

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET**

DATE: 27 APRIL 2021

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: MR TIM OLIVER, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

LEAD OFFICER: MICHAEL COUGHLIN, DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

SUBJECT: COVID-19: SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL UPDATE

ORGANISATION STRATEGY PRIORITY AREA: GROWING A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY SO EVERYONE CAN BENEFIT/ TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITY/EMPOWERING 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 intention to stand down the Major Incident from the end of April 2021;
7. The continued use of Covid Bus Service Support Grant to support contracted bus services which have continued to operate through the pandemic.

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 appraised 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 22 February 2021 the Government published a four-step plan setting out the roadmap for easing restrictions and exiting England's third national lockdown - COVID-19 Response – Spring 2021. To date, the lifting of restrictions has gone ahead as planned. On 29 March 2021 the 'Stay at Home' rule ended allowing up to six people or two households to meet outside. On 31 March 2021 shielding for those in the clinically extremely vulnerable group ended. On 12 April 2021, the country entered step two of the roadmap, which involved the re-opening of non-essential retail, personal care services, public buildings, most outdoor attractions, self-contained accommodation, and hospitality venues for service outdoors only. A summary of the Covid-19 Response – Spring 2021 plan is available here.

Covid-19 Contain Framework

2. On 18 March 2021, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) published the revised COVID-19 Contain Framework- a guide for local decision makers. This document sets 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.

Covid-19 Surveillance

3. The Public Health team continue to hold data surveillance meetings three times a week to ensure prompt action is taken in line with Surrey's Local Outbreak Control Plan. The COVID-19 Intelligence Summary and Coronavirus infographic are now published weekly (every Friday) and provide regular updates on COVID-19 rates in Surrey. The latest data indicates that between 7 April and 13 April 2021, 13.1 cases per 100,000 population were recorded in Surrey. This rate is lower when compared with England; 26.3 per 100,000 population.

Local Outbreak Control Plan

4. Surrey's Local Outbreak Control Plan has been updated and re-published to reflect the COVID-19 Response – Spring 2021 plan, the revised COVID-19 Contain Framework, as well as local progress and developments. The following actions aligned to the plan which have recently taken place include:

- **Testing**

Full details on COVID-19 testing in Surrey are available [here](#). There is also a new [NHS webpage](#) for COVID-19 testing.

- **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. Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, new continuous cough, loss of sense of taste or smell) can access [PCR testing](#) at regional testing sites, local testing sites, mobile testing units or through home delivery. The Surrey Testing Cell continues to assist with the provision of PCR testing upon request for specific priority groups if needed. [GPs](#) and [children's homes](#) continue to be able to order PCR testing kits if needed.

- **Symptom-free Testing**

Symptom-free testing, recommending regular testing of adults using twice weekly lateral flow testing, has been expanded both locally and nationally. The local authority led Targeted Community Testing programme in Surrey has now been approved by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) until June 2021. On-site testing is now available to anyone over the age of 16 who lives, works or studies in Surrey at four testing sites in Staines, Ewell, Woking and Redhill as well as 22 participating community pharmacies across the county. On-site testing is walk-in at testing sites; however, booking is still required for community pharmacies due to lower capacity and to allow for business as usual activity. Anyone over the age of 18 can also collect home testing kits from the four testing sites in Staines, Ewell, Woking and Redhill.

Anyone over the age of 18 can also collect home testing kits from NHS Test & Trace testing sites, which are repurposed as collection points in the afternoon and evenings. These are in Egham, Epsom, Guildford, Farnham, and Hersham in Surrey; however, residents can also collect kits from sites in neighbouring areas if this is more convenient. 177 pharmacies in Surrey have also now signed up to act as collection points for home testing kits as part of a Pharmacy Collect model being rolled out by NHS Test & Trace – of which around 70 are already operational. Locations and opening times of sites can be found by visiting the Surrey County Council or NHS testing webpages. Other nationally led symptom-free testing streams are still in place in educational settings (for pupils and/or staff), care settings, NHS settings, and workplaces. These may be home testing, collection or on-site testing depending on setting. Individuals who cannot collect home testing kits or access testing through their workplace or educational setting can also [order](#) them to be delivered to their home.

- **Surge Testing**

The Surrey Local Resilience Forum (SLRF) has completed surge testing in three postcodes (GU21, GU22 and TW20). These have been surveillance exercises in response to notification that a different variant of COVID-19 which originated in South Africa had been identified from positive tests in these areas. The Surrey County Council public health team will continue to work with Public Health England to assist in the investigation and management of variants under investigation (VUI) and variants of concern (VOC) as required, with the support of the SLRF. Further information about surge testing can be found [here](#).

