

ASHFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL



Council Offices,
Urban Road,
Kirkby in Ashfield
Nottingham
NG17 8DA

Agenda

COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel

Date: **Tuesday, 27th July, 2021**

Time: **7.00 pm**

Venue: **Council Chamber, Council Offices, Urban Road,
Kirkby-in-Ashfield**

For any further information please contact:

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01623 457317

COVID-19 RECOVERY SCRUTINY PANEL

Membership

Chairman: Councillor Jim Blagden

Vice-Chairman: Councillor Will Bostock

Councillors:

Dale Grounds

Kevin Rostance

Caroline Wilkinson

David Hennigan

Dave Shaw

FILMING/AUDIO RECORDING NOTICE

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SUMMONS

You are hereby requested to attend a meeting of the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel to be held at the time/place and on the date mentioned above for the purpose of transacting the business set out below.



R. Mitchell
Chief Executive

AGENDA

Page

1. **To receive apologies for absence, if any.**
2. **Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and/or Non-Registrable Interests.**
3. **To receive and approve as a correct record the minutes of a meeting of the Panel held on 2 February 2021.** 5 - 14
4. **Covid-19 Recovery.** 15 - 32
5. **Ashfield Commemorative Memorial - Verbal Update.**

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COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY SCRUTINY PANEL

Virtual Meeting held on Tuesday, 2nd February, 2021 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor David Hennigan in the Chair;

Councillors Jim Blagden (Vice-Chair),
Dale Grounds, Kevin Rostance, Dave Shaw,
John Smallridge and Caroline Wilkinson.

Officers Present: Lynn Cain, Carol Cooper-Smith, Ruth Dennis,
Joanne Froggatt, Theresa Hodgkinson, Pete
Hudson, Mike Joy and Shane Wright.

In Attendance: Richard Mitchell (Chief Executive of Sherwood
Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust).

CP.20 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

CP.21 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 10 December 2020, be received and approved as a correct record.

CP.22 NHS and Kings Mill Hospital Covid Response

The Chairman and Director of Place and Communities warmly welcomed Richard Mitchell, the Chief Executive of Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, to the meeting and thanked him for taking time out of his busy schedule to speak to the Committee.

Through the Scrutiny Panel, it was important that the Council conveyed its eternal gratitude to the NHS and the staff at Kings Mill Hospital for their unrelenting care and support of local residents throughout the pandemic. The recent extension of vaccine provision to the Council's front-line staff from the Hospital Trust also required the Council's gratitude and would go a long way towards protecting employees who were committed to delivering services to the people of Ashfield on a daily basis.

Richard Mitchell, Chief Executive of Sherwood Forest Hospitals Trust

Having thanked the Chairman for his opening words, Richard Mitchell briefly spoke about his role as Chief Executive at the Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust which covered Kings Mill Hospital, Newark and

Mansfield Community Hospitals. He was also Executive Lead for the Mid Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Partnership whose overarching remit was to improve the integration of care and facilities within local communities.

In relation to the Trust's response to the pandemic, overall the care service provided had been immense and staff had worked tirelessly to provide care to its patients. However, the last 12 months had taken its toll and staff were exhausted and in many cases, emotionally spent. The Council had been a great support to Kings Mill Hospital during the pandemic and the relationships that had been cemented would endure and be invaluable going forward.

The Trust had provided safe care for all its patients over the last 12 months with some cancer and diagnostic care continuing wherever possible. As Chief Executive, Richard was aware that the care needed to be for patients and staff alike and it had been a tough task for staff having to work in this challenging environment and wear full personal protective equipment (PPE) throughout. The pandemic had also had an impact of NHS staff working at home and it had been paramount that they all continued to share experiences and have access to welfare support as required.

From any angle, the Trust could be immensely proud of what it had achieved over the last year; their PPE plan especially had been effective from the start and all staff had been able to access full PPE equipment as needed. The excellent PPE provision had also enabled the Trust's many partners including care homes and funeral suppliers to have access to equipment and supplies as required.

The Trust were the first to offer 24/7 vaccine provision and this was continuing, placing them in the top 5 for vaccine provision and roll out of the programme. It was also noted, with relief, that the Trust had not lost any health care workers to Covid-19 to date and this was hopefully in small part due to the continuous supply of PPE and the support network in place to protect and care for staff during the most difficult times.

As an up to date position, the Trust was currently caring for 161 patients with Covid-19 and this had fallen from 220 patients at its peak three weeks prior. 14 of those patients were currently in intensive care of which 5 of those patients were receiving critical care but not in relation to the virus. Therefore, these reducing figures allowed the Trust to be a little optimistic that things were moving in the right direction. It had also been acknowledged that sickness absence had risen to around 10% from the average baseline of 4.5% with most of the additional 5.5% of sickness absence being due to Covid-19 and any resulting isolations.

In relation to the vaccination programme, by 8 December 2020, around 25,000 people had been vaccinated which equated to a quarter of Over 80s, around 20% of care homes and the remainder being mostly NHS care workers across the spectrum. The national vaccination programme had proved effective so far and was continuing at pace.

As for a post-Covid world, the reality for the Trust was that there would inevitably be some fallout from the intense, pressured environment that staff had been working in for the last 12 months. Staff would definitely need time to

rest and recuperate from the psychological trauma of the pandemic and the loss of many lives, but this would inevitably have a huge impact on the ever-increasing waiting lists for other areas of patient care. Cancer care treatment at Kings Mill Hospital had thankfully been continuous through most of the pandemic but diagnostic care had halted and the waiting lists for this type of treatment had inevitably increased.

