

COVID-19 EMERGENCY PLANNING HIGHLIGHT REPORT

SERVICE AREA:	Resources
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REPORTING PERIOD:	To April 18 th 2020

KEY ACTIVITY HEADLINES

Revenues and Benefits

- As of Thursday 16th April we have made 38.65% of payments – 1,089 of 2,815 due. As of the Sunday evening payment run, this percentage will increase to 45%. Overall, BIES are going to publish where Councils are in delivering this aid every Monday afternoon on their Website. The Council expects, as is required by BIES, to have 90% of payments made before the 30th April. This will result in £34.5m Grant payments to Small and Rural business, as well as retail, hospitality and Leisure businesses.
- Council Tax Hardship funding of **£1.6m** has been awarded to the Council. We are still awaiting the updates to our Council Tax systems in order to apply these £150 allocations to the 7,700 recipients of Council Tax Support. This will be delivered in April.

The Registrars Service

- Following on from the messages over the past 2 weeks, the Registrars Office is now closed to the Public and the service is being delivered remotely. Death registration appointments are available within 1 to 2 days of request.

The Bereavement Service

- The Website has been updated for the latest information. Appointments for cremations and burials are still available with no requirement to extend hours of operations. 70 cremation slots are available within the next 12 days as of 17th April.

Property

- The demolition of Northminster Car Park continues.
- We are fielding queries from tenants on rent and other reliefs and signposting them to the most relevant aid route for their circumstances

Finance

- The Council returned to MHCLG on Wednesday, their informational request on the financial impact the COVID-19 situation is having on Council financial resources. This is picked up further in the Finance section.
- It is expected that the Government will announce further Local Government Grant Aid over the weekend. As of Saturday 18th April, this still had not been announced.
- Finance staff are now moving forward on the production of the Councils 2019/20 Statement of Accounts. Members are reminded to complete their Related Party Forms.
- We have in place processes to log COVID-19 expenditure and this is monitored through Gold Group on a weekly basis.

Procurement

- We are working with our Bank on easier ways to allow people to pay for COVID-19 services that are being delivered through the Hub.
- We are working jointly with CCC on revised procurement arrangements to ensure we continue to comply with changing Government requirements and to keep our supply chains operational.

RISKS / CHALLENGES (AND MITIGATION)

Finance, Revenues and Benefits:

- Logging the additional expenditure linked to COVID-19. We have an online form

to log the information, however we are having to move quickly as service delivery is a priority. Spending is reported to the Gold Management Group weekly, and to MHCLG on a monthly basis.

- Payment of the Grants of £10k and £25k to businesses in receipt of small business and rural relief as well as the retail, hospitality and leisure industries. We continue to work through the returned confirmations as quickly as possible to ensure we get payments out to valid recipients (we have had significant Fraud check guidance from the Government in the past week) as quickly as possible. We make a weekly return to BIES on how we are progressing with payments.
- Requests from other Business Rates payers for relief continues to be an issue. We have relaxed recovery for Council Tax and Business Rates for April and May to help taxpayers and have publicised numbers to call the Council to notify ourselves. We will be lobbying government through our professional bodies if additional reliefs are possible.
- Significant reductions in Council commercial income as the City is closed down due to Covid-19 which is leading to requests from recipients for payment holidays on payments for commercial services such as property rents, parking and licensing as examples. This includes Council Tax and Business rates for which we will get a first view later this month as we compare payments to April 2019.

Bereavement and Registrars

- No significant changes since last week. We now must report to the police if more than 10 mourners are attending a funeral. To ensure this does not happen we continue to work closely with all the Funeral Directors.

Property and Procurement

- No significant changes since last week.

WORKFORCE UPDATE

No significant changes since last week. We have a number self-isolating in the working from Home figures.

Summary	Staff	Work at Premises	WFH and Enabled	In Hub	Notes
Council Staff					
Bereavement	17	17			
Finance\Audit\Insurance	59		50	9	All enabled to WFH, 9 in Hub
Registrars	21		21		Will need to have 4 in office
Serco					
Revenues, Bens, Trans	95		95		All enabled to and are WFH
Business Support					Dependent on Service Depts
Other (NPS)					
Facilities Management	19	2	17		Dependent on buildings open

FINANCIAL IMPACT (increase in costs / reduction in income)

The Council has put in place processes to ensure that all costs attributable to COVID-19 are captured properly. As with other Councils, the significant issues for the Council are:

- Ensuring that there are adequate resources to make the required payments (cash flow);
- Significant risks around the loss of commercial and other income and increases in demand for services;
- Ensuring in parallel delivery of existing financial priorities for 2020/21 where possible and 2021/22 and the closure of the 2019/20 accounts.

We are having to report BIES on a weekly basis on progress with the delivery of grants, which is open to the public, and are now having to report to MHCLG monthly on the financial impact of the crisis.

The Council have received £5.3 of Government Grant to fund COVID-19 costs but presently our additional outlay is estimated to be significantly more than this. MHCLG are taking a view now across all Councils potential additional COVID-19 costs. 320 Councils responded to MHCLG's request for information on Wednesday, which was the highest number ever that have ever responded to them, which reflects the significance of COVID-19 on Council finances across the sector.

As an order of magnitude with Council Tax and Business Rates non collection, a 10% reduction gives the Council a £16m cash flow issue. Members will have seen on Thursday that MHCLG have relaxed their first 3 month payment dates of their portion of Business rates.

We still await the magnitude of additional Grant funding announced on Friday

The Peterborough and Cambridgeshire CCG is paying for additional capacity to move clients from Hospital into Care and so this does not appear in our figures.

RECOVERY ACTIVITY (plans being considered / future steps)

- We are considering how financial monitoring of the Council will be delivered once we move out of the current processes. This includes implementation of the Financial Recovery and updated finance processes work that is being carried on in parallel.
- A significant change we are now considering is how people work and if services are more effectively delivered from a mixed approach of in office and alternate locations across all of Resources (In and outsourced). The COVID-19 emergency has necessitated significant changes in how we work as a Council and this needs to be taken on board as we move out of this crisis. This will also affect our approach to commercial property as more firms also consider this approach and we will have to model the effect of that on our portfolio and future.
- Effective lobbying of our financial position both through peer Councils, the LGA and MHCLG will be key – as will it's timing.
 - It is clear that in the short term and perhaps up to 3 years:
 - Council Tax and Business Rates income will be reduced;
 - External income will remain suppressed in the short term;
 - Demand for our services will be increasing;
 - There will be the requirement for investment in regeneration schemes to “kick start” our local economy.
 - As such as quickly as possible the 1-3 year future view on our probable financial position is imperative.
 - Effective lobbying on the proposed fair funding changes (whenever these happen) to ensure we take maximum benefit from this
- We still do not know the full impact of Brexit in December this year. We must not take our eyes off this as it has the potential for significant impacts on both our economy and overall funding as well as the local economy
- Notices to enable ceremonies to take place are valid for 12 months. Professional bodies are currently lobbying central government to extend this period to avoid notices having to be retaken.

COMMUNICATIONS

We will communicate changes to crematorium arrangements as soon as they are confirmed.
We are working with Opportunity Peterborough on communications to the business community around the £10k and £25k Government Grants.