

<i>REPORT TO:</i>	Scrutiny Commission
<i>SUBJECT:</i>	Community Recovery Post Covid -19
<i>LEAD OFFICER:</i>	Eileen Mallon
<i>CABINET LEAD MEMBER:</i>	Cllr. J Morgan
<i>ORIGIN OF ITEM:</i>	The Scrutiny Commission on 1st June 2020 resolved that a single substantive agenda item for each meeting concentrates on one of the recovery cells as listed in the report of the Chief Executive 'COVID-19: Council approach to community, economic and organisational recovery'.
<i>BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE</i>	To provide the Commission with more detail on the approach to community recovery.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 At its meeting on 1st June 2020 the Scrutiny Commission received a report from the Chief Executive outlining the impact of the Covid – 19 outbreak on the financial and operational position of the Council. In addition, the Commission was advised of the actions taken to respond to the emergency and begin the recovery for the Community, Economy and Organisation.
- 1.2 The Economic Recovery cell actions were considered at the previous meeting on 6th July 2020, and this paper outlines the Community Cell approach to recovery. The original Community Cell work programme is attached at Appendix A. This has now been archived due to the number of actions completed, and the latest 'live' action plan is attached at Appendix B. These work programmes give an overview of the range of actions that have taken place since the start of the pandemic crisis.

The objectives of the Community Cell are to

- help the Charnwood community emerge from the coronavirus pandemic stronger than ever, and in a positive and creative way, build on the experiences and challenges that have been faced together and overcome
- develop improved networks of support and inclusivity through our partners in the voluntary sector and other agencies.
- ensure that our towns and villages can return to being vibrant, safe and welcoming places where over time we can come together to enjoy shared events
- ensure no-one is left behind, and those self-isolating for longer are supported and cared for as valued members of our community

2. Report

2.1 Response phase

At the start of the pandemic, the Council's focus was on the response element, which was mainly driven by the Local Resilience Forum through the activation of emergency plan processes. This included setting up the community hub to support those who were shielding or unable to access critical support services and food purchases, providing accommodation for rough sleepers and those at imminent risk of rough sleeping, closing open spaces and play areas, while dealing with the organisational impact of the closure of the Southfields office and most employees working remotely.

In addition, arrangements had to be made to protect those staff who were still operating in residents homes, most specifically the housing repairs team which has continued to respond to emergency repair requests throughout.

These actions were all covered by the community cell, and the extent to which officers became involved in the planning and execution of the response phase is evident from the scale of the actions contained in the original work programme attached at Appendix A.

It is important to note that during this phase, actions were highly reactive, as many of the regulations or government requirements were often issued with short notice implementation deadlines, and involved officers undertaking a significant amount of work to deliver them.

The work programme has been divided into a number of workstreams as follows

Building Stronger Communities

- Facilitate community initiatives to enable the community to reconnect and support return to the 'new normal' in a safe way.
- Support the community in recovery by coordinating living displays in various locations across the Borough, to encourage community cohesion and pride in the local area.
- Work with the Voluntary and Community Sector, by developing improved networks of support to build a better Charnwood.

Building Safe Spaces

- Support members of our community to return to our villages, towns and open spaces by making them safely accessible.

- Ensure a safe environment is upheld in the public realm, including the cleansing of facilities, for our residents.
- Assess the impact of the pandemic and the resource implications upon our VCS partners.
- Support our housing partners to tackle increased demand and any changes to housing priorities created by the pandemic.
- Work with the County Council and other partners to support safe travel and access to work and recreation.

Building Community Connections

- Alongside our partners, create frameworks and mechanisms for supporting our residents across the Borough, who will continue to be unable to leave their homes.
- Alongside our partners heighten support for our most vulnerable residents, including those suffering domestic abuse, financial hardship etc.
- Support our residents across the Borough to continue to build healthy minds and active bodies.
- Work with our partners to help support individuals in isolation and any residents suffering from loneliness by facilitating opportunities to build friendships and remain involved in wider society.
- Develop initiatives to support those in digital poverty and seek to increase virtual worlds for those people reverting to online support rather than physical.

Building a Lasting Legacy

- Utilise environmental benefits sustained throughout the pandemic to enhance the Council's carbon neutral agenda.
- Create and promote sustainable transport options to enable our residents to continue to increase air quality improvements.
- Celebrate our volunteers, community heroes, and key workers through positive initiatives, to provide recognition for those supporting the current and future situation.
- Harness and sustain the sense of community spirit that has been generated in response to the crisis to build a lasting legacy.

Key areas of activity

Throughout the response period, there have been some key activity areas which have helped us to deliver the objectives for the cell, and these are explained more fully below.

