

QUESTIONS FROM THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REGARDING THE ISLE OF WIGHT COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

PREFACE:

As set out in the report to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee the council is still actively responding to the coronavirus and, whilst the immediacy of response that has been required for much of the last 85 days has lessened somewhat this could increase at any time. However, this does allow time to give greater emphasis to work on planning for recovery than has been the case. In the coming months the council will need to balance the needs of response against recovery depending on circumstances (7 June 2020).

Background

1. **Paragraph 7** refers to the Strategic Command Group (Gold Group) being the body responsible for making decisions. Was a decision log kept? If so, can the committee have access to this?

Yes – the logs are marked ‘official – sensitive’ so can be shared on that basis.

Community Support

2. **Paragraph 9** refers to briefings held with Cabinet members and group leaders. What briefings were made available to other members of the Council on the actions being taken to combat the pandemic?

Group leaders undertook to brief their own group members (92.5% of all councillors). A total of fifteen emails to all members have been sent by the Chief Executive. A single point of contact was arranged for members needing further or specific information.

3. In **paragraphs 10, 25 and 26** mention is made of difficulties with obtaining up to date data to undertake effective support within the community and businesses. The absence of consistent updated data from relevant bodies is of concern. What steps can be taken through the One Public Service initiative to rectify this so that any data held is of good quality and can be relied upon for future planning and delivery of services?

The data in these paragraphs primarily refers to data provided from government and therefore outside of anything covered by the One Public Service approach.

4. **Paragraph 12** refers to the establishment of 27 community hubs. In which areas is there no community hub in operation? What steps can be taken by the Council to encourage the establishment of a hub in those areas?

A list of those areas with hubs can be provided to the committee and is also available [online](http://www.iowcoronavirus.co.uk) at: www.iowcoronavirus.co.uk . Where no local hub is active, residents can phone the helpline to request support and the council has its own responders in place to support. The establishment of hubs in other areas would require dedicated officer time to establish and it would be more prudent to understand the government's medium-term plans for shielded and vulnerable people before making any changes to the current arrangements.

5. **Paragraph 16** refers to a third sector lifeline fund. Are there any applications that have yet to be approved and processed for payment? If so how many, for what amounts and what is the timescale for completion of the process?

No

6. **Paragraph 17** refers to a community essential shopping and delivery fund. Is there a timescale for when this will cease?

No

7. **Paragraph 18** refers to economically vulnerable people and households. What is the actual number in each category?

This paragraph relates only to those in receipt of local council tax support (LCTS); the number is therefore 5,000.

8. What is the up to date plan to work and collaborate with Town and Parish Councils at local level in rebuilding our communities, villages and towns post-Covid-19?

This is under consideration of as part of recovery planning.

Preventing the Spread of Infection

9. **Paragraph 20** in relation to PPE. Were partners aware that the council had secured its own stock so that they could make similar arrangements?

Yes – once the council was assured it has sufficient stock for its own immediate needs, all partners in the care sector were written to and advised of its availability.

10. **Paragraph 22** refers to the establishment of an NHS Island App.

- Is there any report or data regarding the App?

Yes – an evaluation report is being prepared by the cross-government team who developed the app.

- Is there evidence that the App has assisted the IW in reduction of possible Covid-19 cases? (and if so, how? - Details of its effectiveness or not?)

The roll out of the app was not designed by government to collect data on this basis (for example there was no 'control group' by which you could compare non-users against users). There are far too many variables that were changed throughout the roll out of the app to make meaningful comparisons (eg lockdown measures, levels of testing and care home testing).

However, it is arguable that the app raised people's awareness and understanding of the coronavirus and therefore encouraged them to observe the control measures of social distancing and personal vigilance.

When the app launched to the community there were 154 lab confirmed cases of Covid-19 on the Isle of Wight (as at 7 May). At the 6 June there are 200 lab confirmed cases at a rate of 141.3 per 100,000 population (compared with a rate of 276.3 in England).

- How are the findings from the App helping the Government fight against Covid-19?

The functionality and ease of use of the app have been well tested on the Island and are being improved as part of the next version (in development). Back office processes for tracing and contacting affected individuals have been developed and improved alongside different delivery methods for delivering tests to those reporting symptoms.

