial Draft for Discussion
5 June 20	Emergency Committee	REVIEW OF 2020/21 BUDGETS
15 June 20	Special Full Council	REVIEW OF 2020/21 BUDGETS

4.6 The Council has also been required to submit financial impact returns to Government on a monthly basis. To date returns have been submitted on the following dates: 15 April, 15 May, 19 Jun, 31 July.

4.7 The AD Finance also attended regular catch up calls with the s151 officers across Norfolk to exchange information.

### **Assessment of Response**

4.8 In general, the Covid 19 financial monitoring went well.

4.9 Monitoring information had to be compiled from scratch and over time has expanded to cope with the myriad of funding sources.

4.10 At times it was challenging to keep up to date with the number of Government announcements. For instance, at the start of the pandemic there were daily updates via:

- The Coronavirus government policy daily briefing
- The LGA
- MHCLG
- LG Futures

Each one has to be checked for any financial information. Information was also often released in stages, for instance the Government would announce a new national grant, but the grant details at local authority level was often not released until a few days later, and the actual payment arrangements were announced later still.

4.11 Through effective lobbying with the District Council's Network, significant additional funding was given to councils from central government to support the covid response,

### **Learning Points**

4.11 There were resource implications for the finance team to support this regular monitoring.

4.12 Effective lobbying at a national level was critical to securing the additional funding required to support the council's response.

## **5 FINANCE / REVENUES TEAM INCLUDING DEBT COLLECTION**

### **Action Taken**

4.13 The key actions taken by the Finance / Revenues Team in response to the Covid 19 pandemic and lockdown are shown in the table below.

4.14 In essence these actions tend to relate to either:

- Reducing or suspending debt recovery action, to reduce the financial pressure on residents temporarily, and also workloads to focus on priority work.
- Amending the financial processes to ensure that key tasks (eg paying suppliers etc) could still be carried out.

Date	What	Rationale	Decision taken by
Wed 18 Mar 20	To <b>delay some</b> debt recovery action.	To reduce the financial pressure on residents temporarily, and also reduce call volumes and workload to focus on priority work.	AD Finance
Thu 19 Mar 20	To <b>suspend all</b> debt recovery action (will still send bills and reminders).	To reduce the financial pressure on residents temporarily, and also reduce call volumes and workload to focus on priority work.	CMLT
Mon 23 Mar 20	Provided guidance to staff on sundry debt deferrals.	To allow staff to provide effective appropriate answers to customer queries.	AD Finance
	Evening of Mon 23rd March - Prime Minister announced 3 week lock down		
Tue 24 Mar 20	To invoke the full business continuity process for Finance / Revenues	Announcement from Prime Minister last night means all movements of people are restricted	AD Finance
Tue 24 Mar 20	To suspend creation of overpaid housing benefit invoices.	Would add to the financial constraints of those already in difficulty. Overpayments remain on HB claims but will be recovered / pursued from July 2020.	Housing Benefit Manager
Thu 26 Mar 20	To amend timeframe for reporting 2019/20 provisional outturn figures; pushed back from early May to early June.	Pressure of work will mean target dates need to be pushed back in line with the relaxation of statutory accounts deadline from End May to End Jun.	AD Finance
Thu 26 Mar 20	To not chase payment if a Brown Bin DD fails or other non-payment. However, will continue to provide service.	Not a priority task, and could be due to financial hardship. Could also cause issue if we have to suspend Brown bin collections in coming weeks.	CMLT
Thu 26 Mar 20	To continue to collect Council Tax and NDR Direct Debits in April.	Some people can still afford to pay and changing arrangements would cause more disruption.	CMLT
Thu 26 Mar 20	To increase Director of Resources authorisation limit to £500k, and agreed to divert	To provide quicker authorisation of orders and invoices at this challenging time, and freeing MD up to	AD Finance (as s151 Officer)

Date	What	Rationale	Decision taken by
	any of MD's finance work to DoR.	focus on the Covid 19 response	
Wed 01 Apr 20	No need to wait for payments terms to be reached, before payment is made to suppliers	Following advice in the Cabinet Office Procurement Policy Note – Supplier Relief due to Covid 19.	AD Finance
Wed 01 Apr 20	Authorisation to breach Treasury Management Strategy limits (in particular in the main instant access bank accounts), due to the large receipt of Covid 19 funds.	We need to spend these funds quickly and thus cannot tie these up in longer term investments.	AD Finance
Wed 08 Apr 20	Agreement for some of the SNC finance transactional staff to attend the SNC Office to do tasks that cannot be done at home	Tasks are important to keep the service running	Director of Resources
Tue 14 Apr 20	To send out a 'friendly' reminder letter out to Council Tax non payers	To help encourage payment where tax payer able to do so.	CMLT
Tue 12 May 20	To resume issuing CTAX debt statutory reminders from 22 May.	Need to prompt people to pay if they can, they have already had a friendly reminder letter.	CMLT
Fri 15 May 20	Sundry Debt chasing may resume	Need to restart some debt collection work.	AD Finance