Question/Comment:	Response from Richard Mitchell:
<p>What impact has the pandemic had on the full range of other care services provided? (Cllr. David Hennigan)</p>	<p>There are 4 main pathways of care namely, emergency, cancer, diagnostic and elective/planned care.</p> <p>Emergency services were working well with a response time of around 4 hours but worryingly the number of people presenting in emergency had fallen (but heart attacks/strokes etc. were still happening).</p> <p>The cancer pathway had been largely protected although fewer operations were taking place due to preparation time and implementation of Covid safety measures taking more time.</p> <p>Diagnostic and elective care had been hit the worst with the target of 52 weeks from referral to operation/treatment not currently being met. No diagnostic care took place for the first 6 months of the pandemic and nationally there were over 250,000 cases waiting that were outside the 52 week target.</p>
<p>I had great care and support over the weekend when visiting the Ashfield Health Village for a vaccination (Cllr. John Smallridge)</p>	<p>Thank you, I will pass on your comments</p>
<p>Some over 80s residents in my Ward are worried that the vaccine will have run out and they won't get their second dose? (Cllr. Caroline Wilkinson)</p>	<p>No one can say with complete certainty that the vaccines will be continually available, but it is highly unlikely that the country will run out of vaccine.</p>
<p>Concerns surrounding whether the vaccine programme is reaching all ethnic minority groups so how might the Council help in mitigating against this potential problem? (Cllr. Dave Shaw)</p>	<p>Looking at recent data from the vaccination of health care workers in Newark, there was parity in the reach of the vaccination through all groups and out of 56% vaccinated, 53% were from ethnic minority groups.</p>

	<p>I have not seen the Mid Nottinghamshire figures but I believe there is more of a gap in that area. All partners alike should endeavour to work with community groups to dispel any myths and make it clear that the vaccine is safe.</p>
<p>A massive thank you to all your staff at the Trust for keeping us safe over the last 12 months. I appreciate the initiatives that you are implementing to protect employees' health and wellbeing (Cllr. Kevin Rostance)</p>	<p>Thank you but the initiatives are not just down to me, they are in existence because of my amazing, strong team of staff (around 5,000 in the Sherwood Trust). I will pass on your thanks.</p> <p>It was recognised early that staff needed to feel valued and supported and some of the initiatives implemented have helped but most employees just want us to focus on doing the basics well with everything in its rightful place.</p> <p>I hear time after time and totally believe that the most important thing to staff is being valued and genuinely supported by their line managers. Staff must never be left feeling guilty for taking leave and recuperating.</p> <p>It became apparent that some of our staff across all three of our hospital sites were suffering hardship and having to access foodbanks, so early on we set up a hardship fund and £15,000 of that has supported around 150 staff through their most difficult times to date.</p>
<p>Thank you for all your hard work and dedication to the residents of Ashfield. As someone who tries to devote time to the children's wards at Nottingham hospitals, could you advise if many children have been affected by Covid? (Cllr. Dale Grounds)</p>	<p>Luckily very few children have been affected by Covid. The planned and day care children's' services at Kings Mill Hospital are wonderful and we have been awarded a rating of 'outstanding' by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).</p>
<p>Do you have any idea when staff at private health care companies might be vaccinated? (Cllr. Dale Grounds)</p>	<p>No, I am unfortunately not aware.</p>

<p>The NHS staff deserve all the praise for their achievements over the last year and in the future. How do you intend to give staff the rest and recuperation they so desperately need? (Cllr. Jim Blagden)</p>	<p>It is the biggest concern we now have and the recent media narrative (mainly driven by the situation in London who are 3 weeks ahead of the East Midlands) for the NHS to move immediately to reduce waiting lists post Covid is difficult to hear when staff are already exhausted.</p> <p>It is hoped that the Government will recognise how hard staff worked and acknowledge that a longer-term plan for recuperation is needed. Many firstly need to take annual leave without any guilt and then address any wellbeing issues they may now have as a result of the pandemic.</p> <p>Also just to note, the vacancy rate at the Trust is the lowest in the Midlands and this hopefully reflects the fact that staff are appreciated, valued and supported in their roles across all 3 sites.</p>
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Following the question and answer session, the Chairman proffered a heartfelt thank you to Richard Mitchell, on behalf of the Panel, for attending the meeting amidst all the other pressures and commitments that were undoubtedly facing him at this difficult time.

In turn Richard thanked the Council and all its staff for their unwavering support to the NHS during the pandemic.

The Director of Place and Communities also took the opportunity to reiterate the growing partnership between the Council and the Trust and reaffirmed that the Council would continue to support all the NHS campaigns in relation to Covid safety measures and the roll out of the vaccination programme.

RESOLVED

that the following recommendations be made to Cabinet:

- a) the work undertaken by the Council and the Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust as a partnership, to support the NHS and Ashfield residents through the pandemic, be noted, welcomed and continued;
- b) a letter of appreciation and thanks be forwarded to Richard Mitchell and all the staff at the Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust for their unwavering dedication and care to the people of Ashfield during the pandemic.

CP.23 Guidance and Restrictions Update

The Vice Chairman gave an update to Members in relation to the latest position and Government's need to look at further options to tighten regulations if required. Some of the options to be considered:

- introducing a 3-metre rule
- wearing masks outside in busy areas
- scrapping support bubbles
- scrapping childcare bubbles
- restricting school access to children of 'critical workers'
- banning people from meeting to exercise
- limiting exercise to one hour a day
- increasing fines handed out for rule breaches
- shutting nurseries for non-key workers
- closing playgrounds
- shutting car parks at country parks.

The excellent work of the Finance Team was highlighted with the current processing position being that 1,697 businesses have been paid a total of £7.666m to date with the following split:

- Businesses with a Rateable Value: 1,332 paid to a value of £7.098 million
- Businesses without a Rateable Value: 365 paid to a value of £568 thousand.

The Discretionary Grant Scheme closed at midnight on Sunday and the Council's website had been updated to reflect this. There had been a last minute surge over the weekend of around 70 applications taking the outstanding discretionary applications that morning to 246. Processing was expected to take up to 3 weeks. Delivery of the scheme had been an enormous amount of work for staff and on behalf of the Panel, thanks were afforded to the Corporate Finance Manager (and Section 151 Officer) and the Chief Accountant for their diligence and professionalism throughout.

Latest coronavirus figures for the Ashfield District continued to drop. As of 31 January, there had been an increase of 83 with 7757 having contracted the virus since the pandemic began.

The Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services advised the Panel that the latest picture was ever changing but reiterated that people must not become complacent and continue to strictly follow the Government guidelines.

The Director of Place and Communities asked Members to consider how they might utilise their roles as Councillors to encourage residents to take up the vaccinations and stay safe. They had influence within their Wards in their community leadership roles and had built up many contacts and networks over their time in office. The Communications Team were also available to assist them as required and any assistance they could offer would be welcomed.