11. Reports that the IW is at R0.42 and well under R1, whilst neighbouring mainland authorities report nearer or over R1 (such as Southampton at 1.21). As Southampton and Portsmouth are the main ports to the IW, and residents still have to go to these cities for work or hospitals visits,

what measures are in place to protect the Island from exposure to increase in Covid-19 from the fact these areas are at higher risk?

The sample size on the Isle of Wight for calculating R is so small, that any reports such as the one referred to must be considered very carefully. The actual degree of statistical variance has not been reported and is expected to be quite large.

The council continues to follow all of the guidance measures issued by government to protect individuals and will continue to promote these messages through its media channels.

Working with Island Businesses

12. **Paragraph 29** refers is made to a business rates holiday. How many premises does this involve?

1,385

13. **Paragraph 31** indicates that a policy is being finalised for two funds. What is the process for the final decision on the policy and what date will it be implemented from?

In reality, the amount of discretion for the council to deviate from government guidelines is very little and the fund was launched in consultation with the Cabinet member for Resources on 27th May. Businesses and government have been keen to get these funds flowing as soon as possible and already £1m of the £3m available has been allocated.

Details are available on the council's [website](#).

14. **Paragraph 32** mentions the co-ordination being undertaken between ferry operators. Is there a possibility of such arrangements being continued just for the travel of patients to mainland hospitals for treatment with the costs being passported by the Department of Health?

No

Maintaining Critical Services

15. **Paragraphs 37 to 40** refer to communications. What co-ordination was there with partners to ensure a one public service approach?

The council is part of the media and communications cell of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF). Locally as part of the Island Tactical Coordinating Group (ITCG) media messages were shared and planned across the IW NHS Trust, IW CCG and all multi-agency partners who are part of that group and the council.

Children's Services

16. **Paragraph 42** indicates that visits are still being made to children and family homes for safeguarding purposes. Are there similar arrangements in place for adult social care?

Yes

17. Has a response been received from the DfE regarding the issues contained in **paragraph 47**?

The DfE have issued subsequent guidance which addresses some of the issues outlined by the council and further dialogue continues through professional channels.

Public Health

18. **Paragraph 48** - Will the Local Resilience Forum be doing a wash up meeting to identify lessons learnt and if so can a copy be made available to the Committee?

This would be a normal part of its processes, but it is still standing and in response mode, so it is too early to begin to plan a review of all of its activities.

19. Separate from any provided reports for Corporate Scrutiny Committee, have IW/Hampshire Public Health or Public Health England produced any data and report on Covid-19 in relation to the Island? If available, can members of the Committee have copies?

There is no report specific to the Island; most data is collected nationally and then fed back at upper tier local authority level. For example see the data on lab confirmed cases at <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/#category=nations&map=rate>

20. Has there been a full risk assessment and analysis of the effects of Covid-19 to the Island's economy, health and social infrastructures, and what is the estimated cost to the Island as a whole and to the IW Council? If there is a risk assessment and analysis, please can members of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee have access to copies?

As the council is still responding to the crisis – there are no reports or analyses of this type available at present.

Adult Social Care

21. **Paragraph 50** refers to homeless people. When is it believed that the emergency accommodation will cease? Besides accommodation what arrangements were put in place to meet to meet known medical and social needs of those involved?

The indications are that the government's requirements to provide emergency accommodation to everyone presenting homeless will cease at the end of June, although there is no official confirmation that this is the case. The council commissioned support services from the Salvation Army and Two Saints (to provide support to the people in the emergency accommodation). It also convened multi-agency meetings three times a week (attended by the police, mental health NHS services, Inclusion substance misuse services) in order to ensure that plans are in place for those individuals with the most complex needs.

22. **Paragraph 51** indicates that accommodation had to be arranged for prisoners released early. Has the Government been asked to recognise the additional burden that having a prison on the island has had on emergency arrangements?

It has been identified as an area of risk with the Local Resilience Forum and therefore 'flagged' with its contacts with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. Prisoners released under licence must have a 'home address' to go to before release.

