

Cabinet

22 June 2021

Covid-19 Response

For Decision

Portfolio Holder: Cllr S Flower, Leader of the Council

Local Councillor(s): All Councillors

Executive Director: [M Prosser, Chief Executive](#)

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Report Status: [Public](#)

Recommendation:

- a) That the continued Covid-19 emergency response is noted in relation to the organisational and incident recovery
- b) That the recovery plan is progressed as directed by the Local Resilience Forum, with input from the council's Overview Committees
- c) That the Dorset Council Plan is reviewed and refreshed in light of the learning from Covid-19 and the revised aims of the council

Reason for Recommendation:

To ensure that Cabinet is able to lead and remain assured of the way that the response and recovery from Covid-19 is progressing and is able to respond effectively to the changing needs of Dorset residents during the Covid-19 pandemic.

1. Executive Summary

This report provides an update on the council's response to Covid-19 following the report received by Cabinet in June 2020. This report provides an update on key areas in the last 12 months, along with Dorset's recovery strategy and work plans, which are being led by the Local Resilience Forum.

The council plan is being updated to reflect Covid-19 recovery activities, and this will come to Cabinet for discussion and agreement in the autumn.

2. Financial Implications

2.1 Dorset Council predicted an overspend from the outset of the pandemic. A combination of cost pressures, lost income from sales, fees and charges and potential shortfalls in council tax and business rates collection were the principal causes. During the financial year additional general grant from Government was announced as well as support for lost income. Our latest

assessment is that the impact of the pandemic on the council will have been in the region of £15m.

3. Well-being and Health Implications

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to have an impact on the wellbeing and health of residents and employees. The Dorset Together services stepped up to support residents and was instrumental in signposting additional support and advice during the pandemic. This service is provided in collaboration with the voluntary and community sector alongside statutory health partners. Dorset Council also provides wellbeing support for employees and has undertaken regular employee surveys to best understand how employees are coping and any additional support that may be required. The internal Employee Wellbeing Service offers several interventions to support employees whilst they continue working during the pandemic.

4. Climate implications

The council remains committed to the Climate and Ecological emergency and the strategy was approved by Cabinet in May 2021.

The implications of Covid-19 have been positive for our climate and ecology, with an initial reduction in travel by 80% due to the national lockdowns. The impact of the pandemic on our climate has been integrated into the new strategy and action plan. This work will continue as the county progresses recovery plans.

5. Other Implications

Public Health implications are ongoing due to the active pandemic.

Additionally, there are implications for all aspects of business as usual service delivery as the recovery strategy unfolds. This includes and is not limited to sustainability, property and assets, voluntary organisations, community safety, corporate parenting, physical activity, safeguarding children and adults, the workforce and HR implications.

6. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: High

Residual Risk: High

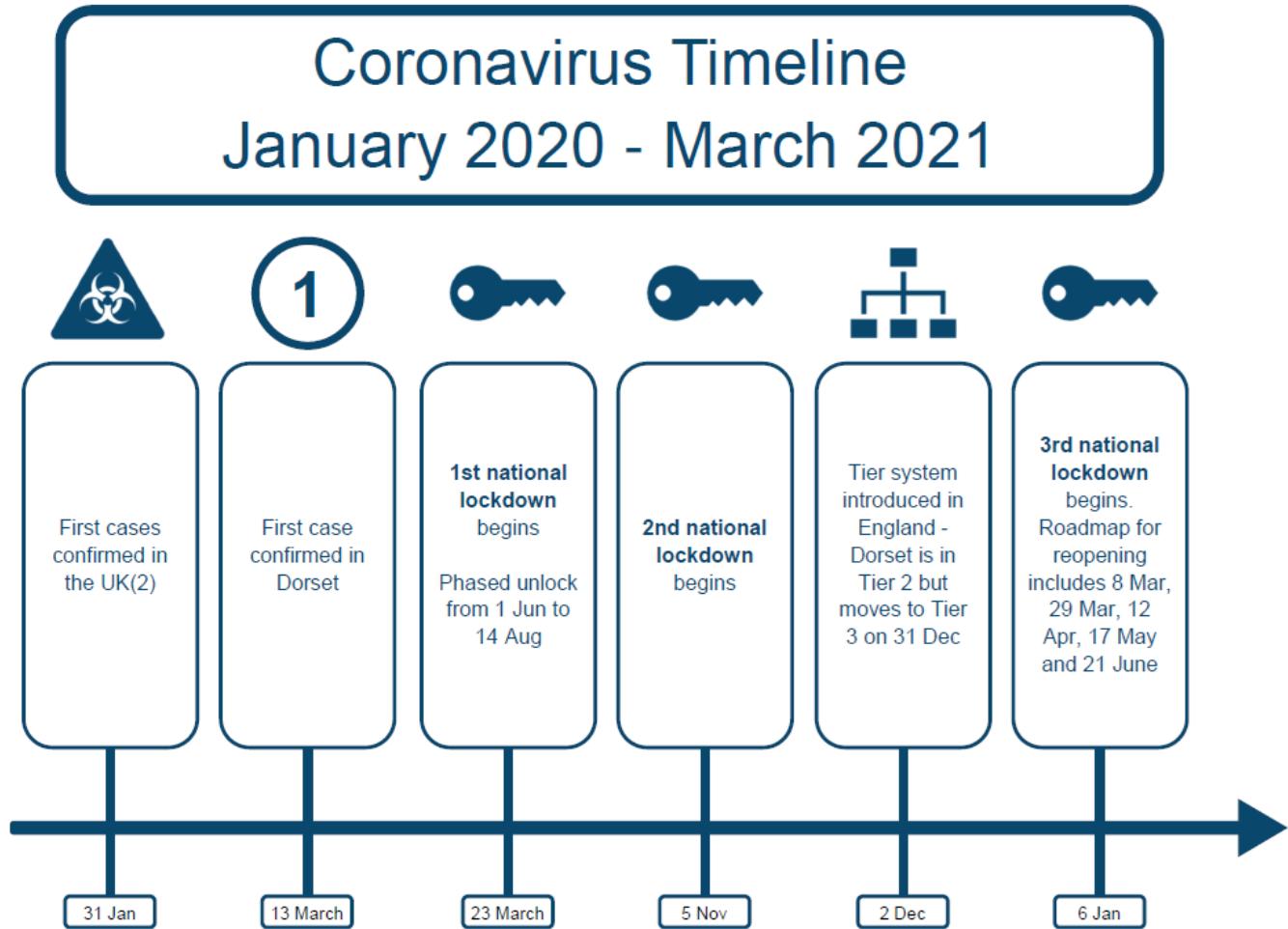
The council continues to deliver during a high-risk situation during a major incident with many factors unpredictable including the central government response during the outbreak. The risk management strategy at this time is for continued, focussed oversight of known risk and management of capacity to respond to priority situations as they evolve.

7. Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA)

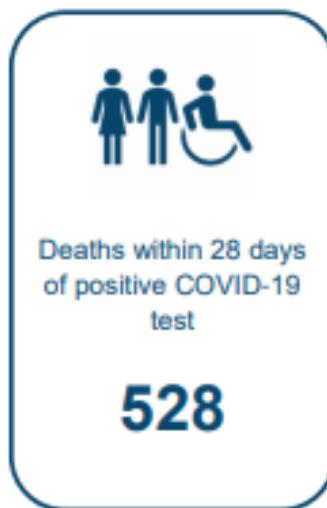
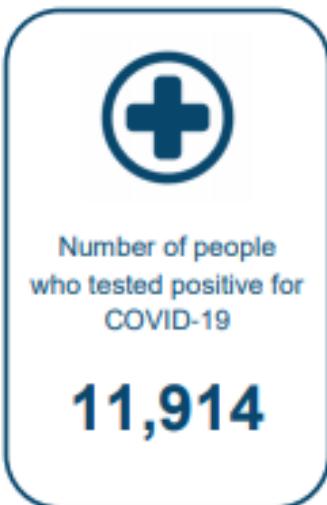
The action plan that was developed from the EqIA on how well Dorset Council responded to meeting the needs of vulnerable communities has been regularly updated and is overseen by the wellbeing sub-group of Dorset Together. Details are provided at section 18 below.