Source: Primarily Finance / Revenues Service log for Covid-19 issues decisions and actions

- 4.15 In addition with particular reference to finance controls the following changes (as detailed in the Annual Governance Statement) were implemented:
- Accepted approval by email (as opposed to wet signatures).
  - Authorisation of business grants carried out by s151 officer (over and above normal authorised signatory limit).
  - Held more monies in bank account than normal, to respond to payment requests (particularly the business grants).
  - Business grant payments were made based on requests as submitted with limited pre-payment checks (as requested by Government, in order to get payments out quickly).
  - A change of system to pay hardship payments, payments are personally authorised by Assistant Director twice a week to ensure quick payment.

### **Assessment of Response**

- 4.16 In general, the Finance function held up well during the pandemic. Financial processes continued to be carried out and a firm but fair approach to debt recovery was taken.
- 4.17 Rates of debt collection for Council Tax and Business Rates are monitored monthly. These are down slightly on previous years but are holding up well compared to informal feedback from a number of other Councils.

Council Tax Cash Collected in Month	Apr £'000	May £'000	Jun £'000
SNC - Net Collectable Debit (Net of benefit & TR)	95,670	95,032	95,136

<b>Council Tax Cash Collected in Month</b>	Apr £'000	May £'000	Jun £'000
Current Year Cash Collected	9,986	18,513	26,902
Previous Year Cash Collected	128	230	322
% of net debt collected	10.44%	19.48%	28.28%
% of net debt collected - 19/20	10.83%	19.78%	28.60%
% of net debt collected - 18/19	10.83%	19.75%	28.67%
% of net debt collected - 17/18	10.88%	19.93%	28.81%
<i>Reduction</i>	-0.41%	-0.34%	-0.42%

<b>NDR Cash Collected in Month</b>	Apr £'000	May £'000	Jun £'000
SNC - Net Collectable Debit (Net of reliefs & TR)	20,394	19,515	19,401
Current Year Cash Collected	1,830	3,054	4,965
Previous Year Cash Collected	139	82	72
% of net debt collected	8.97%	15.65%	25.59%
% of net debt collected - 19/20	9.93%	19.26%	27.82%
% of net debt collected - 18/19	8.93%	19.57%	27.88%
% of net debt collected - 17/18	8.10%	18.25%	27.83%
<i>Reduction</i>	-0.01%	-3.38%	-2.25%

### **Learning Points**

- 4.18 There are still some paper based / manual processes, which made it challenging to adopt a fully offsite service provision. These processes will need to be looked at as part of the SPARK improvement process.
- 4.19 There are still some key person dependencies within Finance. As part of bring the One Team together these are due to be addressed. However, the pandemic hit before new ways of working were implemented.
- 4.20 At times it was difficult to obtain the normal authorisations, as staff were working off site. Authorisation limits therefore need to be reviewed and potentially increased to provide appropriate flexibility.

## **5 MANDATORY BUSINESS GRANTS**

### **Action Taken**

- 5.1 The key actions taken to make the mandatory business grant payments are detailed in the following table.

<b>Date</b>	<b>What</b>
Wed 11 Mar 20	As part of the Budget, the Government announced a Small Business Grant Fund (SBGF) of £3,000 per eligible business.
Tue 17 Mar 20	The SBGF was increased to £10,000 and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Grant Scheme (RHLG) was announced (RHLG payments to be £10,000 or £25,000).
Tues 24 Mar 20	The initial draft of the guidance for these schemes was issued <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-business-support-grant-funding">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-business-support-grant-funding</a>
Mon 30 March 20	CIVICA Open Revenues software installed to facilitate the collection of bank detail evidence to allow grant payments to be made.

