

**REPORT TO:** East Lothian Council

**MEETING DATE:** 27 October 2020

**BY:** Chief Executive

**SUBJECT:** COVID-19 – Update on the Management of Council Response and Recovery

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## **1 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 In accordance with the previous decision taken by Council on 25 August 2020, this report provides an update of how the Council has managed both its ongoing response to supporting the national public health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and also taken action in support of recovery and renewal.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 Council is asked to:
- 2.1.1 note the contents of this report and to acknowledge the unprecedented effect the COVID-19 outbreak continues to have on both the East Lothian community and delivery of Council services;
- 2.1.2 note the ongoing COVID-19 response in respect of service delivery and interventions necessary to continue to contain the spread of the virus, particularly the ongoing deployment of Business Continuity Plans in support of National Guidance and appropriate public health measures.
- 2.1.3 note further updated COVID-19 Response and Recovery reports will be brought forward to future meetings of Council when appropriate.

## **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Since March of this year the Council has been operating within a series of constraints, restrictions and implications associated with the COVID-19 global pandemic and management of what has become a national public health crisis. For a significant period, Council decision-making was operating under delegated emergency powers, although since August, we

have managed to reinstate the vast majority of our governance arrangements albeit largely working on a remote/virtual basis.

- 3.2 Business Continuity Plans were formally invoked by the Chief Executive across all services on 24 March 2020. This remains the position, which means that responding to the COVID-19 emergency has been the Council's priority for seven months. Our strategy throughout has been to follow and support all relevant Scottish Government Guidance and to ensure that the Council continues to provide public service, minimising the impact of the developing COVID-19 outbreak, ensuring critical services are prioritised and that planning takes place for council services to recover wherever possible/ permitted. As the pandemic continues our Business Continuity Plans and our Response and Recovery structures will flex to address the developing challenges brought from COVID-19 impact, national planning as well as any seasonal impacts.
- 3.3 The now well established COVID-19 Command and Response Structure remains in place, with the Chief Executive designated as 'Gold Command'. The Head of Communities & Partnerships is 'Silver Command' and leads the Council's COVID-19 Emergency Planning Response, supported by the East Lothian Council COVID-19 Oversight Group (COG), and supporting sub-groups that continue to meet on a regular basis. The Head of Council Resources was identified as 'Bronze Command' and is co-ordinating our actions in accordance with our approved Recovery and Renewal Framework, supported by the Multi-agency Recovery & Renewal Co-ordinating Group (MARRCG) and various supporting sub groups.
- 3.4 Effective communication continues to be a critical component in support of managing our response to COVID-19 and most of the additional measures put in place continue with particular importance/ emphasis placed upon:
- A suite of COVID-19 pages on the Council's website
  - Regular use of press and social media releases
  - Maintaining effective dialogue between officers and Elected Members and therefore enabling more effective response and resolution to any matters arising
  - Regular Chief Executive briefings to Elected Members and employees
  - Maintaining effective and regular briefings and dialogue with our workforce and also with our Joint Trade Unions
  - Connected Communities Service collaboration with Community Councils, Area Partnerships and local community groups and networks.
- 3.5 The impact upon Council services, customers and staff remains significant and unprecedented. 'Lockdown' saw the Council move to delivery of business critical activity and, although this was subsequently relaxed, many significant restrictions remain in place across services. At the time of writing this report, further restrictions are being re-imposed both

nationally and regionally with the NHS Lothian Health Board area being amongst those facing increased restrictions and controls. It is clearer now than it has been for some time that we remain firmly in crisis response mode. Inevitably it follows that the focus of our collective efforts will now swing back towards further management of response and containment of the now rapidly spreading virus, and that our actions in support of recovery and renewal will be more restricted.

