

REPORT TO: ECONOMY AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 11TH JUNE

REPORT OF: CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMY AND REGENERATION

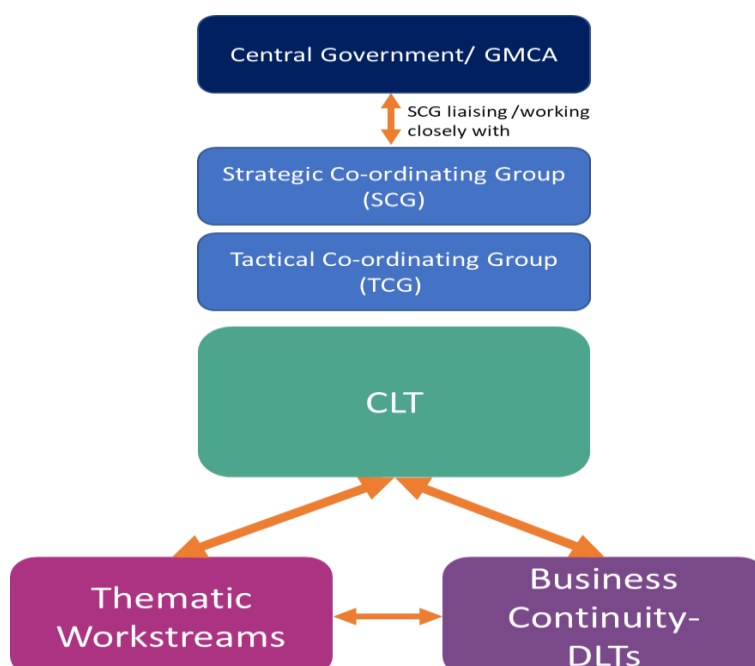
REPORT TITLE: RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The spread of coronavirus, declared a global public health emergency, has created unprecedented circumstances within which the Council, working with our communities and partners, have had to respond.
- 1.2 Whilst an understandably difficult period for many living and working within Stockport, we have also witnessed an incredible and inspiring outpouring of neighbourliness and community spirit.
- 1.3 This report provides an overview of the Council's response to date, building on regular updates received directly by members and including detail relating to the remit of this committee, and a view of how this response will be developing over the coming weeks and months.

2.0 Responding to Covid-19: Council approach

- 2.1 The Council has established a robust and responsive governance to facilitate cross partnership and organisational response. This has included close working with Government and Greater Manchester:



Responded to Government guidance and advice

2.2 The Council's responses have been very much guided by advice and guidance provided by Central Government and the Corporate Leadership Team have reviewed guidance and announcements daily throughout this period. The specific relevant published guidance in terms of the remit of this Committee has included:

- Coronavirus Act 2020
- Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020
- Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020
- Health Protection (Coronavirus, Business Closure) (England) Regulations 2020
- 02/04/20 Expanded Retail Discount Guidance
- 02/04/20 (Updated 24/04/20) High Street Grants Announced
- 02/04/20 (Updated 24/04/20) Business Support Grant Funding Announced
- 06/04/20 Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (Extended to October on 12/05/20)
- 07/04/20 Support and Advice for Businesses
- 07/04/20 Workplace Social Distancing Guidance
- 09/04/20 Enforcement of Business Closures
- 22/04/20 Business Rate Relief
- 04/05/20 Discretionary Grant Scheme Announced
- 06/05/20 Business Rates Revaluation Postponed
- 13/05/20 FSA Guidance in Food Businesses
- 13/05/20 Self Employment Income Support Scheme Launched
- 13/05/20 Guidance on Holiday Entitlement and Holiday Pay
- 13/05/20 Guidance on the Discretionary Grant Fund Scheme
- 19/05/20 Coronavirus Statutory Sick Pay Rebate Scheme

Provided robust and responsive communications

2.3 Clear and responsive communications have been fundamental throughout the Council's response. This has included:

- Boroughwide public communications, sharing public health messages, information about support and celebrating local businesses and organisations;
- Targeted communications for those who are shielding or vulnerable;
- Daily members e-brief;
- Daily all colleague e-briefings;
- Regular forums (2/3 times a week) with Partners including: Schools, Businesses, VCSE, Food Banks.

Redesigned and introduced new service provision

2.4 The organisation has made several changes to provision in response to Covid-19, this has included changing the way some services are delivered and, in some instances, temporarily suspending some services. This has included:

- Closure of public facing buildings (e.g. libraries, registrars);
- Virtual formal meetings;
- Face to face assessments and reviews moved to video/ teleconferencing;
- Temporary suspension of services, schemes and projects (e.g. registrations of births and marriages, Apprenticeships, A Bed Every Night Project);

- Early years, schools and post-16 setting closures;
- Reduction in waste collection, suspension of park maintenance services, closure of public outdoor sport facilities.