Weds 1 – Tues 14 Apr 20	Lettering and email mailshot to all properties identified as being potentially eligible, signposting them to apply via the web form (we contacted 2,931 during this first wave).
Thurs 2 Apr 20	First grant payments made totaling £3.835m were made to customers our Business Rates team identified as being eligible. These were made to customers we already held bank details for – so they did not need to apply.
Fri 3 Apr 20	CIVICA Web form published on SNC website to allow businesses to claim their grants.
Fri 3 Apr – 21 May 20	Grant payments made on a daily basis throughout April and most of May. From 21 <sup>st</sup> May (as the numbers started to reduce) payments continued but now on a weekly basis.
Fri 24 Apr 20	Second wave of emails and letters sent to those that had not responded to our initial mailshot at the start of April.
Mon 4 May 20	Outbound calls made to those customers that did not respond to either of the earlier mailshots.
Tues 28 Jul 20	Final mailshot to the remaining 90 businesses that have not claimed their grant to advise them that the scheme will close by 28 August 2020

5.2 The instruction given by Government was that these grants should be processed as soon after 1 April as possible.

5.3 A detailed post payment assurance process is now being carried out in line with Government requirements issued on 16 June. The detail of this assurance process is not within the public domain, due to the sensitive nature of the verification process that is being followed.

5.4 The total value of mandatory grants paid out to date is shown in the following table.

<u>Mandatory Business Rate Grants</u>		SNC
	Value	No of Grant Payments
<b>Total Processed</b>		
Small Business Rate Relief £10k Grants	19,920,000	1,992
Retail, Hospitality and Leisure £10k Grants	3,020,000	302
Retail, Hospitality and Leisure £25k Grants	5,500,000	220
	<b>28,440,000</b>	<b>2,514</b>

5.5 The Council has also been required to submit a weekly return to Government detailing the number and value of grants paid.

5.6 The Government has also recently announced that the mandatory grant scheme must close by Friday 28 August 20.

### **Assessment of Response**

5.7 The payment of the grants to business was a success. This payment process was established quickly, particularly given that staff were having to work remotely and the fact that this happened at the busiest time of year namely annual billing.

5.8 The Council performance in paying out grants was in line with, if not better than many other authorities. As at 30/07/2020 over 97% of potential grants have been made. There are now fewer than 80 potentially eligible business that have not claimed. They have all been



contacted a number of times but have not provided details for grants to be able to be paid out. This could be because they do not want to claim, or indeed are not eligible to claim (for instance they ceased trading before 11 March – the cut-off date).

### **Learning Points**

- 5.9 We did not hold email addresses and / or bank details for many local businesses as there was no reason for us to hold this information as a number of business have no rates liability.
- 5.10 There were a few cases where businesses premises had changed hands and we had not been notified. Therefore, it was more time consuming to identify the correct recipient for the grant.
- 5.11 Consideration therefore needs to be given to trying to obtain additional data, albeit that we will not be able to require this, and we need to be mindful of data protection rules which require us to only hold essential data.

## **6 DISCRETIONARY BUSINESS GRANTS**

### **Action Taken**

- 6.1 The key actions taken to make the discretionary business grant payments are detailed in the following table.
- 6.2

<b>Date</b>	<b>What</b>
Fri 1 May 20	Government announce a Discretionary Grant Fund (DGF) scheme to support those businesses not eligible for the earlier SBGF or RHLG schemes - highlighting their four main areas of focus - B&B, Shared Spaces, Charities and Market Traders.  <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/887310/local-authority-discretionary-fund-la-guidance-v2.pdf">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/887310/local-authority-discretionary-fund-la-guidance-v2.pdf</a>  LAs to have discretion to add their own areas relevant to support local business sectors - South Norfolk's allocation was c£1.5m.
w/c 11 May 20	Discussions started with other Norfolk LA's and the New Enterprise LEP to explore whether a single County-wide scheme could be established.
w/c 11 May 20	Using data held by existing Council teams, financial modelling took place to estimate how much of the DGF allocation would be spent. This allowed release of funds for other sectors specific to South Norfolk.
20 & 29 May 20	Further discussions with each LA across Norfolk showed some similarities and cross overs, however quickly established that it would not be possible to have one single scheme in operation for the entire County.
5 June 20	Scheme designed, modelled and costed by Officers. It was approved by Members at Emergency Committee to be launched in two phases.
Weds 3 June 20	Monitoring reports created to ensure that payments were accounted for and that no duplication was made. Separation of duties, including sign-off and payment approval put in place.
Tues 9 June 20	Web-forms developed using internal resources launched on SNC website for applicants.