- 3.6 COVID-19 incidence levels in East Lothian are rising and with the winter season looming, and normal seasonal flu and colds generating increased pressures in health and social care settings, it is clear to see that we must do all that we can to contain the spread of the virus within East Lothian.
- 3.7 Public Health Scotland has now published information relating to COVID-19 infection rates at a local level, this is available to the public on **[www.publichealthscotland.scot/covidcasesbyneighbourhood](http://www.publichealthscotland.scot/covidcasesbyneighbourhood)**.

The data provided shows the 7-day positive rate number per 100,000 population within 'intermediate data zones (IZ)' of which East Lothian has 22, but since the areas have populations of around 5,000 - 6,000 the actual number of cases is much lower than the reported level. The latest 7-day data (as at time of writing, i.e. 16 October 2020) shows only four IZs in East Lothian as having 5 or more positive cases in this period (28 September – 4 October). There can be fairly large variations from day to day. The dashboard period 27 September – 3 October showed three IZs in East Lothian with positive rates of over 100 per 100,000 population and a total of 49 cases in East Lothian with a rate per 100,000 of 45.8. In comparison, the dashboard period 28 September – 4 October only has one East Lothian IZ with a positive rate over 100 per 100,000 population, a total of 44 cases in East Lothian and a rate per 100,000 of 41.1.

The 7-day rate also shows large differences in with number of cases and rate per 100,000 population between the four councils in the Lothians (previously data was only available at the Health Board level):

	<b><u>28 Sept – 4 Oct</u></b>
Edinburgh	792 cases – 150.9 per 100,000
West Lothian	178 cases – 97.2 per 100,000
Midlothian	69 cases – 74.6 per 100,000
<u>East Lothian</u>	<u>44 cases – 41.1 per 100,000</u>
Total	1083 cases

Access to this data provides useful insight to the incidence and trend in the spread of the virus across the Lothians, and provides evidence and insight to the Scottish Government's approach in relaxing or increasing national and local COVID-19 restrictions.

The Scottish Government has instructed Health Boards to prepare for an unprecedented combination of risk factors which will affect community services and inpatient capacity: specifically, the impact of subsequent waves of COVID-19 infection combined with the seasonal demand on

services brought on by winter and the unknown impact of Brexit. These risk factors are modelled with a range of best- and worst-case scenarios for COVID-19 spread based on Scottish Government guidance. Current projections and discussion would indicate that contingency planning and resulting service disruption will continue for at least the next 6 months.

At this point in time there are a range of actions being taken by Scottish Government, East Lothian Council, NHS Lothian, East Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership and other partnership agencies to mitigate these risks. It is important to note that some of these actions (e.g. local lockdown or service access restrictions) will have a detrimental effect on our communities. Section 3.8 sets out many of the ways in which services have been developed to operate in response to this situation.

3.8 The following sections contain a summary update of key developments and activities undertaken since the last council meeting. This is now provided for key workstreams spanning both response and recovery.

i. **Test and Protect**

The Scottish Government's national Test and Protect policy and programme has seen significant increase in demand aligned to the relaxation of the Routemap Through and Out of the Crises and spread of the virus across the population.

Information on the national Test and Protect Programme is available at: <https://www.gov.scot/news/test-and-protect-rolled-out-nationally/>. At a local level, this translates to local people experiencing COVID-19 symptoms accessing tests and subsequently, for those tested positive, to be contacted by the national Contact Tracing service, leading to the close contacts of those people being required to self-isolate for 14 days.

Self-Isolation Assistance: The COVID-19 Oversight Group continues to oversee the work associated with Supporting People. On 12 October 2020 the Scottish Government issued guidance relating to the support to be offered to those vulnerable people required to self-isolate including people who are on the shielding list and people aged 70+.