In relation to the Council's Communication Team, Members were advised that the Senior Communications Officer currently attended two weekly meetings, one with the Local Resilience Forum in relation to Covid-19 communications

across the County and the second, with Nottinghamshire County Council and the CCG regarding the vaccination roll out programme.

The Portfolio Holder for Streets, Parks and Town Centres had joined the meeting and advised that he was currently a Member on the Nottinghamshire County Council Health and Wellbeing Board.

Many older residents were confused as to the correct course of action to access the vaccination following receipt of their letters. It was suggested that 'Tech Buddies' would be a help to residents who were struggling to get online and book their vaccination slots.

It was envisaged that vaccinations might soon to be administered by GP surgeries and pharmacies and the Council would be well placed to assist with this extension to the programme by reinforcing messages to local residents and publicising details of the participating sites on the Council's website and social media platforms.

Concerns were also raised that Hucknall residents were being forgotten and it was imperative that Members and the Council continued to lobby the CCG for the provision of a vaccination centre in Hucknall. The Panel also spoke of the need for an asymptomatic testing centre at Sutton in Ashfield as this area continued to report high levels of positive Covid-19 results.

In relation to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Panel it was suggested that invites could be sent to a couple of local charity representatives to enable the Panel to gain insight into how the pandemic has impacted their ability to fundraise and continue to meet their objectives for supporting local people.

RESOLVED

- a) that the latest position in respect of Government guidelines be received and noted;
- b) that Cabinet be recommended to endorse:
 - the continued lobbying of the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to provide a vaccination centre in Hucknall;
 - the provision of a mass asymptomatic testing centre in Sutton in Ashfield, as part of a Middle Super Middle Output Area which is currently showing consistently high positive Covid-19 results.

CP.24 Corporate Plan Performance Update

The Assistant Director, Corporate Services and Transformation presented the Quarter 2 Corporate Scorecard for April to September 2020 to enable Members to review the levels of performance achieved and consider the impact of the pandemic on the Council's performance.

The Council has worked extremely hard since the pandemic began and were the only local authority in Nottinghamshire that has continued to deliver their Tier 1 and Tier 2 critical services without interruption. The Council had also

delivered a variety of humanitarian services across the District and had continued to facilitate many of their waste collection campaigns.

As at the end of September 2020, 71% of Corporate Scorecard measures were achieving or exceeding target or were within 10% variance of their targets. 61% of measures were also indicating an improved position compared to the same period in the previous year or were within 5% of the previous year's performance levels.

The key highlights regarding performance were as follows:

Health and Happiness

- work commenced on the new leisure centre build in Kirkby
- many voluntary organisations have benefitted from community funding especially through the Council's 'Feel Good Food' project

Homes and Housing

- service delivery to Council owned stock has been maintained throughout
- prevention of 35% more households becoming homeless
- 99.6% of properties have received their annual gas and safety checks

Economic Growth and Place

- Covid Information Officers have been continuing to support high street businesses
- Idlewells Shopping Centre retained its occupancy up to September 2020
- Economic Recovery Plan created to support the Council's high streets post Covid

Cleaner and Greener

- increases in incidences of fly tipping (mainly due to closure of local recycling centres)
- success of the 'Bag It' campaign
- reduction of reported incidences of dog fouling and littering

Safer and Stronger

- increases in reported incidences of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and nuisance (more prevalent during lockdowns)
- increases in incidences of domestic violence and the recruitment of a Domestic Violence Support Officer

Innovate and Improve

- use of digital and online facilities increased, in no small part due to the introduction of the Council's new website and an easier journey for customers
- effective administration of the online Business Grants Scheme applications.

The pandemic had unfortunately had a negative impact on some of the Council's critical functions and these were outlined as follows:

Business Rates Collection

At the end of Quarter 2, business rates collection stood at 46.1% which was considerably lower than the target of 53.8%.

Rent Arrears

There had been a significant increase in rent arrears due to many households experiencing financial difficulties and the timelines for seeking possession being extended from 3 months to 6 months.

Void Property Turnaround

Void property turnaround had slowed down from the target of 21 days due to difficulties accessing building/refurbishment materials during the lockdowns.

Members discussed the Council's Quarter 2 position in particular the current position with regard to homeless persons in the District and the recent operational difficulties faced by the Housing Team as a result of key officers being in isolation.

RESOLVED

that the level of performance achieved against the Quarter 2 Corporate Scorecard for 2020/21, as presented, be received and noted.

The meeting closed at 8.37 pm

Chairman.

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Report To:	COVID-19 RECOVERY SCRUTINY PANEL	Date:	27 JULY 2021
Heading:	COVID-19 RECOVERY		
Portfolio Holder:	NOT APPLICABLE		
Ward/s:	ALL		
Key Decision:	NO		
Subject to Call-In:	NO		

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel with an update in relation to the Council's COVID-19 recovery actions and up to date Government COVID-19 guidance and restrictions.

Recommendation(s)

COVID-19 Response Scrutiny Panel Members are recommended to:

- a. Note the information contained in this report, including the latest COVID-19 guidance and restrictions and service area updates.
- b. Identify key recovery themes to explore as part of the work programme of the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel.
- c. Consider and approve any recommendations to be made to Cabinet at the September meeting.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

The COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel has been established to ensure the Council has robust recovery arrangements in place.

Alternative Options Considered

No alternative options have been considered.

Detailed Information

Note: Following the Annual Council Meeting, the name of the Panel was changed from the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel to the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel to align with the shift in focus of the Panel's work.

GUIDANCE AND RESTRICTIONS UPDATE

Please see below some details of the roadmap out of lockdown developed by the Government, as well as the move into step four of the roadmap in England and what that means practically for Ashfield residents, businesses, and the Council.

Vaccinations and Roadmap Development

In February 2021, as part of the Government's COVID-19 Response, a roadmap was developed setting out how England will move out of lockdown.

Vaccines have been at the heart of the Government's strategy to manage COVID-19, as the UK deployed an ambitious vaccination programme. As of 19 July 2021, in England, 38,863,810 people have received a first dose of vaccine. 30,213,335 have received a second dose, giving a cumulative total of 69,077,145 to date.