Charnwood Community Action Hub

The Council launched Charnwood Community Action (CCA) hub, in partnership with John Storer Charnwood and other voluntary sector organisations in the borough. The aim of the hub was to ensure that residents within the borough who maybe struggling were provided with appropriate support and advise during the pandemic. The Council committed £126,000 to support the services being provided out of the CCA. The CCA have been supported by other key partners such as The Bridge, Fearon Hall, Gorse Covert Community Centre and Equality Action.

In addition, the hub provides guidance and central co-ordination to groups and people who were volunteering to help others in the borough during this time. Many new community groups were quickly established throughout the borough to provide help to their local communities.

During the initial set up it became clear that many of the existing food banks in the borough could not cope with the demand and many of their volunteers were no longer able to help and as a result closed. The food bank co-ordination and food distribution provided via the Charnwood Food Poverty Group (CFPG) also could not cope with the increased demand that was created as a result of the pandemic and were also struggling to maintain volunteer levels.

All food bank activity was related to the hub at John Storer House and a food parcel delivery service set up. A total of 8465 food parcels have been delivered, as at Friday 17th July. These figures include deliveries to food bank clients (due to temporary closures) already registered with existing food banks prior to the hub set up. The hub has had 850 individuals registered to receive food parcels with over 600 recurring weekly deliveries.

Services provided through CCA include food essential items delivery, prescription collection drop off telephone contact/ welfare checks and advice and signposting to other services. A website was created to provide information about the services being provide and referral processes were put in place to ensure that individuals received the required support.

The CCA also partnered with the Loughborough Against Corona group during this period who were providing a matching platform for volunteers and residents to deliver neighbourly services and low-level

support e.g. helping to collect and deliver shopping and medical supplies for residents in the borough. During this period, they had 997 volunteers register with them and have completed 1235 tasks. This has included over 429 shopping trips with over 392 prescription collections and 283 recurring jobs.

Providing Support for those Shielding

The Council has worked in partnership with Leicestershire County Council (LCC) to provide support to those individuals who were told to shield by the government during this period. These are people identified as clinically extremely vulnerable and who may be at high risk of serious illness if contracting COVID-19. The government is currently advising people to shield until 31 July, and for those in the former Leicester extended lockdown areas which fell within the Borough, until 17th August.

All of the individuals in this cohort were written to and provided with additional support by registering through a government website. LCC were identified as the Local Authority providing overall support, but they have worked with Districts through their community hub provision to ensure residents were provided with the identified support. To assist with this the Council and the CCA made approximately 1700 telephone calls to Priority 4 Shielded individuals to identify whether they had any support needs. In addition, food parcels have also been provided to some individuals that are shielding to ensure that their dietary needs are met.

Sport and Active Recreation

On the 23rd March all face to face activities provided by the Council's sport and active recreation team were suspended. In line with Government guidance Active Charnwood have been focusing their efforts on promoting activity in the home via various social media platforms including; CBC/Charnwood Active Alliance websites, emails, newsletters and video channels such as You Tube. The first videos went public on 22nd April. Playlists have been created for family activities, gentle activities for adults (seated exercise), weight management maintainers classes, exercise classes for GP Referral participants and activities for people with learning disabilities. These videos are continuing to receive views daily.

Both Charnwood's' Easter and Summer Holiday Activity Programme for young people aged 5-16 years have also been moved online. The 'virtual' 6-week summer programme is a combination of pre-recorded and live online activity sessions and face to face delivery by some of our key providers (subject to current Covid-19 guidelines). Sessions include; daily family activities, love family fit with Tayplay, football skills with Leicester City Football Club and dance with Bhangra Fusion. There are also resources and activity ideas for people to do in their own time throughout the holiday period including den building, orienteering, cycling, multi-sports, tennis and running.

National and local physical activity campaigns continue to be promoted through Active Charnwood's social media channels including gardening week, walking month, Active Foxes, 2.6 challenge, Bike Week, Healthy Eating Week, Learning Disability Awareness Week, Men's Health Week and Love Parks Week.

Key Public Health messages are being produced and distributed on a weekly keep in touch sport and physical activity newsletter which is shared to Active Charnwood's participant database (4602 members) and club database (100 + clubs).

Local instructors are being utilised to deliver weekly yoga, circuit and mindfulness sessions to all Council staff, these are accessed via zoom and are free of charge to staff. On average 40 members of staff attend these sessions a week. Live physical activity sessions for Council staff children (Joe Wick's concept) is due to be launched next week. In addition, the weekly staff newsletter (Circulation 500+ employees) features a section on how to keep fit and healthy during lockdown and sport and physical activity opportunities.