The national Track and Trace Team now advises the Council of those people required to self-isolate to enable out-bound calls to be made to those in the vulnerable categories such as those outlined above. The Customer Services team began making these contact calls on 12 October 2020. The purpose of these calls is to consider what support, or other services, the individual and their household may need to meet essential needs that may present as a result of self-isolating. The provision of outbound calls is intended to triage individuals asked to self-isolate to consider whether they are able to 'cope' or require any of the existing support services available as part of the National Assistance Helpline offer (<https://www.gov.scot/news/support-for-those-at-high-covid-19-risk/>) (the National Assistance Helpline was established for those who do not have family or community support) or available locally by routing callers to the

East Lothian Council COVID-19 Helpline on 01875 824300. This ensures that people are able to access the local support services they need such as onward referral to existing support networks e.g. Foodbank. People contacted will receive an initial and 2 follow-up calls, if they wish. Many people will require no support, having sufficient assistance from family, neighbours and friends, and may not wish follow up contact.

Self-Isolation Support Grant: The Scottish Government published the Discretionary Self-Isolation Support Grant Guidance on 12 October 2020, setting out the basis for providing financial assistance for people on low-income asked to self-isolate following contact through Test & Protect. The new Self-Isolation Support Grant (SISG), of £500 per applicant, which is administered by the Council on behalf of the Scottish Government using existing statutory provisions in The Welfare Funds (Scotland) Regulations 2016 and the Public Health (Scotland) Act 2008, became available on 12 October 2020. Strict eligibility criteria applies. Applicants must:

- have been asked by the national Test and Protect Service to self-isolate on or after 28 September 2020
- be employed or self-employed and will lose income as a result of self-isolating
- be in current receipt of at least one of the following benefits: Universal Credit/Working Tax Credit, Income Based Employment and Support Allowance, Income based Job Seekers Allowance, Income Support or Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit.

The Benefits Team, which administers the Scottish Welfare Fund, oversee the new grant application process and an online application form is available within the Council's COVID-19 pages on the Council's website.

## ii. **Regulatory Support and Enforcement**

On 27 March the Scottish Government passed The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020. On 11 September new legislation was passed, repealing these Regulations, and introducing The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Scotland) Regulations 2020. These Regulations were made in response to the serious and imminent threat to public health which is posed by the growing incidence and spread of coronavirus in Scotland. The enforcement of the Regulations relate to the requirement to:

- close certain premises to members of the public (regulation 4)
- take measures to minimise risk of exposure to coronavirus (regulation 5)
- collect and share information: restaurants, cafes, bars public houses etc. (regulation 6).

Officers within the Protective Services Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Safer Communities teams and Police Constables are authorised to deploy these Regulations to 31 March 2021.

Further, on 7 October 2020, the Scottish Government announced new legislation in response to the serious and imminent threat to public health which is posed by the growing incidence and spread of coronavirus in Scotland: The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Additional Temporary Measures) (Scotland) Regulations 2020.

With very little notice, these Regulations came into force at 1800 on 9 October 2020, with additional aspects within the Regulations applying from 10 October 2020. The enforcement of the Regulations, in relation to the following requirements is to be carried out by persons the local authority designates (regulation 25 (10)(b) and (11)):

- close certain premises to members of the public (regulation 7)
- requirement to close licensed premises to members of the public in the protected area (regulation 8)
- requirement to close unlicensed premises during certain hours and to prohibit consumption of alcohol in the protected area (regulation 9)
- requirements to close certain premises outside the protected area to members of the public (regulations 12)
- requirements relating to relevant hospitality premises during certain hours (regulation 13)
- requirement to take measures to minimise risk of exposure to coronavirus (regulations 17)
- requirement to collect and share information (regulation 18)

Officers within the Protective Services Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Safer Communities teams are authorised to deploy these Regulations to 26 October 2020, when these Regulations will expire.

### iii. **Economy**

The Connected Economies Group (CEG) continues to meet monthly to coordinate the preparedness for, and delivery of, the Recovery and Renewal of the East Lothian economy from a multi-agency and partnering perspective. The CEG has regularly updated its action card, and continues to oversee key support interventions. Notable workstreams in terms of further update include the establishment of traders associations in each main town; local business support funding for towns & villages; rural impact survey analysis; the COVID-19 Jobs Portal; Health and Social Care Skills Gateway and Kickstart in respect of employability; business debt advice; mentoring support; marketing campaigns; and. substantial support for businesses in terms of Scottish Government guidance in respect of changing restrictions.