In chapter 3 of the roadmap, the Government sets out four steps for easing restrictions. Before proceeding through the steps, the Government examined data available to assess the impact of the previous step, with these four key considerations:

- The vaccine deployment programme continues successfully
- Evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths in those vaccinated
- Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations which would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS
- Government's assessment of the risk is not fundamentally changed by new Variants of Concern

From the 19 July, England has moved to Step 4 of the COVID-19 roadmap out of lockdown, as set out by the Government. Everyone should remain cautious while managing the risks as cases of COVID-19 remain high.

Step Four of the Roadmap

While cases are high and rising, everybody needs to continue to act carefully and remain cautious. The following key protections will remain in place at step four:

- Testing when you have symptoms and targeted asymptomatic testing in education, high risk workplaces, and to help people manage their personal risk.
- Isolating when positive or when contacted by NHS Test and Trace
- Border quarantine – for all arriving from red list countries and for those people not fully vaccinated arriving from amber list countries

- Cautious guidance for individuals, businesses, and the vulnerable while the prevalence is high including:
 - Whilst Government is no longer instructing people to work from home if they can, Government would expect and recommend a gradual return over the summer
 - Government expects and recommends that people wear face coverings in crowded areas such as public transport
 - Being outside in fresh air
 - Minimising the number, proximity, and duration of social contacts
 - Encouraging and supporting businesses and large events to use the NHS COVID Pass in high risk settings. The Government will work with organisations where people are likely to be near others outside their household to encourage the use of this.

Following England moving to step four of the roadmap out of lockdown, the Government released this further guidance regarding restrictions being lifted:

“Although most legal restrictions have been lifted at step four, and many people have been vaccinated, it is still possible to catch and spread COVID-19, even if you are fully vaccinated, and we are still in the third wave of the pandemic in the UK.

COVID-19 will be a feature of our lives for the foreseeable future, so we need to learn to live with it and manage the risk to ourselves and others.

As COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, it is important that we all use personal judgement to manage our own risk. All of us can play our part by exercising common sense and considering the risk. While no situation is risk free, there are actions we can take to protect ourselves and others around us. Following this guidance will help you stay safe and protect others by controlling the spread. Every action to help reduce the spread will reduce any further resurgence of the virus in the coming months”.

Lifting Restrictions

Most legal restrictions to control COVID-19 have been lifted at step four. This means that:

- You do not need to stay 2 metres apart from people you do not live with. There are also no limits on the number of people you can meet
- However, in order to minimise risk at a time of high prevalence, you should limit the close contact you have with those you do not usually live with and increase close contact gradually. This includes minimising the number, proximity and duration of social contacts
- You should meet outdoors where possible and let fresh air into homes or other enclosed spaces
- The Government is no longer instructing people to work from home if they can. However, the Government expects and recommends a gradual return over the summer
- The requirement to wear face coverings in law has been lifted. However, the Government expects and recommends that people wear face coverings in crowded areas such as public transport

- There are no longer limits on the number of people who can attend weddings, civil partnerships, funerals, and other life events (including receptions and celebrations). There is no requirement for table service at life events, or restrictions on singing or dancing. You should follow guidance for weddings and funerals to reduce risk and protect yourself and others
- There are no longer restrictions on group sizes for attending communal worship. COVID-19 has not gone away, so it's important to remember the actions you can take to keep yourself and others safe. Everybody needs to continue to act carefully and remain cautious.

Businesses and Venues

All remaining closed businesses and venues such as nightclubs and adult entertainment venues are able to reopen. All capacity limits at sporting, entertainment, or business events have been lifted.

Hospitality venues such as pubs, restaurants and bars are no longer required to provide table service or follow other social distancing rules.

All businesses should follow the principles set out in the working safely guidance. Whilst the Government is no longer instructing people to work from home if they can, the Government would expect and recommend a gradual return over the summer.

Employers still have a legal duty to manage risks to those affected by their business. The way to do this is to carry out a health and safety risk assessment, including the risk of COVID-19, and to take reasonable steps to mitigate the risks you identify. Working Safely guidance sets out a range of mitigations employers should consider including:

- cleaning surfaces that people touch regularly
- identifying poorly ventilated areas in the venue and taking steps to improve air flow
- ensuring that staff and customers who are unwell do not attend the workplace or venue
- communicating to staff and customers the measures you have put in place.

We encourage organisations in certain settings to use the NHS COVID Pass as a condition of entry, in order to reduce the risk of COVID-19. This will especially be the case in large, crowded settings (such as nightclubs) where people are likely to be in close proximity to others outside their household.

To support organisations and individuals in these settings, the NHS COVID Pass will be made available through the NHS App, NHS.UK, or as a letter that can be requested by ringing NHS 119. Visitors will also be able to show text or email confirmation of test results. Organisations should ensure they are in compliance with all legal obligations, including on equalities.

There are some settings where the NHS COVID Pass should not be used as a condition of entry, in order to ensure access for all. This includes essential services and essential retailers which have been able to stay open throughout the pandemic.

Businesses are also encouraged to continue displaying QR codes for customers wishing to check in using the NHS COVID-19 app, or to continue collecting customer contact details to support NHS Test and Trace, however this will no longer be a legal requirement.

SERVICE AREA UPDATES

Please see below a series of updates provided across several service areas of the Council in relation to COVID-19 recovery. These updates have been provided by:

- Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services
- Corporate Finance Manager (and S151 Officer)
- Team Leader, Commercial and Environmental Protection
- Service Manager, Neighbourhoods and Environment
- Health and Wellbeing Manager
- Town Centres and Markets Manager

Collection Rates and Grant Payment Information

Collection Rates

	2019/20		2020/21	
	£m	%	£m	%
Council Tax	64.357	97.05	65.940	95.85
Business Rates	37.339	97.95	27.584	95.40
Council House Rents	24.244	99.27	24.232	99.82

NB: The £10m reduction in Business Rates between 2019/20 and 2020/21 was paid as Rates Relief as shown in the Table below.