Tues 9 June 20	Launch of Phase 1 – Government's four sectors (B&B, Shared Space, Charities & Market Traders) + Retail with RV between 51,000 – 70,000, Childcare Nurseries, Businesses occupying properties between 11/03/2020 and 23/03/2020, Supply Chain businesses & Healthcare.
Fri 12 June 20	First payments made to successful applicants.
Fri 3 July 20	Launch of Phase 2 – all of the above + those businesses operating in Manufacturing, Construction and Professional, Scientific & Technical Services.
Ongoing	Waves of promotion of the scheme using social media, our own website, local trade bodies (for construction, accountancy, manufacturing) and direct emailing.

- 6.3 The guidance given by Government was that these grants should be by application and that the first payments under the scheme would be received by businesses by early June.
- 6.4 A detailed post payment assurance process is now being carried out in line with Government requirements. The detail of this assurance process is not within the public domain, due to the sensitive nature of the verification process that is being followed.
- 6.5 Applications continue to be assessed and the scheme also remains open to new applicants – however the total value of discretionary grants paid out to date is shown in the following table (as at 03/08/2020).

Category	Applications	Paid	£	Declined
B&B	15	12	18,500	1
Market Trader	7	5	27,500	1
Charity	23	20	41,000	1
Shared Space	34	25	130,000	4
Other	124	90	585,000	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>802,000</b>	<b>14</b>

- 6.6 The Council has also been required to submit a weekly return to Government detailing the number and value of grants paid.
- 6.7 The Government has also recently announced that the mandatory grant scheme must close by Friday 28 August 20.

### **Assessment of Response**

- 6.8 We realised that these applications would be more involved than the first two schemes. Priority was given to ensuring a consistent outcome for each application which resulted in it taking longer to approve each grant application that was made.
- 6.9 It has also proven difficult to assess the true financial impact on some sectors (particularly those in rural areas) where income is heavily cash based. Whilst this has been done, it has added time to the overall assessment process.

## **Learning Points**

- 6.10 Department for Business Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) have acknowledged that Guidance Notes for this scheme were published later than they had hoped, and, in many instances Local Authorities had already designed and published their schemes.
- 6.11 As time progressed the scheme could have been made broader to accommodate other sectors. The ability to vary the scheme, via delegated powers (with the agreement of the Director and Portfolio holder) would be beneficial in future.
- 6.12 Further work is required to build a database about the businesses that operate within our area. Whilst the Business Rates database is maintained there is additional work that can be done (and is already underway) to make sure we have up to date trading data including contact details for all business operations.

## **7 RECOVERY PLAN**

- 7.1 In July Full Council endorsed the Council's recovery plan, with the focus on the council now shifting from response to recovery.
- 7.2 The Recovery Plan outlines the planning work that is now under way to support the recovery from the pandemic in South Norfolk and Broadland. Early planning is critical to ensure that we are clear on the priorities for recovery across the district, while also enabling us to internally to review changes needing to be made to how we operate in the future.
- 7.3 The Recovery Plan is shaped around a 6-point plan based on 3 key themes that need to be progressed to ensure we are prepared for recovery. This is outlined below:



- 7.4 While it is important to set out our early priorities for recovery, it is also recognised that the plan will need to remain flexible as the impacts of the pandemic become clearer over time or indeed a second wave arises. Therefore, the Recovery Plan will remain under review and adapted where needed.

## **8 SUMMARY OF KEY LEARNING FROM COUNCIL RESPONSE**

- 8.1 The above report has set out the comprehensive response that the council has taken to support its communities and businesses through the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 8.2 The report has set out an overview of the key action taken with regard to governance, communities and finance, with the economic response having been picked up as a separate report to Scrutiny.

8.3 The report has also set out a range of key learning from the council's response, and some of the key points are set out below:

