

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET****DATE: 30 MARCH 2021****REPORT OF: MR TIM OLIVER, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL****LEAD OFFICER: MICHAEL COUGHLIN, DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE****SUBJECT: COVID-19: SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL - UPDATE**

ORGANISATION STRATEGY GROWING A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY SO EVERYONE CAN BENEFIT/ TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITY/EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES
PRIORITY AREA: COMMUNITIES

SUMMARY OF ISSUE:

Surrey County Council continues to have a critical role in leading the ongoing local response to Covid-19, to save lives, protect the NHS, ensure our residents are protected wherever possible and that crucial council services continue to operate in these unprecedented times.

The pandemic continues to disproportionately impact communities across Surrey and responding to this effectively and helping communities to recover is critical to tackling health inequalities across the county.

As we move into a period of easing restrictions and existing lockdown in line with the Government's Spring 2021 Plan, the purpose of this report is to set out the latest Public Health information about Covid-19 and update Cabinet on the strategic and sensitive issues arising from the extensive response and recovery work going on across Surrey.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that Cabinet note and endorse:

1. The latest public health situation with regard to Covid-19, nationally and in Surrey;
2. The actions being delivered through Surrey's Local Outbreak Control Plan, including the vaccination roll out, and the ongoing support to vulnerable residents, including through the council's Community Helpline and the Covid Winter Support Grant scheme;
3. The latest impacts on Adult Social Care and Children's, Families, Lifelong learning services;
4. The ongoing preparation for the local elections in May 2021 and associated risks;
5. The work and planning going on in respect of the transition into recovery from the pandemic;
6. The allocation of a £500,000 grant to Community Foundation for Surrey, of which a half of the funding will be placed into an endowment to create a lasting legacy for groups working on priorities for the county.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

The county and council continue to face unprecedented challenges due to the Covid-19 crisis. We are simultaneously managing response activity and work with our partners to enable recovery within the county, looking ahead to a return to day-to-day life for communities following the end of national lockdown.

The recommendations set out in this report ensure Cabinet are apprised of the most recent work going on across the council to protect, sustain and support residents and communities and the economy of Surrey.

DETAILS:

Public Health Update

Covid-19 Response – Spring 2021 Plan

1. On 22nd February, the government published a four-step plan setting out the roadmap for easing restrictions and exiting lockdown in England - [Covid-19 Response – Spring 2021](#). Before taking each step, the Government will review the latest data on the impact of the previous step against four tests. The tests are:
 - 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.
 - Our assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new Variants of Concern.
2. The roadmap therefore sets out indicative, ‘no earlier than’ dates for the steps which are at least five weeks apart. These dates are wholly contingent on the data and are subject to change if the four tests are not met. A summary of the Covid-19 Response – Spring 2021 plan is available [here](#).

Covid-19 Contain Framework

3. The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) is expected to publish a revised Contain Framework which will set out how national, regional and local partners will work with each other, the public, businesses, institutions (including schools, prisons, hospitals and care homes) and other local partners in their communities to prevent, contain and manage outbreaks of Covid-19. This will be incorporated into Surrey’s revised Local Outbreak Control Plan which is currently being updated in light of the new national roadmap for easing lockdown restrictions in England

Covid-19 Surveillance

4. Public Health continue to hold daily data surveillance meetings to ensure prompt action is taken in line with [Surrey’s Local Outbreak Control Plan](#). The Surrey [Covid-19 Intelligence Summary](#) and daily [Coronavirus infographic](#) provide regular updates on Covid-19 levels in Surrey. For the latest week of data (6th March to 12th March), 34.4 cases per 100,000 population were recorded in Surrey. This rate is lower when compared with England; 57.1 per 100,000 population.