In partnership with a range of partners Active Charnwood have been distributing physical activity bags to encourage older people to stay active at home. To date a total of 872 packs have been distributed.

In addition, Active Charnwood have also delivered 100 physical activity bags to encourage those families that have little or no access to sports equipment to be active at home.

Leisure, Culture and Events

Following the Government decision to close leisure centres, theatres, and museums, these buildings have remained closed to the public. Essential and planned maintenance has been ongoing to ensure when they do open to the public, they are ready to do so.

Plans continue to be made for the safe return of Charnwood Museum in August. This will include a one-way system and new ways of working to replace traditional interaction with the exhibits. While in lockdown the Museum ran a range of online projects and initiatives in partnership with Leicestershire County Council. These initiatives were designed to support and engage with local communities.

Due to Government guidance most of the Summer events programmed have now been cancelled. Event organisers have been supported in the decision-making process and provided with advice in line with Government guidance.

Consultation continues with event organisers and communities on events planned for autumn and winter months along with alternative suggestions to support the most vulnerable and at risk. This may

include the use of social media to support events such as Remembrance Day.

Plans are also being developed and will be considered by Cabinet on 13th August on the major events that may need to be cancelled or adapted. Special Christmas Markets, the use of social media and events that require advanced tickets are being considered, informed by the latest Government guidance.

Parks and Green Spaces

Parks and green spaces have played a significant role in supporting the community in both the response and recovery phases of coronavirus. They have formed part of the critical infrastructure that has supported residents needs for outside exercise and enjoyment, particularly where outside space in residents' homes is restricted.

At the start of lockdown, in line with Government guidance, play areas, outdoor gyms and skateparks had to be closed and measures were taken to prevent usage. The guidance was changed which allowed these facilities to be reopened with effect from 4th July. The completion of risk assessments, installation of new signage, and the removal of some equipment for social distancing allowed the Council's facilities to be open and operational from 6th July. An enhanced cleaning and inspection regime is in place.

It was necessary to close the Councils outdoor sports facilities like the golf course and tennis courts. Grass pitch sports like football, rugby and cricket have been suspended by their governing organisations. The golf course and tennis courts are now open, following revised guidance, and grass pitch sports are gradually being reinstated. This will be without the use of changing rooms or other associated facilities i.e. cricket pavilions for lunches.

It was considered necessary to close the Outwoods for a period at the start of lockdown. This decision was made knowing that other local attractions like Bradgate Park and Beacon Hill had decided to close. The combination of increased visitor numbers and the narrow paths in the woods made social distancing very difficult for visitors. All three of these locations reopened simultaneously on the 13th May.

Routine grounds maintenance on all of the green spaces has continued throughout the period, however, the pandemic has had an impact on our ability to source supplies and contractors to undertake the repair of play equipment, fencing and other items.

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

On the 26th March 2020, the Government instructed all Councils to arrange accommodation for anyone sleeping rough or at imminent risk of sleeping rough to help reduce the spread of coronavirus.

The primary aim was to ensure anyone who was homeless within the Borough was offered somewhere safe to stay. Many people who are homeless in Charnwood have complex needs and vulnerabilities, and it can be challenging to identify, contact and encourage them to access accommodation and ensure that they remain in the accommodation provided.

The Council's Housing Needs Team were active from the outset with the CBC Lettings Team reserving spaces in bed and breakfast accommodation and the Housing Options Team working in partnership with voluntary and statutory agencies to identify people in need of assistance.

Since the 23rd March, 85 people have been placed in accommodation, and as at 27th July 2020, 25 rough sleepers or those at imminent risk of rough sleeping remained in Bed and Breakfast/emergency accommodation, and 7 in interim accommodation in the Council's housing stock. We would usually expect to be dealing with around 2 to 3 rough sleepers in normal circumstances.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has asked Council's to start planning the next steps for accommodating and supporting people to move on from the emergency accommodation that has been provided. It is clear that the Council will be dealing with the needs of this group for some time, and we will look to secure funding and support from any government initiatives which may emerge.

In relation to other causes of homelessness, the Council has not seen a particularly high increase in Domestic Abuse, Prison Release and Hospital Discharge cases as expected or reported nationally.

Supporting Vulnerable Tenants and Residents

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic the landlord services teams, particularly those providing warden services and tenancy support, have engaged our most vulnerable tenants in trying to support them during these times.