23. Is there any data showing the number of discharges mentioned in **paragraph 52** and the time taken to complete these? Were all those discharged tested and clear of Covid-19?

The data can be made available but due to the low number of incidents will need to be managed carefully to protect patient confidentiality. Government policy until 15 April was that people being discharged from hospital into a care home did not need to be tested unless they were exhibiting covid-19 symptoms. The hospital complied fully with this government guidance. Since 15 April, when government policy changed, everyone being discharged from hospital into a care home has been tested for covid-19.

24. **Paragraph 55** mentions the provision of staff to care homes. How long will such arrangements be in operation for?

For the period of the pandemic – it is expected that this might be something that is built into the actions that will follow the government changing the ‘Covid-19 alert status’ as launched in the government’s document, “our plan to rebuild” (11 May 2020).

25. **Paragraph 56** indicates a Support for Care Homes Plan being compiled. It indicates that the delivery of this will be scrutinised by the Better Care Support Team. Will this team submit a report on a regular basis to the Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Health and Social Care?

No - this is a national team of experts which reports to the Department of Health and Social Care. It will assure the government of the robustness of the council’s care home support plan, submitted on 29 May. If any feedback is received from the team it can be reported to a future meeting of the Health and Adult Social Care Policy/Scrutiny Committee.

26. **Paragraph 57** indicates that a decision may be taken on a further lump sum enhanced payment scheme. When will this decision be made and will funds be made available from the IWNHS Trust to this?

This decision will be made later this month in accordance with government guidance, part will come from the IW CCG (new discharges) and the rest from the council (current clients).

Neighbourhood Services

27. **Paragraph 63** refers to a revised highway resurfacing programme will have to be implemented. Can members receive a copy of this?

Yes – as it becomes available, as part of the communications plan referred to.

Regeneration

28. **Paragraph 66** refers to the development of a Recovery Plan. Can the Leader/Chief Executive outline with more clarity what the Recovery Plan is - especially as it is mentioned in the Cabinet Report (page C-9 paragraph 52). What will be the structure of an “Island Recovery Task Force” and it’s agreed priorities?

The council has started to work up its approach to recover over the last few weeks. The paper today outlines some of the areas are being considered as part of the recovery plan, but more work is needed to add to the detail. The key challenge for the council will be finding the right balance between rebuilding the Island’s economy whilst continuing to protect the community by controlling the spread of the virus.

Financial/Budget Implications

29. Is the IWC in talks with Government directly or indirectly (such as through LGA), on the estimated cost to the IW and its residents - and is there any indication of any future support?

Yes, the council is working in support of the Local Government Association’s lobbying activities for securing more funds for local authorities. The LGA has estimated a minimum £6bn is needed across local government in 2020/21 alone.

Correspondence received from Government indicates that Local Authorities will not be funded for all costs / losses of income. Robert Jenrick has stated:

“we wouldn’t want anybody to labour under a false impression that what they are doing will be guaranteed funded by central government“

"But as you can imagine it is only fair that central government supports things that are open to all rather than individual choices by local councils."

Government have identified the following as priorities for funding, notably it doesn't cover income losses which for the Council amounts to £8m

- ❖ Adult Social Care
- ❖ Children’s Services
- ❖ Public Health Services
- ❖ Fire and Rescue Services
- ❖ Waste Collection Services
- ❖ Shielding the clinically extremely vulnerable
- ❖ Homelessness and rough sleeping
- ❖ Domestic Abuse
- ❖ Supporting the NHS
- ❖ Managing excess deaths

30. On 31st April 2020, the Isle of Wight Council received a full repayment of £1.7m from Wight Community Energy into its reserves. Has this figure been considered in the £9.8m total shortfall?

Not directly since the receipt from Wight Community Energy is a capital receipt whereas the funding shortfall is revenue. It will however be considered as a potential mechanism for funding the shortfall itself

31. **Paragraphs 77-78** - What communications have been made to the Government (to whom/when) concerning our budget gap and how they can help with:
- The current shortfall in the 2020/21 budget, due to COVID-19
 - The estimated further shortfalls in the 2020/21 budget, due to COVID-19
 - If there was a second wave (spike) of COVID-19

Please see the answer to question 29. In addition, the Leader, Deputy Leader and MP have all spoken with the Minister for Local Government in the last few weeks. As set out earlier, this is an issue for all local authorities and the government is keen to work with industry representatives bodies understand the scale of the challenge.