Local Outbreak Control Plan

5. Surrey's Local Outbreak Control Plan is in the process of being updated and re-published to reflect the [Covid-19 Response – Spring 2021](#) plan, as well as local progress and developments. The actions aligned to the plan which have recently taken place include:
- **Symptomatic Testing** – A range of testing for symptomatic individuals continues to be accessible including regional drive-through test sites in Guildford, Chessington, Gatwick, Heathrow and Twickenham and local test sites in areas of greater population density offering cycle/walk-in testing.
 - **Targeted Community Testing (Asymptomatic testing)** – Symptom-free testing uses rapid Covid-19 tests to identify people who have coronavirus without symptoms, so they don't spread the virus unknowingly. As of 17th March, there are 29 sites across the county offering symptom-free testing to anyone who needs to [leave home to work](#), or anyone who is in the [same household, childcare bubble or support bubble as a pupil or someone who works in a school or college](#). This includes four main test sites operational in Staines, Woking, Ewell and Redhill, and 25 pharmacies. The current demand is lower than anticipated and is under review in light of the government's recent announcements, outlined below.
 - **Spring Plan announcement** – The Community Testing programme is to be extended to June 2021. There is a key role for symptom-free testing, including new Community Collect model – the programme would be responsible for setting up a distribution network and collection points for the home testing kits. Currently the DHSC are focusing on supporting [Rapid lateral flow testing for households and bubbles of school pupils and staff](#).
 - **Local Contact Tracing** – Between the 8th and 14th March, the Local Contact Tracing service succeeded in contacting 72% of the cases that the national team were not able to contact within the first 24 hours. The combined national and local contact tracing of cases across the whole of Surrey remains around 87% each day. On 3rd March, Surrey commenced participation in a national Hot Spot Pilot, further details are outlined in the 'Impact on Communities and Support to Vulnerable Residents' section of this report.
 - **Welfare Support** – When individuals are contacted by the test and trace service and they require support, they are directed to the most appropriate agency. For instance, British Red Cross provides shopping support alongside prescription delivery. Districts and Boroughs also offer emergency food provision via food banks. During out of hours (including over weekends), the Council Emergency Duty Team can arrange immediate food provision. During the third lockdown, the volume of requests for support has been minimal due to residents having their own support networks in place.
 - **Schools** – Regular testing processes in education settings have been established (or expanded for settings that have already begun testing) in line with guidance and advice from the DfE and partners.
 - **Care Homes** – The Care Homes Covid-19 Outbreak Oversight Group continues to meet weekly to provide oversight of current outbreaks in care homes and co-ordination of system response in line with national guidance. On 5th March, the DHSC published an [overview](#) of guidance on visiting care homes, which must be supported wherever and whenever it is possible and safe to do so.

- **COVID Champions** – The first COVID Champions Steering Group took place on 3rd March, with 11 out of 12 district and boroughs attending, plus local voluntary organisations. Coordinators valued the opportunity to share information and learning. The next steering group meeting will take place on 24th March to decide the programme's phase two priorities and ways of working, particularly the weekly briefing content and a new website.

COVID-19 Vaccination Roll-out

6. Surrey Heartlands

6.1. Between 8th December 2020 and 7th March 2021 (data published 11th March), Surrey Heartlands Health and Care Partnership delivered a total of 367,560 Covid-19 vaccinations, of which 354,472 were first doses. All older adult care homes have been visited at least once. To date, over 90% of all eligible citizens over the age of 70 have been given at least one vaccination. A dedicated cell was established to manage the identification and booking in of eligible Health and Social Care workers (HSCW). Further information on the Surrey Heartlands Vaccination Programme is available [here](#).

7. Frimley

7.1. Between 8th December 2020 and 7th March 2021 (data published 11th March), Frimley Health and Care ICS delivered a total of 228,924 Covid-19 vaccinations, of which 218,978 were first doses. Vaccination of Cohorts 1-4 was completed by the target date of 15th February 2021, with the offer of vaccination made to everyone in these groups, and an overall uptake percentage of 87.4%. Those in Cohorts 1-4 who have not taken up the offer can still come forward for a vaccination at any point. Work has now started on the vaccination of Cohorts 5 and 6, with 7-8 to follow. The aim is to have completed all of Cohorts 1-9 by 1st May 2021. Further information on the Frimley Vaccination Programme is available [here](#).

The council's Covid-19 Ops Group

8. The Ops Group continues to meet weekly to lead on Surrey County Council's response to the current Covid-19 pandemic, with a particular focus at this time on the Mass Vaccination and Community Testing programmes.
9. Colleagues in Adult Social Care and Children, Schools, Families and Lifelong Learning, as well as those supporting the Surrey Local Resilience Forum (SLRF) death management cell, have ensured that eligible Surrey County Council staff have been put forward and offered the vaccination. HR Colleagues have developed a reporting tool to log when members of staff have received both the first and second dose of the vaccination, which mirrors similar reporting for the flu jab, and levels are being monitored at Ops Group meetings. HR colleagues are also enhancing this reporting by working with managers to log the percentage uptake against the eligible workforce to ensure the most accurate and stringent data is captured.
10. **Community Testing Programme** – Staff working away from home are being encouraged to engage with the Community Testing Programme, whilst further work is being done to develop additional guidance on how services and staff can use asymptomatic testing to provide safe working environments.
11. Following the release of the Spring 2021 roadmap, the Ops Group are leading on an exercise to review and understand what is required to ensure all council services are once again fully operational. This will map out key dates and milestones and capture the

necessary steps required to reaching a fully operational status – which will help form the Council's own roadmap to recovery.