- 8.3.1 **Closeness to communities and local connection proved critical to an effective community response** – The links and understanding of community and place were critical to the council being able mobilise its response so quickly and effectively to those in most need.
- 8.3.2 **The importance of securing additional funding from central government** – extensive work went into making the case to central government for additional funding for the council and councils nationally. The success of this lobbying was critical in ensuring that financially the council could respond effectively to crisis financially.
- 8.3.3 **Working with public sector partners as part of Norfolk Resilience Forum to influence response was critical**- the Councils response demonstrated that working effectively in partnership was key to an effective response, ensuring the council was able to influence the wider county response, as well as ensure solutions were tailored to the districts local needs.
- 8.3.4 **Resilience of officers** – officers across the council worked at exceptional pace to deliver the council's response to Covid, often in different roles and doing additional hours. Consideration should be given to ensure the long-term resilience of officers by a review of resource to ensure that the council can effectively respond to a second wave if it were to occur.
- 8.3.5 **New ways of working** – over the past few months, through remote working, officers and members have demonstrated a new way of working, including increased virtual meetings and enhanced flexibility to where and when people work. The benefits of this new way of working should not be lost as we transition from response and recovery and consideration given to how this approach can feed into a new model of working longer term, with relevant technology investment to support this model.
- 8.3.6 **Emergency committee**- consideration should be given to the resource impacts of the emergency committee and the most effective future governance mechanisms to support the council response in the most efficient and impactful way.

## 9 ISSUES AND RISKS

- 9.1 Resource Implications – As outlined in the above report, there were significant draws on resources to support the council's covid response. Consideration should be given to the long-term resilience of the staff team to ensure an effective response to any future wave of the pandemic
- 9.2 Legal Implications – Not applicable to this report
- 9.3 Equality Implications – Equality analysis for those most vulnerable needing support will be monitored to understand trends and any action required.
- 9.4 Environmental Impact – Not applicable to this report.
- 9.5 Crime and Disorder – Not applicable to this report.
- 9.6 Risks – Ongoing risks continue to be monitored as part of the council's risk register and assessment process.

## 10 RECOMENDATIONS

Scrutiny is asked to:

- 1 Note the response of the Council to supporting the district's communities and businesses during the Covid 19 pandemic.
- 2 Endorse the key learning identified in the report and make any recommendations regarding future action.

## Scrutiny Committee – Work Programme

In setting future Scrutiny **TOPICS**, members are asked to consider the following: **T**imely – **O**bjective – **P**erformance – **I**nterest – **C**orporate Priority

- T** Is this the right **time** to review this issue and is there sufficient **officer time** and resource to conduct the review? What is the **timescale**?  
**O** What is the reason for review; do officers have a clear **objective**?  
**P** Can **performance** in this area be improved by input from Scrutiny?  
**I** Is there sufficient **interest** (particularly from the public)? The concerns of local people should influence the issues chosen for scrutiny.  
**C** Will the review assist the Council to achieve its **Corporate Priorities**?

Date of meeting	Topic	Organisation / Officer / Responsible member	Objectives
14 Oct 2020	Community Grants	Assistant Director – Individuals & Families; and Portfolio Holder for Better Lives	The Committee to consider and review the proposed changes to the Community Grants process and make any recommendations to Cabinet, which will consider this at its meeting on 2 November 2020
	ASB & Crime	Assistant Director – Individuals & Families; and Portfolio Holder for Clean & Safe Environment	The Committee to consider and review the Council's approach to anti-social behaviour and crime, and ensure that our community is safe. Partners to be invited, including the Police. Members make any recommendations to Cabinet, which will consider this at its meeting on 2 November 2020.
	Early Help Approach	Assistant Director – Individuals & Families; and Portfolio Holder for Better Lives	The Committee to consider and review the Council's Early help Approach and the future model and make any recommendations to Cabinet, which will consider this at its meeting on 2 November 2020. Partners in the Hub to also be invited to attend the meeting.
19 Nov 2020	<i>No items scheduled</i>		
21 Dec 2020	2021/22 Strategic Plan with the Delivery Plan	Chief of Staff & all cabinet members	For members to review the draft 2021/22 Strategic Plan with the Delivery Plan and make recommendations as appropriate.
27 Jan 2021	<i>No items scheduled</i>		
11 Feb 2021	2021/22 Budget & Longer-Term Financial Strategy	S151 Officer; and Portfolio Holder for Finance & Resources	Scrutiny Committee to consider the Council's 2021/22 budget and the recommendations of Cabinet. Members to also formulate a recommendation to Council regarding the budget for consideration at its meeting on February 2021.
25 Feb 2021	<i>To be held in the event of a call-in only</i>		

Date of meeting	Topic	Organisation / Officer / Responsible member	Objectives
31 March 2021	<i>No items scheduled</i>		
Sept 2021	Environment Strategy	Environment Manager and Portfolio Holder for Clean & Safe Environment	Scrutiny Committee to review the effectiveness of the Strategy and assess whether outcomes have been achieved. To make recommendations as appropriate.