- **Local Contact Tracing**

Since 15 March 2021, Surrey has been completing contact tracing for all cases. Between 1 April and 7 April 2021, the national and local contact tracing teams combined in England reached 87.9% of cases. Between 9 April and 15 April 2021, Surrey's Local Contact Tracing team in Surrey reached 94% of cases demonstrating

that Surrey are continuing to reach more cases than the national average. From 19 April 2021, Surrey will also be rolling out face to face contact tracing in an effort to speak to the 6% of cases they are not currently reaching.

- **Schools**

Public Health and Education colleagues continue to provide support to education settings across Surrey. COVID mitigation measures and regular symptom-free testing processes for eligible ages are well established in education settings in line with guidance and advice from the Department for Education and partners.

- **Care Homes**

The Care Homes COVID-19 Outbreak Oversight Group continues to meet weekly to provide oversight of current COVID-19 outbreaks in care homes and co-ordination of system response in line with national guidance:

- **Visiting in care homes:** From 12 April 2021, updated guidance states that care home residents can nominate up to two named visitors who can enter the care home for regular visits. Visitors under 18 years of age are counted towards the maximum number allowed for the visit. Visits including babies and very young children (under two years old) may also take place with the agreement of the care home manager and would not count towards the maximum number. A Surrey guide for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for visitors has been developed and shared with partners.
- **New PPE guidance:** On 10 April 2021, updated guidance on PPE and Infection Prevention Control was released by the Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC). The guidance provides advice to those working in care homes on how to work safely during this period of sustained transmission of COVID-19. Surrey PPE Standard Operating Procedure has been updated and shared with partners to reflect guidance changes.

- **Community (COVID) Champions**

The Community (COVID) Champions programme has continued to develop with Public Health successfully engaging the majority of the eleven boroughs and districts. The role of Community COVID Champions is to share accurate, timely information on COVID provided by Public Health within their local communities. Recent progress includes:

- **Webinars:** Six districts and boroughs are now holding regular, well-attended online meetings with excellent engagement from across the community. Mole Valley are next to launch online on 28 April 2021 with presentations from their Chief Executive and the CCG.
- **Briefing:** Nine of the districts and boroughs now receive and circulate the weekly e-briefing to their networks. The briefing covers local and national data and guidance, testing and vaccinations, reducing health inequalities, and COVID-related public health topics
- **External Engagement:** The programme is now connected into both Surrey Heartlands Health and Care Partnership and Frimley Health and Care Integrated Care System (ICS) communications teams and equalities workstreams. In addition, the programme is linked into the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government's national Community Champions network. Senior health colleagues are now regularly presenting at the COVID Champions webinars, including George Roe, Chief Operating Officer of North West Surrey Integrated Care Services (Runnymede, 8 April) and Jack Wagstaff, Chief Executive Officer of North West Surrey Health and Care Alliance (Spelthorne, 15 April)

- **Vision:** Contain Outbreak Management Funds (COMF) funds have been secured to extend the programme across communities working with voluntary sector organisations. The aim is to further increase the diversity of champions across (i.e. ethnicity, culture, faith, age, long-term conditions) and to build the programme's ability to address COVID-related health inequalities

COVID-19 Vaccination Roll-out

5. Surrey Heartlands

5.1. Between 8 December 2020 and 11 April 2021 (data published 15 April), Surrey Heartlands Health and Care Partnership delivered a total of 617,898 COVID-19 vaccinations, of which 500,456 were first doses. Delivery of vaccinations has been undertaken in accordance with the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) priority cohorts and Surrey Heartlands is on track to have offered all those in JCVI cohorts 1-9. From 14 April 2021, authorisation was given for the programme to start vaccinating people aged 45-49 years within cohort 10, and this work is now underway. Further information on the Surrey Heartlands Vaccination Programme is available [here](#).

6. Frimley

6.1 Between 8 December 2020 and 11 April (data published 15 April), Frimley Health and Care ICS administered a total of 428,608 COVID-19 vaccinations, of which 350,157 were first doses. Vaccination of cohorts 5-9 was completed by the target date of 15 April 2021, with the offer of vaccination made to everyone in these groups, and an overall uptake percentage of 81.2%. The offer of vaccination remains open to anyone in Cohorts 1-9 who has yet to take it up, and sites are redoubling efforts to attract remaining people in these cohorts. Vaccination of people aged 45-49 years has commenced in Frimley. Further information on the Frimley Vaccination Programme is available [here](#). NHS England data on daily and weekly uptake of vaccinations can be found [here](#).