Impact on Adult Social Care (ASC) services

Hospital Discharge

12. Together with our health partners, we continue to assess scheme 1 people (discharged without an NHS or social care assessment between 19th March – 31st August 2020, as per the emergency guidance and funded by the NHS) and transfer them to the correct funding streams. From 1st September 2020 (scheme 2) new or extended health and care support has been funded by the NHS for a period of up to six weeks. We are still awaiting a decision from NHSE regarding funding for this scheme post March 2021 and in the meantime we are working with Surrey Heartlands colleagues for a Surrey wide model should the national funding not be agreed or in place.
13. Catching up with scheme 1 assessments, whilst also completing scheme 2 within six weeks is proving challenging for our teams, but we are making good progress with all people needing Adult Social Care funded support packages in place by 15th March and completing all work by end March 2021. Teams continue to work incredibly hard to support the flow out of Surrey hospitals, and members of the Adults Leadership Team are actively working to support the system and ASC practitioners in a rapidly changing and demanding environment.

Vaccination

14. As of 12th March, ASC had referred 10,951 eligible workers to a vaccination appointment. We are working with partners to ensure parity in how the Standard Operating Procedure is interpreted and reporting vaccinations for non-CQC registered services on the Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) capacity tracker.
15. ASC is playing an important role in the roll out of the Covid-19 vaccination to unpaid carers (priority group 6), by identifying existing datasets, compiling an eligible carer list for submission to NHS, working with carers organisations to identify unknown carers and ensuring optimum uptake.
16. Covid-19 vaccinations will now be offered to all people on the GP learning disabilities register as part of priority group 6. The numbers on the GP register were low – 3,615 – with just over 50% (1,809) of this cohort having had their 1st dose. Adult Social Care has shared LAS data on people with learning disabilities with Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and Surrey Heartlands to better inform the GP register. We are also monitoring learning disability care homes that have had the vaccine using the DHSC capacity tracker.

Impact on Children, Families and Lifelong Learning

Children's Social Care

17. Face-to-face visits to children and families continue to be our default approach in line with national guidance, and any significant changes to frontline practice over the coming months – if required – continue to need approval from the Executive Director for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning. In the last 10 weeks, we have enacted agreed contingency planning arrangements once for a single team due to significant capacity issues and returned to face-to-face visits by default after 4 weeks.

18. Demand across children's services has reduced slightly over the last month, however we continue to experience a higher-than-average number of contacts to the Children's Single Point of Access (C-SPA) and referrals to Social Care and to Early Help services. Timeliness is fairly stable although where demand has reduced, such as in the number of open assessments, we are seeing improvements in performance. Based on past experience, the return of children to schools this month is expected to lead to a surge in demand and referrals for children's services and arrangements are in place to ensure capacity is sufficient.
19. The majority of frontline staff have now received their vaccine (first dose) with significant effort in January and February to coordinate the programme for Surrey County Council staff and partner agencies via the Local Resilience Forum (LRF).
20. The number of children in care in Surrey remains stable at approximately 1000, however the number of children subject of Child Protection Plans continues to rise for the eighth consecutive month to 861 at the end of February; this compares with 669 at the same time last year. Surrey's numbers of children with Child Protection plans remain lower than statistical neighbours and the increase is expected to stabilise.

Education

21. From 8th March, Surrey's school and colleges opened for all children and young people. During the most recent national lockdown since January, around 25,000 children of critical workers and vulnerable children have been attending school regularly, meaning schools have been teaching both face to face and remotely. From this month, the vast majority of students are back in school. We know that being in school or college gives children and young people the chance to develop, learn more quickly and socialise. It is fundamental for their well-being and for furthering their aspirations.
22. With the return of children to school, our school-based services, such as speech and language therapy, educational psychology, our catering provider Twelve-15 and school transport, are resuming as normal, adhering to schools' risk assessments and infection control measures.
23. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, secondary school place offers for 12,311 Surrey Year 6 students were successfully confirmed by the national deadline. Most students – nearly 95% - were offered a place at one of their preferred schools. We have made sure that the small number of students who did not get into their preferred school have an alternative place and are able to get on a waiting list.