A refreshed and updated communications plan for the Economy Key Area has been developed, and further campaigns devised around our “Stay

Safe, Support Local and Love East Lothian” messaging. New posters have been provided to local businesses encouraging good behaviours alongside social media and press activity.

Metrics are being reviewed to monitor outcomes of interventions and longer term renewal is being aligned with regional work on growth and the work of the Economic Advisory Board on Scotland’s economic recovery.

Recent increased restrictions are a double blow to many businesses particularly in the tourism and hospitality sector. At the time of writing this report the Council awaits the detail of further financial support interventions that we will be expected to administer but it is now expected that applications will be invited from week commencing 19 October.

#### iv. **Communities**

The Communities Recovery and Renewal Group has met three times, lastly on 16 September 2020, and has agreed its Terms of Reference and Action Card. The group’s current focus is the development of local recovery priorities informed by key strategic needs analysis data (the East Lothian Profile) currently in development, focussed on identifying and reducing inequalities exacerbated by COVID-19.

With the pausing of the national Shielding Programme, and the standing down of local Resilience Groups, ongoing community support continues through the extensive network of voluntary and third sector groups across East Lothian. Resilience Groups are now preparing for ‘winter resilience’ should there be adverse weather ahead. Area Partnerships and Community Councils are reviewing Locality Plans and Local Priority initiatives respectively, taking account of COVID-19 lessons learned and the impact on local communities.

Current areas of action supporting the Communities Recovery and Renewal Action Card include:

- Customer Services call-out support for Test and Protect and those required to self-isolate and management of the Self-Isolation Support Grant provisions through the Benefits Service
- co-ordination across the East Lothian Food Network, supported by Scottish Government COVID-19 food funds, embedding and sustaining local food supports for vulnerable people
- Customer Services - Libraries & Museums Service – are, within available resources, deploying phased and targeted reopening whereby residents in each of the six Area Wards have access to Library Services, supporting customers to access face to face and online services and encouraging ‘footfall’ to support economic activity within our towns
- Connected Communities Services continue to support Area Partnership and Community Councils in responding to local priorities. Following Public Health Guidance, community buildings remain closed for general public use, but targeted service use is being managed to meet the needs of services working with vulnerable client groups, e.g. Children’s Services, Adult Services etc. Youth Work continues to be a priority,

engaging with young people in proactive and innovative ways, e.g. online activity programmes.

- Protective Services continue direct work in our communities and with the business sector, supporting safe deployment of the Government's COVID-19 Regulations and public health guidelines. Joint working with Economic Development, and in collaboration with Police Scotland, continues to support the safe operation of the business and hospitality sectors in compliance with Scottish Government Guidelines for public health management and reducing the spread of the coronavirus.

v. **Health & Social Care**

East Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership has continued to develop services in response to COVID-19. Response and renewal actions with strategic implications are being managed through the change board and IJB structure. Actions with operational implications continue to be overseen by the HSCP management team. The most recent publication of service response actions is available online in the IJB papers.

As per Section 3.7 above, the HSCP has progressed a range of operational responses to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 on inpatient and community service provision. Specific areas of progress since the previous council meeting include:

- Flu campaign – uptake has increased by over 12% and over 3,000 flu vaccinations have been given by the HSCP so far in October and the HSCP will continue to work with practices to maximise the provision of the flu vaccination across all appropriate patient groups.
- ELCH Inpatient Capacity – At the instruction of NHS Lothian Gold command East Lothian Community Hospital is expanding the provision of inpatient capacity within ELCH. This will mean the full opening of Ward 5.
- Day centre and Adult Resource Centres – Work is ongoing to alter building based services across the region. These building based services are functioning at capacity by following COVID-19 restrictions and this is unlikely to change. However, this means fewer people can be supported in these facilities and so the additional staffing and resources previously available are being utilised differently to provide support.
- Home Care capacity and model – Additional Home Care capacity is required to meet the needs of the population. The HSCP has agreed to expand internal provision and is working very closely with providers to facilitate better service efficiency.
- COVID – 19 Vaccination preparation – NHS Lothian has been instructed by Scottish Government to prepare operations for the deployment of the COVID-19 vaccine. This work is in the early stages with a high degree of uncertainty regarding timescales and delivery methods for the vaccine. However given the requirement to vaccinate