The council's Covid-19 Ops Group

7. 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 on transitioning from response into recovery and a 'new normal'. The Group have helped shape the SCC Roadmap to Recovery work being presented at the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT), highlighting the major steps for a return to a 'new normal' and business as usual. Further work is also ongoing in reviewing the risk assessment process and linking in with the Agile Organisation Programme team as we transition to new and more agile ways of working, whilst ensuring staff are able to safely access the SCC estate where they cannot work from home.
8. Symptom-free testing for staff and the reporting and logging of vaccinations are also an important focus for the Ops Group at this time. Public Health colleagues, linked into the Testing Cell, continue to advise on new developments in the provision of symptom-free testing in Surrey, which is a further tool to ensure a safe return of staff to work settings. HR&OD colleagues have developed a report highlighting the number of staff who have logged their COVID vaccinations, and further work is also being undertaken to enhance this reporting.

Impact on Adult Social Care (ASC) services

Hospital Discharge

9. Together with health partners, Adult Social Care has now completed assessments for people discharged under scheme 1 (people discharged without an NHS or social care assessment between 19 March - 31 August 2020, as per the emergency guidance and funded by the NHS). NHS Funding has been confirmed for the continuation of Scheme 2 until September 2021.
10. The service will continue to work with our NHS colleagues to agree the discharge to assess funding model for Surrey post September 2021, should national funding cease.

Testing

11. The Surrey Local Resilience Forum (LRF) Testing Cell continues to work with local, national and regional partners to ensure that those people who have symptoms are able to access testing through the national system as necessary.
12. The Heartlands Testing Group have put in place local arrangements for essential key workers to access tests as required. Testing of residents and staff in older people services, including staff in home-based care continues across Surrey.

Vaccination

13. Adult Social Care continues to work with partners to ensure front line social care workers receive their vaccination. All CQC registered providers in addition to our in-house service report their vaccination data via the National Capacity tracker. At present, 399 out of the 412 Care Homes in Surrey have entered information onto the tracker.
14. Each week, the council is required to report the vaccination of other eligible people who work in Social Care with adults and children, yet do not work in CQC registered services. The latest return on 14 April for these individuals noted that there were 12,984 known eligible individuals in this group and that of these 10,054 were known to have had their first dose.
15. The service will continue to play an important role in the roll out of the Covid-19 vaccination to unpaid carers (priority group 6).

Impact on Children, Families and Lifelong Learning

Children's Social Care

16. Since the last update to Cabinet in March, arrangements across frontline children's services largely remain the same with both frontline and support staff being asked to work in offices and the community where required to enable services to function effectively. 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. We have not needed to enact contingency planning arrangements in the last 8 weeks.
17. Demand across children's services remains high with the number of contacts to the Children's Single Point of Access (C-SPA) at the highest they've been over the last year with 5,099 contacts received in March – an increase of 37% from the month before. The return of children to schools in March contributed to the current surge in demand, however, the arrangements we put in place have ensured that work continues to progress within

timescales. We continue to see improvements in performance with 94% of assessments and 95% of Initial Child Protection Conferences completed within timescales.

18. The majority of frontline children's services staff received their first dose of the vaccine in January/February and some have now received their second dose following significant effort this year to coordinate the programme for SCC staff and partner agencies via the LRF.
19. The number of children in care in Surrey remains stable at approximately 1000 however, the number of children subject to Child Protection Plans continues to rise for the ninth consecutive month to 901 at the end of March. This compares with 693 at the same time last year. It should be noted that Surrey's numbers of children subject of Child Protection Plans is lower than the regional and national average and there has been an increase nationally throughout the pandemic.

Education

20. From 12 April, educational day visits resumed in recognition that these experiences can improve and enrich children's personal and social development as well as their learning. Surrey Outdoor Learning and Development (SOLD) has opened its three sites – Thames Young Mariners, Henley Fort and High Ashurst – to school groups, voluntary and community groups and families for its outdoor learning programmes. There is significant interest from schools and bookings for the Summer term and into the Autumn are steadily being seen. As Surrey moves into recovery following the pandemic, this service becomes even more vital for restoring the health and wellbeing of our residents.
21. Schools are also continuing to receive support through Covid-19 clinics, weekly emails and staff, pupils and families all having access to home testing kits. Families were supported over the Easter holidays through Free School Meal vouchers as well as holiday activity packs for disadvantaged children. Colleagues are supporting parents choosing to home educate, partly due to anxiety about going back into a school environment, whilst ensuring that safeguarding responsibilities are fully met.
22. Schools are seeing a growing number of children, including younger children, with mental health issues. Before the Easter break, we asked all schools to share the [Health, Wellbeing and Emotional Wellbeing Support for Children in Surrey - A Guide for Parents and Carers, April 2021](#) with their parents. The Guide helps families understand how to access the right advice, guidance and support when they need it. It highlights a range of resources to help maintain a child's wellbeing and to address any emotional needs, as well as guidance about self-harm.