Supporting Families

24. We have again used the Covid Winter Grant funding to provide supermarket vouchers to over 20,000 children eligible for free school meals over the two-week Easter holidays. We know that many families struggle to purchase the additional groceries required over the school holidays. Planning is also well underway to set up a new Holiday Activity and Food programme from Easter which will provide free healthy meals and enriching activities during school holidays for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Impact on Communities and Support to Vulnerable Residents

Covid-19 Local Contact Tracing Partnership

25. The Covid-19 Local Contact Tracing Partnership, a joint endeavour between Public Health and Customer Services, continues to expand and evolve. Our local contact

tracing service now covers all of Surrey and is operating seven days a week, using local expertise and knowledge to contact people who have tested positive for Covid-19, but that NHS Test & Trace have been unable to reach.

26. On 3rd March we began a pilot involving our local team contacting all positive cases in three District and Borough areas (Woking, Spelthorne, and Runnymede) as soon as their results are registered on the national system. This is a change from the current system, where the national team will attempt to make contact during the first 24 hours. The aim is to increase our contact rates in Surrey and help to drive transmission rates down. Initial results from this pilot have been very encouraging and we will adopt this model Surrey-wide from 15th March.
27. Since launching we have received 2,834 positive cases from NHS Test and Trace; 62% of which have been successfully contacted. We expect this success rate to climb significantly as we move to the new model.

Community Helpline

28. Our Community Helpline continues to operate, providing advice and support to residents that need help, as well as acting as the inbound arm of the local contact tracing operation. We have taken 14,701 calls since the Community Helpline went live and recently experienced a significant increase in calls from residents with enquiries about the surge testing in parts of Woking and Egham.
29. There are now 67,962 Surrey residents (as of 5th March 2021) on the Shielded Patient list (SPL) after the Government took the decision to add additional people as a result of new modelling, which considers multiple risk factors for Covid-19. District & Borough Council colleagues are making outbound calls to those Clinically Extremely Vulnerable residents in their local areas who register for support on the National Shielding Service System (NSSS). Surrey County Council is continuing to send a text message to anyone living in the county who is newly added to the SPL to let them know how they can access support if they need it.

Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS)

30. The county council and Community Foundation for Surrey (CFS) are continuing to work together to support some of the most vulnerable communities in Surrey. Since the start of the pandemic the county council has given CFS two grants totalling £300,000 which have been match-funded by donations from the public helping to generate over £2m funding to help the VCFS. This has enabled the sector to adapt, strengthen and continue to deliver services at a time when demand is high.
31. The VCFS remains imperative to the rebuilding and recovery work and the county council will be giving the CFS a further grant of £500,000 to help with this. The grant will again be fully matched through public donations bringing £1m of benefit to Surrey's communities. A quarter of the total funding (£250,000) will be placed into an endowment, creating a lasting legacy for groups working on priorities for the county, such as reducing health inequality and ensuring no one is left behind. The majority of the grant will be distributed more immediately through a flow-through mechanism to enable targeted rebuilding activities and supporting important community empowerment initiatives.

Recovery activity

32. Following the announcement of the Government's roadmap to recovery, the SLRF Recovery Co-ordinating Group (RCG) is supporting and monitoring the restoration and

reopening of services and businesses in line with the planned three stage approach, which started with schools reopening from 8th March 2021.

33. Decision making and actions for the restart and restore work is being led by colleagues in the county council and partners in the district and borough councils as well as some partnership bodies. The RCG seeks assurance through sub group leads covering place, economy and retail, health and social care and the community and voluntary sector that this work is on track as well as providing a place to consider cross cutting issues affecting the delivery of the roadmap.
34. Alongside the reopening of services, the RCG has a key role to play leading recovery communications to help ensure adherence to the restrictions as they are lifted whilst encouraging people back to the high street and to other services once it is safe to do so.
35. Work is underway to understand how customers will respond once restrictions are lifted, both in terms of leisure and working practices. This includes looking at the potential impact of changes on the future use of the high street and local areas which may be more focussed on increased leisure, culture and community use as well as implications for public transport patronage and longer term issues such as investment in rail infrastructure and climate change. The full impact of the pandemic on unemployment is still unknown given the further extension of the furlough scheme. People who are requiring help are being supported locally to enrol on national programmes such as Kickstart, and work is ongoing with the further education colleges around support for young people.
36. The Local Recovery Index is being actively used by the RCG to monitor how the county is recovering from the pandemic, with the latest data from quarter 3 showing, a worsening in recovery largely related to the increase in number of Covid-19 cases during the second national lockdown. Indicators around society were more positive, with most boroughs and districts seeing a reflected a fall in crime rates and instances of domestic abuse.
37. Whilst Covid-19 has had a huge impact in terms of health and the economy, the RCG are also aware of a number of new beneficial practices that have been developed – some of which were in the pipeline and expedited by the pandemic, others which were developed in response to Covid-19 and had unexpected longer term benefits. Work is ongoing to capture these with the aim to build on them and sustain them into the longer term.
38. Now that the roadmap to the next phase of living with Covid-19 has been published, the meeting of the South East RCG Chairs has been re-started following a pause in the autumn, with Surrey County Council being appointed as deputy chair. The purpose of this meeting is to share preparations, planning, plans and learning and discuss any cross-border issues, as well as receive updates from MHCLG.