such a large proportion of the population this will require a multi-agency approach. The operation is being led by NHS Lothian and the first East Lothian multi agency meeting was convened on 14 October.

#### **vi. Education & Children's Services**

The Education Service's priority continues to be the safe operation of our schools. School staff have worked tirelessly to implement both Scottish Government and East Lothian-specific guidance. Since schools reopened in August, we have had a relatively small number of positive COVID-19 cases amongst both staff and children. Clear systems, processes and protocols are in place to ensure that timely risk assessments are carried out and close contacts identified quickly. The wider Education Service continues to support all aspects of education delivery and whilst staff are still very much in emergency response, work is well underway to identify the lessons learned and support new ways of working using the learning from the last six months, including planning around the integration of Education and Children's Services.

Within Children's (social work) Services, the priority is managing the continued increase in demand for the service as the cumulative financial, mental health and social impact of the pandemic on vulnerable children, young people and families continues to emerge. Delivery of statutory functions within the restrictions on available safe working spaces remains a key challenge. Opportunities to work jointly across services and with third sector partners and build on the learning from early COVID-19 responses are being developed.

#### **vii. Infrastructure and Environment**

The key area of Infrastructure and Environment response, recovery and renewal has seen substantial challenges in maintaining essential service provision and had reached a point where response was migrating into recovery and a return to almost normal levels of service delivery. With the threat of a second and third wave and with the onset of winter, business continuity has refocused on flexing back to plan for further challenging periods of response and impact upon services.

The Scottish Government Spaces for People initiative, continues to develop through further localised engagement and consultation with stakeholders with progress being made across all in terms of physical distancing, speed limit changes and active travel interventions.

Transportation continue to ensure a co-ordinated public transport network is maintained and have successfully managed the home-to-school transport requirement as schools returned.

In respect of open space management and access to our coast and parks reflecting the Scottish Government Route Map to recovery the multi-agency approach has migrated from a response group to a strategic planning group to plan for 2021.

Sport, Leisure and Countryside Management continue to lead in relation to the recovery of community and school sport and provide a strong link

between policy and guidance at local and national level. EnjoyLeisure have re-opened all sports centres successfully although are operating with restricted access due to COVID19 safety requirements. This is generating a challenging financial position in respect of income to operating expenditure. Further restrictions implemented on 9 October continue to reduce the ALEO's ability to deliver fitness classes and draw income.

Facilities Management Services have redistributed their resources to ensure additional enhanced cleaning regimes are in place across schools, offices and available public buildings and have successfully reintroduced hot food offerings across school meal provision.

Engineering have remained pivotal in managing the phased recommissioning of schools, offices and toilets. Their work alongside the Strategic Asset and Capital Plan Management team has developed with a focus towards contract management to ensure capital works and asset maintenance programmes are brought back on track.

Road Services have realigned the Capital Plan and are delivering progress on assets. Significant focus is now being placed on Winter Maintenance with revised contingency plans drawn up to protect the service in the face of COVID-19.

Substantial focus continues to be given to Climate Change in the consideration of how services operate. Work continues within the Strategic Asset and Capital Plan team to look at asset management and office utilisation drawing benefit from the opportunity presented around virtual, smart and remote working.