Date	Topic	Responsible Officer	Resolution and Recommendations	Progress	Outcome
5 Aug 2020	<b>REVIEW OF MARKET TOWNS CONFIDENCE CAMPAIGN</b>	Assistant Director of Economic Growth	<div>1. To note the contents of the report; and</div> <div>2. To recommend that:<div><div>a. Officers consider the suggestions put forward by the Committee and provide feedback at a future meeting in six months' time.</div><div>b. Cabinet considers future free parking in the Council's car parks during the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to encourage continued local support of the market towns.</div></div></div>	<div>Officers are currently reviewing this</div> <div>Cabinet to consider this at the next meeting on 28 September 2020</div>	Members were able to review the work undertaken in order to support the reopening of businesses in the Market Towns. This will enable the Council to effectively respond to a future second wave of the virus, which could lead to further lockdowns. In addition, the review allows lessons to be learned and ways of working adapted accordingly.



# CABINET CORE AGENDA 2020/21

Date	Key	Title of Report	Responsible Officer	Portfolio Holder	Exempt?
Council Meeting 21 September 2020					
<b>28 Sept</b>	N	Greater Norwich Homelessness Strategy 2020-2025 and South Norfolk and Broadland Rough Sleeper Statement 2020-2022	Victoria Parsons/ Mike Pursehouse	Yvonne Bendle	N
	Y	Interim Approach to Performance Management Framework	Nicola Tullock	Josh Worley	N
	N	Municipal Bonds Agency	Debbie Lorimer	Josh Worley	N
	N	Briefing on Delivery Plan update post-COVID-19	Sinead Carey	John Fuller	N
	N	Broadland and South Norfolk Councils – Our Plan for Recovery	Sinead Carey	John Fuller	N
	N	Council Tax Scheme	Richard Dunsire	Yvonne Bendle	N
	Y	Zone 4 Building Lease	Debbie Lorimer	Lisa Neal	Y
<b>2 Nov</b>	N	Housing Standards Enforcement Procedure	Leigh Booth	Yvonne Bendle	N
	N	ASB and Crime	Mike Pursehouse	Michael Edney	N
	N	Housing Allocation Policy	Richard Dunsire	Yvonne Bendle	N
	N	Housing and Wellbeing Strategy	Richard Dunsire	Yvonne Bendle	N
	N	Community Grants	Kerrie Gallagher	Kay Mason Billig	N
	N	Q2 Strategic Performance, Finance and Risks	Melanie Wiles/ Sinead Carey	Josh Worley	N
	N	Broadland and South Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Strategy	Sarah Oldfield/ Jamie Sutterby	Yvonne Bendle	N
	N	Temporary Accommodation Review	Richard Dunsire	Yvonne Bendle	N
	N	Diss OPE	Mark Heazle		N
	N	Planning Enforcement Review	Helen Mellors	Lisa Neal	N
<b>7 Dec</b>	N	Procurement Options	Rodney Fincham	Alison Thomas	N
	N	Housing Standards Empty Homes Policy and other Discretionary Enforcement Options	Kevin Philcox	Yvonne Bendle	N

Date	Key	Title of Report	Responsible Officer	Portfolio Holder	Exempt?
	N	Consultation followed by adoption of CAA and Boundary Amendments for Burston, Forncett, Gissing, Thorpe Abbots, Winfarthing and Wrampingham Conservation Areas	Chris Bennett	Lisa Neal	N
Council Meeting 14 December 2020					
<b>11 Jan</b>	N	Future Community Help Hub Approach	Kerrie Gallagher	Yvonne Bendle	N
	N	Recycling Facility	Simon Phelan	Michael Edney	N
	Y	Greater Norwich 5-Year Investment Programme	Phil Courtier	John Fuller	N
		Leisure – Transformation	Simon Phelan	Alison Thomas	N
<b>8 Feb</b>	N	Q3 Strategic Performance/Finance and Risks	Mel Wiles/ Sinead Carey	Josh Worley	
	N	Community Transport	Kerrie Gallagher	Yvonne Bendle	N
<b>15 Mar</b>	N	Community Wellbeing Offer	Dan Goodwin/ Simon Phelan	Yvonne Bendle	N

Key decisions are those which result in income, expenditure or savings with a gross full year effect of £100,000 or 10% of the Council's net portfolio budget whichever is the greater which has not been included in the relevant portfolio budget, or are significant (e.g. in environmental, physical, social or economic) in terms of its effect on the communities living or working in an area comprising two or more electoral divisions in the area of the local authority.