Supporting Families

23. Surrey's new Holiday Activity and Food Programme began with a great start over the Easter holidays. Packs containing arts and crafts, food, and nutrition and physical activity advice, as well as a skipping rope were distributed to all 11,500 primary school children eligible for free school meals. There was also a virtual offer for all primary and secondary pupils, including those with additional needs. While face to face activity was limited due to coronavirus, the service ran 12 face to face pilots over Easter, using well regarded providers such as SOLD and YMCA, which offered places to 565 children. These pilots are helping us plan for summer holiday provision which will reach many more children with healthy meals and enriching activities.

Impact on Communities and Support to Vulnerable Residents

Covid-19 Local Contact Tracing Partnership

24. The Covid-19 Local Contact Tracing Partnership, a joint endeavour between Public Health and Customer Services, continues to 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.
25. In March, the partnership took part in a pilot where our local tracing team contacted all positive cases in three District and Borough areas (Woking, Spelthorne, and Runnymede) as soon as their results were registered on the national system. The aim was to increase contact rates in Surrey and help drive transmission rates down. Following the success of the pilot, the partnership has now adopted this model for the whole county. During our first two weeks of operation, we achieved a successful contact rate of 95%, which compares favourably to an 89% overall success rate for the previous model.

Community Helpline

26. The Community Helpline continues to provide advice and support to residents that need help, as well as acting as the inbound arm of the local contact tracing operation. The helpline has received 15,170 calls since it went live. Current demand is being comfortably managed within existing resource, with a view to retaining resilience to cope with any future peaks. Enquiry types have evolved recently from direct support requests to more general queries around the easing of restrictions and vaccinations.
27. On 1 April 2021, shielding advice came to an end for over 68,000 clinically extremely vulnerable residents in Surrey who are on the Shielded Patient List. These residents can now follow the national restrictions alongside the rest of the population, but are still advised to take extra precautions to keep themselves safe from COVID-19.
28. In collaboration with local District & Borough Councils, work is underway to implement the Government's new self-isolation framework which is designed to help local councils provide a triage process and support package for individuals who are required to self-isolate and need practical, social or emotional support to do so. This includes proactive follow-up calls to those residents who are self-isolating and have previously indicated a support need (either flagged by NHS Test & Trace or through direct contact with the council), to check whether any new or additional support needs have arisen during the self-isolation period.

Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS)

29. Voluntary, community and faith bodies continue to face income pressures and increased demand but are continuing to provide ongoing support to residents in their time of need. Discussions with the sector are ongoing through the new Surrey Charities Forum, which was established as a result of the pandemic. Volunteer capacity across the county remains high. As summer approaches, some parts of the sector have started to plan limited activities and events that form a major part of their annual fundraising cycle. The RCG are researching financial resilience and capacity building to support the sector, especially when furlough ends and a further spike in demand for services is expected.

Recovery activity

30. The Recovery Coordinating Group (RCG) continues to monitor and support the reopening of services in line with the Government's Spring Plan. Key to the success of the lifting of lockdown is appropriate and timely messaging to the public. The Multi-Agency Information Group have been working on recovery communications under the strapline 'working together to get there' focusing on reassurance, behaviours and compliance with particular messaging around Easter and Ramadan.
31. Now that the immediacy of the medical crisis has started to recede, the RCG has worked with the Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) to look at how the remaining work can either be stopped or transitioned to business as usual/new business, to enable the major incident and the SCG to be stood down. It is currently the intention that the major incident should be stood down at the end of April 2021, although the CMG will meet in line with the national lockdown easing stages.
32. The temporary mortuary at Headley Court may need to remain open beyond the timeline quoted above. This will have associated costs.
33. Work supporting place, economy and retail continues, with the re-opening of non-essential retail and leisure centres on 12 April having been a key milestone. Key public messages have been issued regarding Covid-19 safety, as well as consideration and respect for the natural environment and countryside 'hot-spots'. The grants programme for businesses administered by the district and boroughs continues with more grants coming online in May. The full impact of Covid on unemployment and town centres remains unknown, but surveys have shown that offices are unlikely to be at more than 50% occupancy before June. To help mitigate the impact of this, work is progressing to encourage those working from home to support their local economy by spending locally.
34. The RCG is capturing and promoting the sustaining of improved behaviours, practices and processes resulting from the pandemic, including; how the pandemic has led to stronger partnerships, transformed services, improved use of infrastructure and green spaces, wider data sharing, enhanced digital solutions and a more agile workforce. Once completed, this will be widely shared to ensure the learning can be taken further and used to benefit other services or organisations.