32. **Paragraph 79** - From the shortfalls, what budget items do not fall into the Secretary of State’s “spending that is not explicitly in alignment with the government’s policy and guidance relating to the emergency”? If there are items outside this statement, how are they specifically going to be covered?

See also the response to Question 29 above. On Monday 4 May, when giving evidence to the Commons' housing, communities and local government committee, Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, set out that the government was "very clear" about the "specific tasks" it has asked of councils, which he spelled out as the provision of social care, housing rough sleepers, education functions within councils to protect vulnerable children and additional costs in fire and rescue services. These, he said, were all costs which the government was prepared to reimburse.

33. **Paragraphs 83-84** mention a deficit recovery strategy. When will this be considered by full council along with the proposed associated savings?

Approval of the deficit reduction strategy is an executive decision provided it is achievable within the overall financial budget envelope agreed by Full Council in February, and therefore does not require the use of General Reserves.

34. **Paragraphs 80-84** – When will the “deficit recovery strategy plan” (with comprehensive outline information) be available to the Full Council for its approval?

The strategy will need agreement before the end of August, at present all non-essential spending is subject to review and agreement by Directors.

Legal Powers and Duties

35. **Paragraph 86.4** covers the decision-making process. Was the Chairman of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee involved in any of the urgent decisions that had to be taken? Can copies of any decisions taken under these provisions be made available to the Committee?

There have been no decisions requiring the involvement of the Chairman of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee whilst the council has operated under its emergency provisions.

36. **Paragraph 87** - The Coronavirus Act 2020 made provision for the postponement of any scheduled elections after 15 March 2020. Is there an end date to this?

Yes. Under s.60 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 and the Local Government and Police and Crime Commissioner (Coronavirus) (Postponement of Elections and Referendums) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, any local, mayoral and Police and Crime Commissioner elections that were due to take place in May this year have been postponed until May 2021. Any by-elections which would be held to fill vacancies in the office of councillor any county, district or London Borough Council in England or any town or parish council are also postponed until 6 May 2021.

Conclusion

37. **Paragraph 92** indicates that the Corporate Plan will require a refresh. Is there a timescale for this?

No – the point being made is that council will not be in a place to deliver the objectives planned before the onset of the coronavirus. The recovery plan will set out some short and medium term objectives that will need to be the council’s corporate focus as the pandemic continues.

38. **Paragraph 93** mentions lesson to be learnt. How will this be captured and where will it be considered?

A full debrief will be led by the Emergency Management and Resilience Manager, involving all areas of the council. It is impossible to determine when this work could start given that the council is actively responding and recovering in unequal measures at the same time.

Appendix H

39. What is the breakdown of the following figures?

There is no detailed breakdown available; these are forecast figures at these levels based on current levels of activity and previous spending patterns. They have been put together by the finance team in accordance with the government’s requirements.

Additional Expenditure

- Adult Social Care - Supporting the market - £2,383,995
- Housing – Homelessness/Rough sleeping - £535,072 (how many people does this represent and is this permanent?)
- Children’s Services – Potential additional costs of delay in ICS project - £305,000

Lost Income

- Neighbourhoods – Leisure centre fees and charges - £1,741,124
- Neighbourhoods – Car parking - £3,167,106
- Regeneration - Planning and Building Control Fees - £431,088
- Miscellaneous – Other fees and charges - £1,163,048

40. It was suggested that PPE was made available to care homes with free packages to start but moving on to a charge for subsequent supplies at cost. Is this figure net or gross of potential income? Can both gross and net figures be provided, or if still work in progress a best estimate be supplied?

Please can the question be clarified. Care homes have received PPE support from a number of different sources.

41. What is the basis for additional staffing not in the original budget and use of additional agency staff? One might expect that most contacts being digital that workloads would increase, and that the 200 redeployed staff might fill the gaps.

Agency staff are still required for technical and professional positions, for example Adult Mental Health Practitioners.