Business Rates Reliefs

	2020/21		2021/22 (Est)	
	£m	No. Businesses	£m	No. Businesses
Retail Relief	9.839	511	5.152	431
Nursery Relief	0.139	20	0.113	20

Business Grants

	Grant Type	Grant Value	£m	No. Grant Awards
Phase One	Small Business Grant	£10k	13.960	1,396
	Retail Hosp. & Leisure Grant	£10k	1.180	118
	Retail Hosp. & Leisure Grant	£25k	3.300	132
	Discretionary Grant	Various	0.846	91
Subsequent Phases (To date)	Local Restrictions Grant / Lockdown Grant / Restart Grant	Various	11.287	4,621
	Additional Restrictions Grant	Various	4.099	2,366

Total Covid Grants and Reliefs to support Businesses since the start of the Pandemic = £49.915m

Council Tax Hardship Payments

	2020/21		2021/22 (Est)	
	No. Awards	£m	No. Awards	£m
Hardship Payments	3,086	0.478	1,662	0.216

This Hardship Payment represents payment of up to a maximum of £150 for those households who are already in receipt of Council Tax Support but who do still have to pay towards their Council Tax.

Test & Trace Payments

	Main Scheme	Discretionary Scheme
Applications Received (To date)	509	918
Applications Paid	335	136
Applications Refused	174	782
Amount Paid (£k)	£167k	£68k

Budget Remaining (£k)	£45k	£168k
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The Main Scheme is fully funded by Government and is for those in receipt of a qualifying benefit (e.g. Universal Credit, Job Seekers, etc). The Discretionary Scheme is for those not in receipt of a qualifying benefit with access to the grant determined by the local scheme which takes into account levels of earnings and savings.

Test & Trace Recent Applications – Trend since January 2021

Month	No. Applications
Jan 2021	356
Feb 2021	300
Mar 2021	120
Apr 2021	47
May 2021	21
Jun 2021	116
Jul 2021 (to 19/07/21)	192

Environmental Health and Commercial and Environmental Protection

Since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, the Council’s Environmental Health team has been heavily involved in ensuring the safety of residents and businesses through proactively engaging with businesses on emerging regulations and also compliance with regulations during the pandemic.

They contacted over 900 food businesses to ensure measures and controls were in place to protect staff and customers from COVID-19 at the start of the pandemic and then as businesses closed assisted providing information to internal colleagues re: grants.

As businesses opened, they have worked with businesses across the district in providing advice and guiding and signposting business to secure compliance with the frequently changing regulations.

They have interpreted legislation and provided digital and hard copy advice and guidance leaflets for distribution to internal and external partners and customers and have intervened, where necessary, by issuing warning letters and final warning letters to persistently non-compliant business including a forced closure/ direction to close under coronavirus legislation of one premises in Hucknall. They also worked on outbreaks to ensure a large warehouse and additional postal businesses stayed open to serve the public.

They have worked tirelessly with Public Health England to provide safety advice to businesses in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The team have dealt with 2,439 requests for service from members of the public, commercial premises, and small and medium enterprises in the District of Ashfield – more than half of these were in relation to cv19 and concerns.

Requests for new food business information – people wishing to provide meals and food from home - have been higher than previous years. They have received 191 new food premises registrations, more than double previous time periods.

In order to protect public health and meet our duty of care and statutory functions, the team have continued to audit and inspect newly registered food businesses.

More recently the team have secured a dedicated officer for food until March 2022, who has been able to inspect outstanding higher risk premises from 2020 and will concentrate on all outstanding food inspections on a risk-based approach

In recovery, the team have employed a new member of staff through the CONTAIN fund who will continue to address COVID-19 queries and assist business in understanding the step 4 regulations and the guidance going forward.

It is hoped that inspections under the Health and Safety remit will now resume these include premises, animal welfare, breeding and boarding and massage and special treatment establishments. Health and Safety Officers have also been serving more than normal notices on empty and commercial premises which may be a direct link to a reduction in owners visiting premises during the last 18 months.

The team also have three vacant posts to advertise which once filled will assist with meeting statutory duties and protecting public health during the upcoming recovery period.

Neighbourhoods and Environment

The Neighbourhood and Environment service continues to deliver all aspects of its services, this includes bin and clinical waste collections, bulky waste collections, street cleansing and street bin emptying, grass cutting and ground maintenance across the District.

Earlier in the year it carried out the BIG Spring Clean collecting over 8,000 bulky items from over 4000 households from across the District over a 3-week period.

Ashfield District Council is the only Local Authority that has continued to provide waste collections, as well other additional services such as the bag it campaigns and skip into the summer, uninterrupted since March 2021.

However, the current focus is on maintaining services against rising infection rates within the Community, combined with the increasing numbers of those being requiring to self-isolate due to track and trace. Many other Local Authorities are being required to reduce or postpone waste collections due to the lack of availability of staff, therefore the impact of COVID remains a significant risk for Ashfield.

Cemeteries

The Council continues to maintain a full service with sickness within the team no longer impacting the delivery of burials. The expected demand on the service due to COVID did not materialise.

The focus for the service moving forward is managing any impact on staffing numbers from rising infection rates within the Community, combined with the increasing numbers of those being requiring to self-isolate due to track and trace.

Parks and Open Spaces

After being initially closed playgrounds and park cars parks soon reopened.

There are no immediate concerns with restrictions having been lifted on the 19th July

Town Centres and Markets

The COVID information officers, as part of their day to day work in our town centres disseminating guidance and support also circulated details of various government grants as they became available, including:

- 20.07.20 – Discretionary Business Grants scheme
- 18.08.20 – D2N2 link to Government information
- 18.11.21 – Coronavirus support for businesses
- 15.01.21 – Coronavirus support for businesses
- 16.02.21 – Coronavirus support for businesses
- 28.04.21 – Business support on grant applications

With the ending of restrictions and subsequent decrease in the amount of guidance available for the CIO's after May 2021, the officer numbers have been reduced. We now have one Senior Covid Information Officer (Ian Rotherham) through to the end of September 2021, helping with any further queries from businesses and supporting the work being carried out through the Welcome Back Fund.