Introduced new service provision

2.5 Alongside service changes a series of new services have also been introduced.

This has included:

- Business Resilience Hub, including: Stockport Jobs Match service, SK Business Recovery website, New Business Grant scheme and daily update newsletter with advice and information about Covid-19 and responses to support businesses;
- Stockport Support Hub, including: coronavirus helpline; New services for food, shopping, medicines, driving support, PPE distribution, social contact;
- Door step / phone check-ins with those adults and children in receipt of care / additional support (e.g. EHCs, over 70s with assisted bin collection) and those on national shielded list;
- New pathways and revised services via MASSH including: new emotional wellbeing hub which includes daily triage and allocation of appropriate support for children and young people; revised early support offer with daily triage;
- Hardship Grant to supplement Council Tax Support (unallocated funds will be used for additional discretionary payments for Council Tax Support, Housing Benefit and support funds);
- New hotel and temporary provision to accommodate rough sleepers;
- Coordination of childcare for vulnerable children and children of key workers.

3.0 Responding to Covid-19: Thematic approach

3.1 The key programmes of work in the Covid-19 response have been:

- Humanitarian Aid.
- Voluntary and Community Response.
- Food.
- Workforce.
- Mortality Management.
- Finance.
- Out of Hospital Support – Adults and Disability and PPE.
- Contact Testing and Tracing.
- Children and Education.
- Economic Resilience.

A summary of scrutiny responsibilities for the Council's Covid-19 response can be found in Appendix.1.

3.2 An overview of the activity, progress and impact to date in relation to the programmes and services relevant to this Committee is set out below.

The workstream covers:

- **Sector liaison;**
- **Business advice, information and guidance;**
- **Coordination of support for businesses;**
- **Economic impact monitoring.**

We are working in partnership with Stockport businesses to understand the impact that Covid-19 is having on them and on the local economy, and to create and provide responses that offer as much mitigation as possible. Based on intelligence and information from our businesses, we have supported an initial phase of surviving the economic shock. The daily communications provide information, advice and support on accessing the various financial support measures offered by Government, as well as support with changing their business models to continue trading by offering deliveries and/or take away services, support for furloughing staff and mental health and wellbeing advice and guidance.

A Stockport Economic Resilience Forum was formed at the start of the crisis to develop and deliver an Economic Response Plan to support Stockport businesses through the crisis and into recovery.

The group meets three times a week and includes Stockport Council, Stockport Economic Alliance, GM Chamber of Commerce, Stockport Business Improvement District, Marketing Stockport, Stockport Jobs Match – Grassroots Recruitment. This forum considers the business intelligence that is being gathered, through GM, the Chamber and our local Business Improvement District surveys, regarding the impact of Covid-19, and agrees the actions to be taken in response to help businesses to cope and recover going forward.

The Forum has agreed that Marketing Stockport will be commissioned to collate and distribute the daily communications. This partner has created the Stockport Business Recovery website, a free to access online portal providing a one-stop resource of support, an online peer-to-peer forum and free access to local business leaders - the Stockport Recovery Board. This Recovery Board provides a forum to access a wide range of business leaders and experts, as a pool of expertise, who answer questions, provide advice and share concerns during these difficult times. These sessions are recorded and available to watch later if people can't join at the time of the live session.

As an early response to the increased supply of labour as people started to come out of work at the start of the crisis, Grassroots Recruitment were commissioned to provide the Stockport Jobs Match and the Stockport Employment Hub online website to support people looking for work and employers looking to recruit workforce. This response was established within three days and was widely promoted as good practice.

We are commissioning a supplier to support us with a "One Stockport" campaign to rebuild confidence in the public, and businesses, that Stockport is a safe place to work, shop and socialise if social distancing measures are applied and followed. This is an important campaign that will bring everyone together to support our local businesses and economy and build on the increased sense of community spirit and mutual support that has been created during the lockdown.

We are working on a plan to reopen the Town Centre and put in place measures to support safe social distancing in public spaces such as Merseyway.

A summary of the main impacts on Stockport Businesses:

- 83% of businesses responding are saying they have been impacted by Covid-19.
- 70% reporting decreased sales.
- 60% have furloughed staff.
- 41% have one to three months' worth of cash reserves.

Impact:

A rapid response to providing access to the business grant support was provided by the Revenues and Benefits team and was well ahead of national averages, as at 22nd May, the figures are:

- £55,580,000 paid, 4,829 grants to qualifying businesses, 88% of those identified as eligible as at 11/03/2020.
- 113 jobs were advertised on Jobs Match.
- 37 employers advertised jobs on Jobs Match.
- 311 people registered on Jobs Match.
- CVs were sent to employers 1,258 times via Jobs Match.
- 3,000 visitors to the Jobs Match website.
- 72 vacancies have been filled and removed from Jobs Match since it started.

Work Area	Stockport Jobs Match – job scheme for residents
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Stockport Jobs Match has been developed by the Council in partnership with Stockport based Grassroots Recruitment, to provide an online portal where employers needing extra staff as a result of Covid-19, can be matched with individuals seeking employment opportunities due to their circumstances from the current situation. There is also access to support with CVs, advice and guidance. Within its first month (by 30th April 113 jobs had been advertised on the website by 37 employers. As well as this, there were 311 registrations and 1,258 CVs sent to employers via Jobs Match, and also almost 3,000 visitors to the website.