Covid-19 Finance update

Overall impact on budget

39. The impact of Covid-19 on the 2020/21 budget is reported monthly in the Financial Update reports to Cabinet. The position at Month 10 is largely unchanged from Month 9, a £0.2m change from £3.6m at Month 9 to £3.8m deficit forecast at Month 10. The council is holding £9.9m in reserve to meet this deficit. Further detail is set out in the 2020/21 Month 10 (January) Financial Report (to this Cabinet meeting) sets out further detail.
40. The 2021/22 impact of Covid-19 was set out in the budget approved by Council on 9th February 2021 and remains largely unchanged. The national Budget, announced by

Chancellor Rishi Sunak on Wednesday 3rd March announced an extension to Business rates reliefs; 100% business rates relief from 1st April 2021 to 30th June 2021, followed by 66% business rates relief for the period from 1st July 2021 to 31st March 2022. The resulting shortfall in rates will be met by Government and does not impact the council's funding.

COVID Winter Support Grant

41. On Monday 22nd February 2021, the government announced that as part of its COVID roadmap, the COVID Winter Grant (CWG) Scheme will be extended to the 16th April 2021, providing an additional £59.1 million of extra targeted financial support for those in need during the pandemic.
42. The CWG Scheme, originally announced in November 2020, provided £170 million to councils to support those most in need across England with the cost of food, energy and water bills and other associated costs during the pandemic. The original scheme was due to end on the 31st March 2021.
43. Surrey County Council was awarded £2.1m in the first announcement and was notified of a further allocation of £739k from the extension in early March. Funding is paid in instalments and dependent on the Council returning reporting on how the funding is being spent, in line with specific grant conditions.
44. The initial allocation has been used to support the provision of food vouchers over the Christmas and Easter holidays and February half term to children entitled to Free School Meals (FSM) and low income families with children in early years settings. In addition, support has provided to Care Leavers, the Surrey Criss Fund, winter cabins for the homeless, a VCF organisation distributing clothes, equipment and school supplies to children and a number of food banks across the County.
45. The additional allocation announced as part of the extension of this grant will be used to further support Care Leavers and to provide additional food vouchers to families entitled to free school meals and in early years settings over Easter, to support them with the provision of other meals (e.g. a healthy breakfast or a hot evening meal) in addition to the lunchtime support offered via the previous funding provided.

DEFRA Food & Essential Supplies Grant

46. In June 2020 the Council received a grant allocation of £788k from the Food & Essential Supplies grant. The majority of this grant allocation was passed onto Boroughs and Districts with smaller amounts retained to support the Surrey Crisis Fund and the Bookham food distribution centre. A proportion of the allocation to the Bookham food distribution centre remains unspent and this amount will be transferred to the crisis fund continue support into 2021/22.

ASC Workforce Capacity Fund

47. Since the previous COVID-19 Cabinet report, it has been agreed that £1.5m of Surrey's £2m allocation will be paid to ASC community care providers, with the remaining £0.5m retained by the Council to contribute towards additional ASC staffing costs. All of the £1.5m has been paid to providers. This grant is for expenditure incurred in the period 16th January 2021 – 31st March 2021, and must be fully spent by 31st March 2021.