Covid-19 Finance update

Overall impact on budget

35. The impact of Covid-19 on the 2020/21 budget continues to be reported monthly in the Financial Update reports to Cabinet. At Month 6, Cabinet approved a budget reset to distribute Covid-19 emergency funding to meet Directorate pressures and the costs of the Local Resilience Forum Cells. A total of £52.5m has been allocated; with £9.9m currently held in reserve.
36. Against the £52.5m budget, at Month 11 a £2.3m deficit is forecast. The 2020/21 Month 11 (February) Financial Report sets out further detail. At outturn any CV-19 overspend will be met from the balance held in the CV-19 reserve.
37. Government have provided £20m of Covid-19 emergency grant for 2021/22, of which £15.1m will fund pressures already quantified in the 2021/22 budget. The remaining £4.9m will be held as a Covid-19 contingency.

Adult Social Care

38. Since the previous COVID-19 Cabinet report, the Department of Health & Social Care has announced a third round of Infection Control Fund (ICF3) and Round 2 Rapid Testing Fund (RTF2) for Adult Social Care (ASC) covering the period 1st April 2021 – 30th June 2021. Surrey County Council will receive £6.1m of ICF3 funding and £4.0m of RTF2 funding. These grants will be distributed to ASC providers in line with the grant conditions. Unless there is a significant change to the Government's Spring Roadmap to remove all COVID-19 restrictions by 21st June, it is expected that ICF3 and RTF2 will be the last tranches of ASC COVID-19 funding from Central Government.
39. When combined with all of the 2020/21 ASC COVID-19 support grants and the over £10m of support the Council provided through goodwill grants and other financial support measures, this will bring the total financial support provided to the ASC sector in Surrey since the start of the pandemic to over £60m.

Covid Bus Service Support Grant

40. Since the start of the pandemic, the Department of Transport has been providing Covid Bus Service Support Grant (CBSSG) to support contracted bus services which have continued to operate, and in doing so have faced significant financial losses due to reduced passenger numbers brought about by lockdowns and the need for social distancing. CBSSG has helped to sustain bus services and supported the passenger transport sector which will play an important role in the county's recovery. To date the Council has received or is expecting to receive CBSSG of c.£3.6m, and funding is expected to continue in the short term.

Public Health Finance

41. 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:
42. 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.
43. The Council has received the final **Contain Management Outbreak Fund (COMF)** payment for 2020/21 bring the total funding received up to 31st March 2021 to £28.6m. Following Government confirmation of COMF allocations for 2021/22, Surrey County Council will receive a payment of £5.2m in April. 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.
44. The **Targeted Community Testing (TCT)** programme continues to progress. 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. A Community Collect programme is now also being rolled out, to enable members of the public to pick up test kits to use at home. SCC spent just under £1m on TCT in the period up to 31st March 2021 and although testing numbers are lower than originally planned, it is still expected that the full cost will be reimbursed by DHSC in line with the bid SCC submitted. Work continues to finalise details of the funding bid for the extension

of the TCT programme (including Community Collect) up until the end of June in line with the Government's plans.

Local Elections

45. 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.
46. Careful planning and preparation for the elections continue in conjunction with districts and boroughs, recognising that the prevalence of Covid-19 presents additional 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. Ensuring residents' safety, welfare and reassurance in the conduct of the elections continues to be a priority, to ensure that people do not feel discouraged from taking part in the elections and/or disenfranchised. A county-wide communications plan has been implemented to make residents aware of the different ways that they can vote (postal, proxy etc) and, in the final weeks before the elections, will focus on assuring residents that polling stations will be safe places to vote.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

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

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48. 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.
49. The financial implications of the pandemic continue to be monitored closely and reported regularly through the budget monitoring report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS – MONITORING OFFICER

50. 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

51. 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;

- Support for unpaid carers of older people and people with disabilities who use Adult Social Care services to be vaccinated;
- Timeliness of assessments and visits to children and families being supported by children's services, despite increased demand; and,
- Support for families over the Easter holidays through Free School Meal vouchers and holiday activity packs for disadvantaged children.

52. The report highlights sustained demand pressures on Children's Services. 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 has risen for the ninth consecutive month and contacts to the C-SPA are the highest they have been in the last year. The report also highlights the work done to support growing numbers of children and young people with mental health issues.

53. As we prepare for county council elections next month, 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 clinically extremely vulnerable.

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