This includes

- Outbound telephone calls to check their wellbeing are being made to tenants in sheltered accommodation by mobile wardens, who are currently unable to undertake home visits in person;
- This service was also provided for other Lifeline customers;
- As part of this service, those contacted have been asked whether they needed help with a food parcel, collection of prescriptions or some other service. Those who requested such help were referred to Charnwood Community Action (CCA);

- Similarly, all single tenants in general needs accommodation over the age of 70 were called by tenancy support and tenancy and estate management officers to check their wellbeing and refer to CCA if support was requested;
- Nearly 950 calls were made in April and May to single tenants over 70 not in sheltered or Lifeline accommodation. Over 430 of those were over the age of 80;
- Since the middle of April nearly 90 vulnerable tenants / lifeline customers have been referred to CCA.
- Since the middle of April over 18,100 calls have been made to vulnerable tenants, an average of nearly 1,300 per week. Since the middle of May nearly all calls are now being carried out by just the warden and Lifeline services.
- In addition to vulnerable tenants, officers identified a number of elderly residents living in other accommodation on their own, through electoral registration records. Where telephone numbers were available, officers from the Council's private sector housing Lightbulb team contacted around 900 residents to make welfare checks and offer advice and support. From these calls, 21 residents were referred to the community hub for support.

Engagement with Parish / Town Councils

The Council identified the need for an officer to act as a single point of contact for Parish/Town Councils to try and assist with the co-ordination of issues and queries being raised, and an officer was re-deployed on a part time basis into this role on 28th April 2020 to act as the Parish / Town Council Link Officer.

This role has ensured the flow of information between the Council and the Parish and Town Councils. The nature of the support and advice that has been requested has been varied. It has enabled the Council to respond to queries raised and for information to be disseminated in a co-ordinated manner.

During the response phase key areas of work included:

- Contacting Parish and Town councils to assess and feedback their position to relevant Council departments
- Sharing information, keeping them updated and answering requests for help and support
- Building rapport and relationships with the clerks

During this phase many local community volunteer groups were created and stepped in to support the vulnerable in their community. We saw community spirit and neighbours pulling together, offering prescription collection services, food deliveries and 'checking-in' on neighbours, and we were able to ensure that the Parish / Town Councils were aware of, and connected to, this support.

During the recovery phase much of the role has been working alongside other departments within the Council to provide advice and information to Parish/Town Councils. Examples include risk assessments, signage, equipment information, cleansing regimes, government guidance interpretation, information on PPE and links of where more details can be found.

3.0 Ongoing Recovery

The live work programme at Appendix B identifies the areas that we are due to focus on now that the response phase has been completed. This includes consideration of projects which will allow the community an opportunity to reflect on the loss of loved ones or to recognise and celebrate the work of key workers and volunteers, through community reflection spaces, recognising the importance of open spaces through a tiny forest initiative and continuing with the commemorative benches project.

In addition, ongoing support to those who are more vulnerable is being provided in partnership with our voluntary sector, and through our own services to support those who are homeless. The recent report to Cabinet on 9th July made some changes to the existing Charnwood Grants schemes to create a VCS COVID-19 Recovery grants scheme that will support the VCS sector to recover from the impact of the pandemic and help open up, rebuild and adapt the delivery of services. This will ensure that funding is quickly put in place to assist VCS organisations with the associated costs of taking those next steps towards recovery and rebuilding in the coming months. It is recognised that there will be additional costs incurred in getting VCS organisations up and running and loss of income will be impacting on their ability to meet core running costs in the period up to 31 March 2021 and possibly beyond.

Work with the Charnwood Food Poverty Group is ongoing to look at recovery and supporting the re-opening of pre-existing local food banks. The Shepshed food bank is now back up and running after a four week transition phase with 72 food parcels now being distributed from this location. Work is also in progress with the Soar Valley Food bank who hope to be back up and running within the next couple of weeks.

There are several other local food banks and COVID-19 related neighbour / local groups that continue to operate across Charnwood independently of the hub and support is being provided to these to

ensure that they can continue to deliver going forward and that provision is co-ordinated.

The challenge in relation to homelessness remains, and the MHCLG has launched the “Next Steps Accommodation Programme which invites local authorities, registered providers, and their local partners to engage with the next stage of our COVID-19 Rough Sleeping response. Funding is available for:

- Assessment of health, circumstances and needs and support
- Shorter-term/interim accommodation and immediate support
- Longer-term Move-on Accommodation.

The options for a bid are currently being considered in respect of a Charnwood only bid and or a joint bid across the County and Rutland.

Recognising that some major national celebrations such as VE day were severely impacted, and the importance of these to our communities is also being considered. This includes a range of opportunities for belated celebrations in sheltered housing schemes, where residents have identified ways to mark this occasion through commemorative benches, activities or plans for delayed parties when allowed.

*Appendices: Appendix A Archived Work programme
Appendix B Live work programme*

Background Papers:	None
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