- 3.9 As previously reported, comprehensive impact assessment work is underway and the East Lothian Partnership's 'East Lothian Profile' strategic needs assessment undertaken in 2017, is in the process of being updated.
- 3.10 Throughout the COVID-19 Response phase, the performance of all Councils has been closely monitored by the Scottish Government, COSLA and SOLACE. Related performance data was recently included within the Q1-2020/21 performance report considered at the Policy and Performance Review Committee on 7 October.
- 3.11 As had previously been reported, the COVID-19 pandemic is very different from any of the Civil Emergencies that have been experienced, planned for and rehearsed. Emergency Planning Recovery and Renewal will continue for a long time and will inform the reshaping of Council priorities, resource allocations and services in the years ahead.

## **4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There are no direct policy implications associated with the report recommendations, although it is anticipated that response and especially recovery and renewal activity may result in significant future policy alterations for the Council and other stakeholders. Any such policy

implications will be subject to the appropriate governance and approval arrangements of each organisation.

## **5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 5.1 The specific recommendations made within this report do not directly affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy. Recovery and Renewal Plans developed will however be subject to Integrated Impact Assessments.

## **6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Financial – The financial implications associated with the Council's response and recovery actions to date are considerable and are likely to increase significantly over the coming months and are also likely to have implications for future financial plans. With funding from national governments very much a moving feast, it is virtually impossible to advise what this will ultimately mean in net terms for final outturn performance and nor the extent of the impact upon future budgets. Based upon funding announcements that have been made at the time of report writing, the council will still face a significant net deficit in respect of COVID-19 related activity. A more detailed review on the financial implications facing the Council has been undertaken in the context of the 2020/21 Financial Year and is the subject of a separate report being considered at Council today. This will set the context for any decisions required to manage the financial commitments for the Council in both the short and medium term, including where appropriate any modification to the Council's approved financial strategy.
- 6.2 Personnel – Council staff in essential direct service delivery services and roles, e.g. Social Care, Connected Communities, Customer Services, Waste service et al., continue to deliver direct business critical service across the community throughout the emergency response to COVID-19 and in support of recovery efforts.

Although some workplaces have been able to re-open, homeworking remains a significant and necessary feature, especially for those who are office based and whose workplace remains unavailable or under constraint. It is estimated that approximately 1200 members of staff are still working from home and it is likely they will be doing so for some time.

This is a considerable change as to how we work as a Council and many HR policies are currently under review to reflect this.

Regular Joint Trades Union meetings ensure timely and open dialogue over any workforce issues generated by COVID-19 response.

Return to Workplaces Guidance, agreed with Trades Unions, enables those staff who work within Council premises/vehicles to do so safely and

in compliance with current public health guidance, with all necessary workplace risk assessments guiding safe operating practices.

Employee communication remains a priority with weekly communication to all staff by the Chief Executive. Eleven COVID-19 Staff Briefings have been issued, the most recent being issued on 8 October 2020. Employee wellbeing continues to be supported by initiatives such as 'Wellbeing Wednesday' e-alerts, encouraging staff to focus on their personal wellbeing and resilience whilst working in challenging circumstances brought about by COVID-19.

- 6.3 Other – continued positive and collaborative working relationships with community planning partners e.g. Police Scotland, Volunteer Centre East Lothian et al, has ensured effective cross-agency co-operation and deployment of resources to meet the COVID-19 challenges experience across East Lothian.

## 7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 COVID – 19 – Management of Council Response and Recovery – Report by the Chief Executive dated 25/08/2020.  
[https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/16617/east\\_lothian\\_council](https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/16617/east_lothian_council)
- 7.2 East Lothian Council COVID 19 Recovery and Renewal Framework Document, Version 1.3 – Report by Head of Council Resources to the Members Library Service dated 5 October 2020.  
[https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/16705/members\\_library\\_service](https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/16705/members_library_service)
- 7.3 2020/21 Q1 and Top 50 Performance Indicators 2019/20 – Report by the Head of Communities & Partnerships to the Policy & Performance Review Committee dated 7 October 2020.  
[https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/16719/policy\\_and\\_performance\\_review\\_committee](https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/16719/policy_and_performance_review_committee)

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