The Welcome Back Fund is a £114k, ERDF funding allocation – similar to the Reopening High Streets Fund, aimed at reinvigorating town centres, increasing footfall and subsequently confidence in the local community to use local facilities and support high street shops.

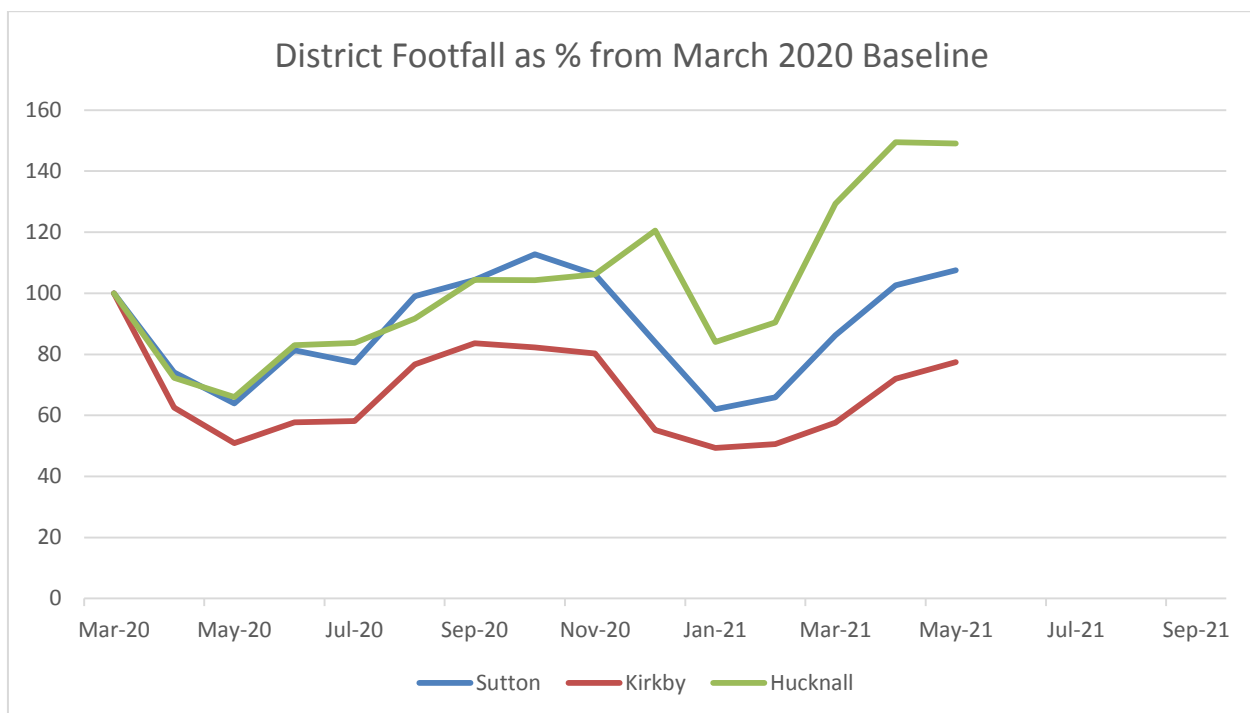
As part of this, we have developed a plan including but limited to:

- Create an Art Trail across the district, placing local art from schools, colleges, community groups etc into the public environment creating sites of interest and increasing dwell time.
- Following on from the successful 'Virtual Ashfield Arts Festival', the art works will include paintings, photography, the spoken word and promote historical events and people.
- Bring Music to the High Street with a string ensemble on Hucknall High Street each Thursday evening in August
- Promote local exhibitors across each town centre e.g. the bus museum in Hucknall and a Birds of Prey
- Support a new food festival in Hucknall
- Painting of columns and high street furniture in Sutton
- Employ street entertainers on market days
- Investigate the repair of Christmas tree brackets on the front of high street shops with the view of placing trees in over the Christmas period
- Improve flower displays

- Bring in a pavement scrubber to deep clean each town centre
- Repaint streetlights (Sutton) and street furniture e.g seating
- Install cross street bunting where possible
- Purchase smaller market stalls to allow traders to stand in areas where existing gazebos impinge on the highway
- Seek small fairground rides for town centre locations
- Promote participation events such as Zumba; line dancing etc
- Hold tabletop sales on market days at reduced rates
- Hold monthly plant fairs
- Seek Farmers markets operators

Footfall

The funding will also be used to renew the footfall counting software we have for our three towns which we are using as a measure on how our town centre footfall declined and recovers in the new normal.

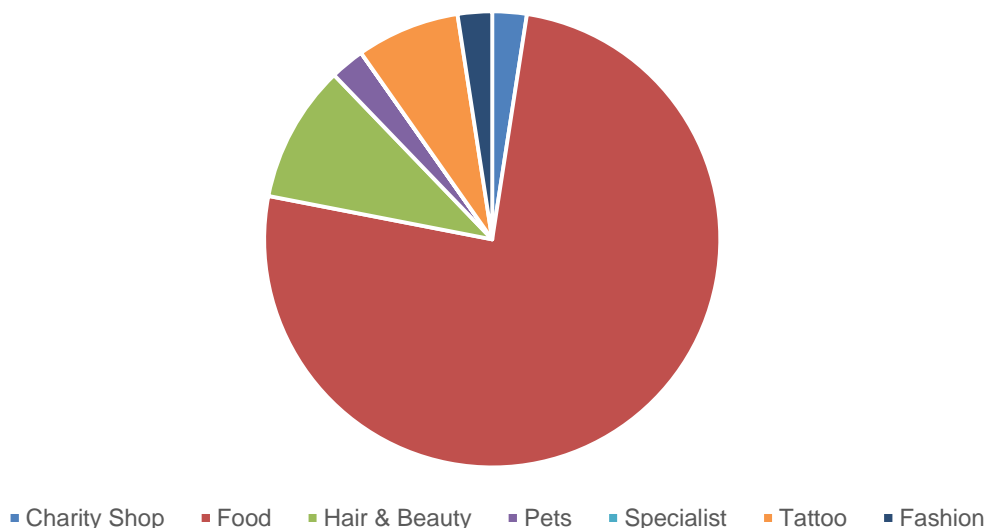


Interesting to note that with both Hucknall and Sutton have recovered to above pre COVID levels (the former significantly), Kirkby is yet to, though impact of Aldi being closed for renovation, cannot be ignored.