Work Area	Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme
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The Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme went live on 20th April, with businesses able to claim up to £2,500 a month towards staff wages. This is the scheme that will provide up to 80% of a furloughed employee's wages.

Employers can furlough anyone they employ, provided that on, or before, March 19th they were on PAYE payroll and HMRC has been notified of payment via the RTI system. The government has provided an updated calculator for businesses to use to work out how much they can claim.

Work Area	Business Support Finder service
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The Government has launched a business support finder to help businesses see what support is available to them.

Work Area	Loan Scheme for small businesses
<p>This Government scheme enables small businesses to access a new fast-track finance scheme providing loans with a 100% government-backed guarantee for lenders. The scheme opened for applications on 4th May.</p> <p>The new "Bounce Back Loans Scheme" is an addition to the existing package of support available to the smallest businesses affected by the coronavirus pandemic by providing loans of up to £50,000. The scheme has been designed to ensure that small firms who need vital cash injections to keep operating can get finance in a matter of days.</p> <p>Government will provide lenders with a 100% guarantee for the loan and pay any fees and interest for the first 12 months, during which time no repayments will be due. Firms will be able to access these loans through a network of accredited lenders.</p>	

Work Area	Launch of the SK Business Recovery website
<p>When the Government announced its lockdown measures in mid-March, Stockport Council convened the Stockport Economic Resilience Group, a partnership of private and public sector representatives, collaborating to coordinate a swift and effective response to the economic impacts that the crisis has brought to the borough's business community. This Group has now launched a new website (www.skbusinessrecovery.co.uk) designed to provide support to businesses as they begin to emerge from the effects of the Covid-19.</p>	

3.3 Given the pace of the Covid-19 response, a verbal update will be provided at the meeting regarding any developments following the publication of this report.

4.0 Looking ahead

4.1 We are working hard with colleagues and partners both locally and across Greater Manchester to ensure that we can "build back better" and make Stockport even stronger in the future. Across Stockport people came together during the crisis and it will be important that we stay together to support recovery.

4.2 With regards to the areas within this committee's responsibility recovery plans will be shared with the committee as they develop. A summary of the next phase of recovery is included below for each workstream.

Workstream	
<p>Next phase/ recovery plans and specific recommendations in relation to Economic Resilience</p> <p>We are developing a local economic recovery plan with the Economic Resilience Forum which aligns with, and informs, wider borough recovery planning and economic recovery planning at the GM level. A series of sector-focused workshops was delivered to gather intelligence and information about the needs and concerns of businesses to ensure that our support and response is configured to meet their needs effectively. The plan reviews a series of scenarios and presents a coordinated action plan to support businesses and the workforce as we come out of lockdown and move through the 'living with Covid-19' phase. As part of this, we are developing approaches and resources to support safe social distancing in public spaces to support the staged return from lockdown. The plan also sets out how we will support the principles of Build Back Better and deliver whole systems change to make the economy in Stockport faster, fairer and greener.</p> <p>We recommend that the revised procurement arrangements under Covid-19 continue to be used to support us to be agile and rapid in commissioning urgent responses to need.</p>	

Work Area	Stockport Jobs Match – job scheme for residents
This has been set up on an initial three-month period until the end of June and we will review at this point to see if it is still required in its current format.	
Work Area	Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme
This HMRC run scheme has been extended until the end of October. Further details are expected imminently.	
Work Area	Launch of the SK Business Recovery website
This will continue to support businesses in the Borough and will tie into the wider Economic Recovery work and the One Stockport campaign in due course.	

4.3 A further update on the Council's recovery planning approach will be brought to a future scrutiny committee.

5.0 Next steps and recommendations

5.1 As outlined in section four, the Council is now moving its focus to preparing for the next phases of its response, both living with Covid-19 and building back better. We are committed to doing this in collaboration with our communities, businesses, elected members, trade unions and partners through existing forums established but also opening conversations and through testing ideas together.

5.2 The Scrutiny Committee are invited to:

- Discuss and note this report and the response to date;
- Note the commitment to return to Scrutiny with information about future phases of response.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are none

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Kathryn Rees on telephone number 07989208640 or alternatively email on kathryn.rees@stockport.gov.uk

Appendix.1 – Overview of response and scrutiny responsibility

Theme	Communities and Housing	Corporate Resource Management and Governance	Children and Young People	Economy and Regeneration	Adult Social Care and Health
	Mon 8 June	Tues 9 June	Weds 10 June	Thurs 11 June	Thurs 11 June
Humanitarian Aid	X	X			
Voluntary and Community Response	X				
Food		X			
Workforce		X			
Mortality Management		X			
Finance		X			
Out of Hospital Support – Adults and Disability and PPE					X
Contact Testing and Tracing					X
Children and Education			X		
Economic Resilience				X	