Public Health Finance

48. The Council's Public Health service continues to lead the response to the virus in Surrey. In doing so they are managing three grant funded programmes:
49. Surrey's **Test and Trace** programme which is funded by a £3.4m grant. The delivery of the Test and Trace programme will continue into 2021/22 to enable Surrey to continue to effectively control the spread of the virus.
50. **The Contain Management Outbreak Fund (COMF)** – Since last month's Covid-19 Cabinet report, the government has confirmed COMF funding arrangements up until 31st March 2021. The Council will receive £27.3m of funding for the period 5th November 2020 – 31st March 2021. At the time of writing this report, £22.5m of this funding had been received with a further payment of £4.8m due for the period 24th February – 31st March 2021. COMF is funding a range of initiatives delivered by the County Council and across Surrey's District & Borough Councils to help manage and contain the spread of the virus.
51. **The Targeted Community Testing (TCT) programme** is now well underway. This programme is focusing on delivering surge asymptomatic testing of key workers across a combination of four specific new temporary testing sites operated by the Council (all of which are now live) and designated pharmacies across the county that sign up to deliver testing. The initial plan was deliver this testing over a period of 8 weeks, and the Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) has approved a £3.9m bid to fund the estimated costs of delivering testing in this period. The government recently announced a national extension of asymptomatic community testing until the end of June. The Council is in the process of confirming its own plans to extend testing in line with this and will be submitting a bid for further funding to cover costs up until the end of June.

Local Elections

52. The Government have confirmed that the local elections scheduled for 6th May 2021 will go ahead and have issued a delivery plan intended to support the safe and effective management of the elections. Changes are to be made to nominations and proxy voting arrangements and additional government grants have been announced to contribute toward additional Covid-19 related costs.
53. Careful planning and preparation for the elections continue in conjunction with districts and boroughs, recognising that the prevalence of Covid-19 presents additional serious challenges and risks (in addition to those presented by multiple, multi-tier elections, including some Parishes, District and Borough Council, County Council and Police and Crime Commissioner) that will have an impact on costs, logistics and management of the elections. The timeframe for the roll-out of vaccinations and when the beneficial effects are expected to be felt fall close to the election timetable. Ensuring residents' safety, welfare and reassurance in the conduct of the elections will be a priority, to ensure that people do not feel discouraged from taking part in the elections and/or disenfranchised.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

54. Risk implications are stated throughout the report and Covid-19 related risks are managed through the Strategic Coordination Group governance structure.

SECTION 151 OFFICER COMMENTARY

55. Although significant progress has been made over the last twelve months to improve the Council's financial position, the medium-term financial outlook beyond 2021/22 remains uncertain. The public health crisis has resulted in increased costs which may not be fully funded. With uncertainty about the ongoing impact of this and no clarity on the extent to which both central and local funding sources might be affected in the medium term, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority in order to ensure stable provision of services in the medium term.
56. The financial implications of the pandemic continue to be monitored closely and reported regularly through the budget monitoring report. The proposed grant of £500,000 to the Community Foundation for Surrey to support the rebuilding and recovery work of the VCFS is factored into the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS – MONITORING OFFICER

57. The various initiatives described in the report have been the subject of specific legal advice and support in formulating and implementing the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure they are in accordance with the Council's powers, duties and responsibilities. There are no further specific legal implications arising in the report.

EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY

58. As in previous updates to Cabinet, this report highlights our continuing work to support some of Surrey's most vulnerable residents through this pandemic. This includes:
- Ongoing work to discharge older and disabled people from hospital into community or other settings;
 - Working with NHS partners to support residents with learning disabilities to be vaccinated;
 - Timeliness of assessments and visits to children and families being supported by children's services, in spite of increased demand;
 - Provision of supermarket vouchers through the Covid Winter Grant scheme to enable over 20,000 children and young people to continue receiving free school meals over the Easter holidays; and,
 - Continued support for over 67,000 CEV residents who are registered on the SPL.
59. The report highlights the impact of the pandemic on some of Surrey's most vulnerable children and young people. It highlights the higher than average number of contacts to Children's Services, particularly as schools started to re-open on 8 March. The number of children on Child Protection plans continues to rise, and the council has made preparations to ensure they can adapt to this increased demand. Children and young people are also being supported to return to education, and the resumption of business-as-usual for support services, such as speech and language therapy, will help all children and young people's learning and wellbeing.
60. While the full impact of the pandemic on unemployment is emerging, the RCG is prioritising support for unemployed residents through national programmes, such as Kickstart, and work with further education colleges on support for young people will continue to be a key focus area over the coming months.

61. As we prepare for county council elections in May, we will work with partners to ensure some of our most vulnerable residents have options available to them to keep them safe while they participate in the democratic process. We will ensure all venues where residents will vote in person will follow Covid-secure guidelines and encourage uptake of postal voting for residents who may feel safer using this option, particularly those who are CEV.

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Consulted: Corporate Leadership Team and other staff