Shops and retailers

With regard to the retail provision across the district we have seen a significant increase in the number of takeaway shops (31), with 52 new or repurposed shops overall:

Change of use or new shop provision - 20/21



Overall comparing to figures from June 2020 to June 2021 are positive:

- An increase in retailers district wide - 1240 from 1188
- A decrease in the vacancy rate district wide 15% down to 10%
- A decrease in the vacancy rate for each town centre:
 1. Hucknall 8.6% to 6.2%
 2. Kirkby 14% to 12.5%.
 3. Sutton 18.6% to 13.5%

Governance

Continued effective governance advice, support and delivery was essential during both the beginning of the Pandemic, throughout and as part of the Council's longer-term recovery plans. Establishing an additional Scrutiny Committee to consider response and recovery through the Pandemic has allowed not only all elected Members to engage in the process, discuss options and recovery with the Council's key officers but also local partner organisations.

As part of its considerations, the Covid-19 Response and Recovery Committee provided an effective forum for the local community and local businesses to not only discuss issues with key representatives but also work together to provide potential solutions to common problems. In June 2021 the Scrutiny Panel was renamed the Covid-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel, ensuring that the focus progressed to recovery plans and actions the Council and its partners will take to assist local communities and businesses into recovery.

All meetings of the Council were live streamed during the pandemic and whilst the legislation to allow virtual attendance at Council meetings has expired, lessons learnt throughout the pandemic have resulted in a refreshed look at accessibility to local decision making through technology for the local community. Virtual training on effective decision making and governance was provided by the Democratic Services / Scrutiny Team throughout and continues to be an effective tool to ensure the route through recovery is managed through good governance and Constitutional decision making.

The County, PCC, and District Elections held in May 2021 proved to be an enormous challenge for the Elections Team but demonstrated how even through the most trying of circumstances, a well-

run, efficient and effective local election could be delivered through the tenacity, dedication and hard work of all involved. Challenges included social distancing, PPE, accommodation and staffing, amongst others.

The Legal Team continue to provide a comprehensive and accessible service enabling the Council to continue receiving appropriate legal advice, support, and action.

Risk and Emergency Planning have played a pivotal role throughout the Pandemic, ensuring the Council can still deliver its services safely and putting the health and wellbeing of the community and Council staff at the forefront. They will continue to play a key role throughout recovery.

ASHFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL – RECOVERY STRATEGY

As England moves in to step four of the roadmap, removing many of the restrictions that have been in place for much of the last 16 months, Ashfield District Council continues to focus on the importance of local recovery in all aspects. This has been reflected in the Council's Corporate Plan 2019 - 2023 which identifies national, regional, and local recovery aims.

Ashfield District Council is the only local authority in Nottinghamshire that has continued to deliver all tier 1 and 2 services without interruption during the pandemic. The whole organisation has worked effectively together as one council, re-deploying staff into important roles outside of their normal duties to ensure continuance of service, whilst also delivering humanitarian services across the district. The Council's local recovery plans align with both national and regional plans.

National recovery themes are focussed on:

Health Recovery

Considering overall health outcomes, not just those directly caused by COVID-19.

Economic Recovery

Protecting and restoring people's livelihoods and improving people's living standards. Considering the wider effect of the social distancing measures on how the public live their daily lives.

Social or Community Recovery

Considering the wider effect of the social distancing measures on how the public live their daily lives.

Regional Local Resilience Forum Recovery Aims are to support the whole of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, including its communities, businesses, and public services, to recover following COVID-19.

As well as addressing the very real adverse impacts – the global scale of which have likely not been seen for decades - this will also mean striving to advance long term opportunities for better physical and mental health, tackling climate change, better health outcomes and supporting a sustainable, fast growing local economy.

Recovery planning and impact assessment is focussed on the following:

- Humanitarian Assistance (including Health)

- Economic
- Environmental
- Infrastructure

The Council's Local Recovery Aims

To support and coordinate the process of rebuilding, restoring, and rehabilitating the emotional, social, economic, and physical wellbeing of the community, businesses, and the Council's employees.

Recovery will cover two main strands:

Ashfield as a Place – Community and Economic Recovery

Supporting the community and businesses in achieving stability and a new normality following COVID-19, assisting in rebuilding, restoring, and rehabilitating the community's emotional, social, economic, and physical wellbeing; and

The Council – Organisational Recovery

Assessing the impact of COVID-19 on Council services, finances and employees and planning for its future financial resilience and how it will need to operate differently. Appendix A demonstrates the Council's alignment of local recovery planning and corporate priorities.

Approach to Recovery

Recovery needs to be done collaboratively with businesses, the community and Council employees.

This includes a collaborative approach through:

- Full engagement with communities, businesses, the voluntary sector, and Council employees, having conversations about the challenges ahead and ensuring that people are put first and that those most affected are not left behind.
- Provision of visible and strong leadership throughout the long road through recovery
- Co-ordination through the process of recovery ensuring local communities, businesses, and Council employees are provided with the required support.

Long term recovery will see the Council support and coordinate the process of rebuilding, restoring, and rehabilitating the emotional, social, economic, and physical wellbeing of the community, businesses, and the Council's employees.

Full details of the Council's Recovery Strategy actions are detailed in the Corporate Plan 2019-2023 attached as Appendix A.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

Details of how the work of the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel aligns with the Council's Corporate Plan 2019 – 2023 are detailed within the main text of this report.

Legal:

There are no direct legal implications resulting from the recommendations in this report. Panel Members will be examining changes in legislation regarding COVID-19 restrictions.

Finance:

There are no direct financial implications resulting from the recommendations in this report. Details of collection rates and COVID-19 funding are included within the report.

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	None.
General Fund – Capital Programme	
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
Not having robust COVID-19 recovery plans in place.	The COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel will work with key officers and partners to ensure robust recovery plans are implemented.

Human Resources:

There are no direct HR implications resulting from the recommendations in this report.

Environmental/Sustainability:

There are no direct environmental or sustainability implications resulting from the recommendations in this report.

