

TITLE OF REPORT: Impact of COVID -19

REPORT OF: Darren Collins, Strategic Director, Resources and Digital

SUMMARY

This report sets out an overview of an update to be provided to Committee on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on areas relevant to its remit.

Background

1. The early impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was reported to Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2020. This provided an overview appropriate to the remit of this Committee and also outlined the impact of the pandemic on performance against the five Thrive pledges.
2. The ongoing response and need to recover is being monitored and will be reported to each Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November / December and in March 2021.

Overview of impact and response

3. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact across the world and has affected the lives of everyone living and working in Gateshead.
4. From the beginning of the pandemic the Council took many steps and put in place activities to respond to the issues resulting from this unprecedented event. The Council has continued to focus on responding to the pandemic and worked towards recovery, supporting local people, particularly the most vulnerable, and businesses, many of whom have and continue to be adversely affected. It has prioritised the needs of local people throughout and putting people at the heart of everything we do.
5. This has also involved working with local communities and partner organisations to help introduce measures to help Gateshead respond to and come through the crisis.
6. While there were some immediate impacts such as on demand for support, it is also anticipated that there will be longer-term impacts for Gateshead and part of the response means looking to the future and how we shape recovery. There are ways of working that have changed the way we operate and the Council is

looking at how to retain the best developments and embed in future service delivery.

7. Key areas of impact and responses include:

- Increased demand for Council support through Council Tax and Housing benefits, offering flexible arrangements and supporting local people in hardship
- Finding effective ways to communicate and engage with local people given the social distancing requirements
- Undertaking a Household Impact of COVID-19 survey on 23 June alongside a Gateshead Business Survey. The findings will be important in developing our response to the pandemic accounting for local demand and needs.
- Administration of grants to businesses to support them through the economic difficulties as a direct consequence of the pandemic
- Responding to needs for different ways of working for employees including facilitating working from home, supporting those in frontline positions including working with suppliers to secure PPE, revising risk assessments, ensuring that workplaces are safe, making better use of technology, and communication across the workforce.
- Setting up Hubs to support local people in their communities, particularly the most vulnerable and how this may inform future ways of working
- Supporting the Public Health response to the pandemic with implementation of resilience and business continuity planning
- Financial impact on the Council through increased expenditure such as securing PPE and supporting the response as well as lost / reduced income through closure of leisure centres, school meals, and anticipated loss of Council Tax / Business Rates income. While some grant has been received, the overall position remains unclear given other pressures
- Supporting schools through the Services for Schools commercial services
- Improving our ability to mobilise, identifying those that need support and respond with measures that provide this where and when this is needed

8. The Committee will receive a presentation which will provide a more detailed overview of the impact of the pandemic on areas relevant to this committee including:

- Impact on the Council both short and anticipated longer term
- Lessons learned through how we work and how we have responded
- How the response could change the ways of working of the Council in the future

Recommendation

9. It is recommended that Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive the presentation and:
- consider the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the areas relevant for this committee
 - identify any areas, they feel they require more detail about or feel require further scrutiny; and

- note that a further report will be received in March 2021

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