42. Can clarification be given to the heading “supporting the market” and a further breakdown of the figures provided?

This is the financial assistance given to the private providers of social care to help them meet the additional costs of responding to the coronavirus. It relates to additional staffing, PPE and cleaning costs in the main.

43. What does the heading “Homelessness/rough sleeping” relate to? If it is just the 81 identified in the cost is higher than the normal rate paid. There are commercial B&Bs on the Island with nightly room rates from £40 per night.

The council was given 48 hours by government to find a safe place for all homeless people. Its choices were very limited and took a substantial effort from the Housing Needs Team to secure. Ultimately it had to go with what was available in the market. It is also easier to provide support to the homeless in a limited number of facilities rather than many spread across the Island.

44. What is the ICS project and why is it delayed?

The new IT system for managing casework in Children’s Services, it was partly delayed as IT staff were redeployed to work on other projects that were of greater corporate priority at the time.

45. Why are additional Foster Care retainers required?

This is for carers in extreme financial hardship, where they may have lost their employment as a result of the pandemic and are awaiting benefits, and where we do not want the placement to breakdown

46. Why is the temporary Mortuary cost so high? There were 30 deaths from Covid-19 on the Isle of Wight to mid-May; which equates to nearly £22,000 per mortuary space if none are released for burial or cremation.

The council has a duty under the Civil Contingencies Act (2004) to plan for the reasonable worst case scenario that might affect the Island. At the start of the crisis in March the Rate of Transmission of the virus (before the government took any action) was 3.43. This translated into a potential for c350 deaths a week at the peak of the pandemic. Sufficient additional body storage capacity had to be arranged to accommodate these numbers.

47. What was Third Sector Lifeline support spent on?

The fund is available to provide initially up to £30k to:

- loan to fund third sector organisations to remain a going concern and pay their staff whilst waiting government support for furloughed staff.
- Grant short term reasonable operational costs whilst awaiting government funding
- Grant funds to cover staff and operational costs incurred through directly supporting Covid -19 response efforts on the Island

48. Is the expenditure in "Community Essential Shopping" inclusive of the Government Food Box scheme or in addition? If in addition what are the criteria for entitlement and how many people are helped by the scheme?

This is in addition to the government food box scheme provided to Shielded residents. It is difficult to evaluate as this is being managed in the community groups. The funds provide working capital for these groups to support residents by advancing monies to pay for and deliver essential shopping with each individual paying their own way for shopping. Only those in extreme vulnerable isolation due to Covid-19 are provided with a specific food drop.

49. The figures show savings of £1,148,563 not being achieved in Adult Social Care. Please explain the reasons that preclude these savings now being made?

This primarily relates to the review of care packages which will be slowed down as more staff are responding directly to the crisis.

50. £1,926,000 income was lost due to Council Tax – how and why?

This is a forecast of the additional cost to the council of the local council tax support scheme as a result of an increase in those eligible for the scheme because of lost income resulting from the coronavirus impact on their employment. In addition, it is forecast that there will be a reduction in Council Tax collected of circa 2%

51. **Section 27** Can you confirm how many of the remaining 17% of eligible properties after the appeals process was put in place have been reassessed and have now been awarded the grant funding?

To be confirmed

52. **Section 28** Following the media campaign to target businesses unaware of the grant availability, and of all the businesses that were contacted by letter, email and by telephone, how many have now been awarded the grant funding?

3,918, which equates to 85.4% of those thought eligible.

- 53. Section 30** How is the previously announced government provision of the Local Authority Discretionary Grant 'fall through the gap' funding being communicated to smaller businesses, market traders and bed & breakfast establishments etc?

The discretionary fund has been communicated through the normal council channels – media release, social media and I appeared on IOW Radio. The scheme was launched on 27/5/20 and by Friday 5/6/20. There has been 265 applications to date of which 102 have been approved for payment at a total value of £851,810.

- 54. Section 31** It is expected, and after taking all reasonable steps to provide grants to all eligible businesses that there will be an underspend of funding. A total of 5% of this allocation can then be directed towards discretionary payments. With the council currently drawing up its intended policy, how is it envisaged to target and contact such businesses?

Please see the answer to question 31