Equalities:

There are no direct equalities implications resulting from the recommendations in this report.

Other Implications:

There are no other implications resulting from the recommendations in this report.

Reason(s) for Urgency

None.

Reason(s) for Exemption

None.

Background Papers

- Ashfield District Council Corporate Plan, 2019 - 2023

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The following table indicates the alignment of our local recovery planning with corporate priorities:-

Local Recovery Theme External Housing and Communities

Corporate Priority

COVID-19 Recovery Considerations

Health and Happiness	<p>Build on humanitarian work with the community and voluntary sector</p> <p>Re-introduction of events when safe to do so</p> <p>Ensure workplace health</p>	<p>Distributed over £40,000 distributed to the Community and Voluntary sector in Ashfield, to help them support residents negatively impacted by Covid</p> <p>Responded to 117 community support requests</p> <p>£70,000 Infrastructure grants distributed to Our Centre, Under one Roof, and Ashfield Citizen's Advice</p> <p>Engaged over 650 families engaged in Feel Good Families activities</p> <p>Co-ordinated over £120,000 of Covid Winter Grants (food vouchers) to vulnerable residents</p> <p>Number of resident engagement events have taken place in the priority areas</p>	<p>Continue to support the Community and Voluntary Sector to help residents' recovery from the impact of Covid-19</p> <p>Deliver an annual programme of events in town centres and green spaces</p> <p>Engage at all levels to improve support for health and wellbeing</p> <p>Aligned with regeneration and skills, continue to provide advice regarding education and interventions</p>
Homes and Housing	<p>Review of homeless strategy to understand covid impact</p>	<p>Successfully and positively adapting our practices to reflect the change in the working environment and in the nature of residents' housing needs and issues. Despite the increasing complexity of cases and limited move on options, set in the context of COVID 19, a significant number of residents have had their housing issues resolved.</p> <p>Secured £1m Rough Sleeper Initiative to improvement opportunities and support for rough sleepers across the County</p> <p>In partnership with Framework we secured Next Steps Accommodation Programme funding to fund 3 additional units of specialist accommodation for rough sleepers with complex needs</p>	<p>Work with partners to identify sustainable housing solutions for individuals continuing to rough sleep following accommodation offers made during Covid</p>
Cleaner and Greener	<p>Delivery of 'Bag it' campaign</p> <p>Safe re-opening of park buildings</p>	<p>Successful delivery of 'Bag it' and 'Spring Clean' campaigns</p> <p>Safe re-opening of our parks and open spaces with investment in improvements completed at 19 sites</p> <p>A review of the standard of all of our parks, open spaces, play areas and sports facilities has been completed which will inform a rolling programme of improvements and investment, including the aim to extend our six green flag awards to seven in 2021/22</p>	<p>Support community and business volunteers to enhance their local area</p>
Safer and Stronger	<p>Provide refuge accommodation for people in abusive relationships</p> <p>Raise awareness of domestic abuse and ensure support is provided to survivors</p>	<p>Appointed a new Domestic Abuse and Vulnerability Officer in October 2020, providing key support across the District</p> <p>Complex Case Team delivered the White Ribbon Campaign and 16 Days of Activism</p>	<p>Continue to support for high risk survivors of domestic abuse</p> <p>Provide refuge accommodation for people in abusive relationships</p> <p>Raise awareness of domestic abuse and ensure support provided to survivors</p> <p>Aim to extend our white ribbon accreditation to a Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation in next 12 months</p>

External Economy and Place | Finance - External

Corporate Priority

Economic Growth and Place

COVID-19 Recovery Considerations

Open up our town centres safely in response to the recovery from Covid-19 implementing appropriate measures

Ensure that eligible businesses receive COVID-19 grant support funding to help their future sustainability

Ensuring transport is safe (social distancing)

Permitting processes and safe practices

In 2020/21 we have

Employed Covid Information Officers to help support high street businesses through the pandemic

Installed hand-sanitising units in town centre car parks to help give confidence and reassurance to shoppers

Worked closely with the market retailers, ensuring that traders selling essential goods and services could trade throughout the lockdowns, including click and collect and home deliveries

Set up a new local skills partnership to help us focus what training provisions partners deliver in our area and ensure they meet employer needs

From September 2020 to March 2021, the regeneration team responded to 3,209 business support enquiries

Circa 7,300 grant payments have been made to businesses, with a total value of around £30m

Processed 1286 test and trace claims, enabling £191,000 to be paid in test and trace grants

In 2021/22 we will

Support businesses through implementation of the Economic Recovery Plan

Deliver the Future High Streets and Towns Fund programmes

Support employment through inclusion of social value in our key contracts

Offer eligible businesses start up grants

Local Recovery Theme

Council Services | Legal and Governance | Finance - Internal

Innovate and Improve

Fast tracking our digital transformation delivery to improve accessibility and online capability centred on the customer

Support employees to increase digital skills
Work in partnership to increase digital inclusion across the District

Enabling employees, where appropriate and relevant, to work from home, having adequate digital tools and equipment, and a safe working environment

Ensuring employee wellbeing at home or when returning to the work environment

At the end of September, 2020, we launched a brand new, modern, user friendly website, which was accredited by the Shaw Trust as fully meeting accessibility standards

Expedient implementation of online forms enabling residents and business to be able to apply for benefits, 24/7. We have received over 2,600 online benefits related applications or notifications of changing circumstances

Over 100 forms now available online

Expanded our payment channels further introducing the ability for debtors to more easily make repayments through 'recurring card payments' functionality, enabling the collection of over £126,000 of debt over the year

Successful rollout of O365 collaboration tools, facilitating a blended approach to working throughout the pandemic and business continuity. Combined with a significant reduction of files and storage space, this has enabled the successful rationalisation of assets through the expedient decant of our Brook Street office, realising circa £200k efficiencies

Putting in place a safe working environment, enabling employees the opportunity to work either in the office or from home, throughout the pandemic

Continue to fast track delivery of significant digital change, increasing the availability of online services

Support employees and members to increase digital skills

Review and refresh the People Strategy, including consideration of new ways of working being embedded as a result of the pandemic

Continuing to ensure employee wellbeing at home or the work environment