- 8. Appendices**
- i. Local Resilience Forum Covid-19 Recovery Strategy and Work Plans (exempt)
- 9. Background Papers**
- [Cabinet report on the Dorset Council response to Covid-19 on 5 May 2020](#)
[Cabinet report on the Dorset Council response to Covid-19 on 30 June 2020](#)
[2020/21 Qtr.1 financial management report](#)
[2021/21 Qtr.2 financial management report](#)
[2020/21 Qtr.3 financial management report](#)
[Covid-19 Equalities Impact Assessment](#)

10. Timeline of events from June 2020 – June 2021



COVID-19 in Dorset: headline figures



Infographics produced by the Research Team.
For more information contact research@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

11. Public health

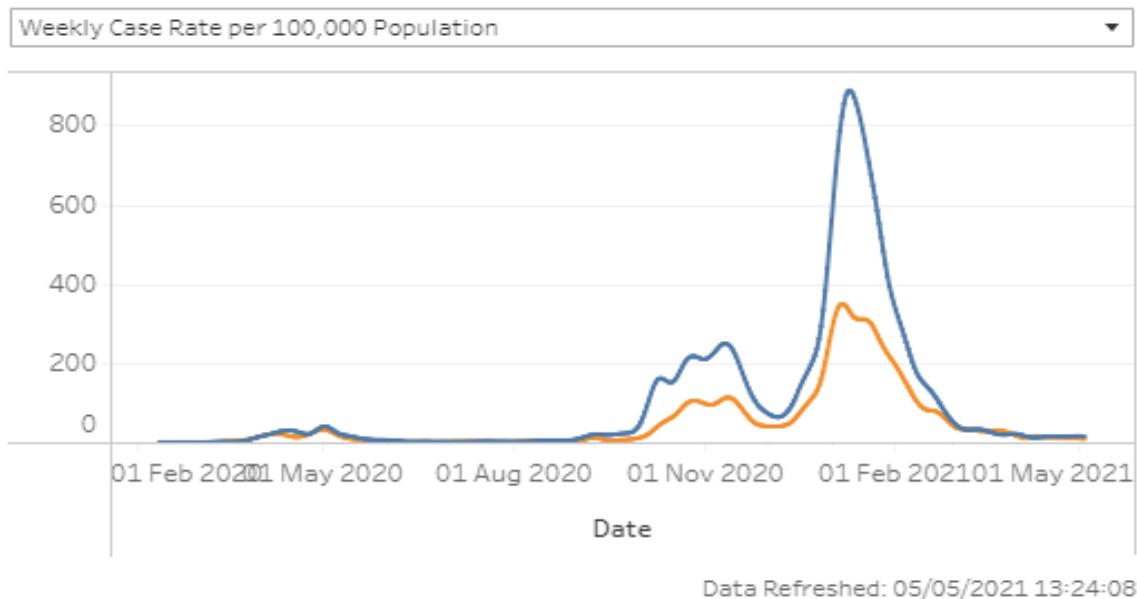
- 11.1** The past year has been an extraordinary time for the public health team. While Dorset has faced and responded to potential pandemics before (SARS Co-V 1, 2003, Influenza A H1N1 or ‘swine flu’, in 2009) this is the first time in living memory that such drastic and restrictive public health measures have been implemented globally in response to a new pathogen. What began as case reports of atypical pneumonia in China quickly built into an unprecedented series of outbreaks as the virus gained a hold in every country, a truly global crisis the extent of which many are still grappling to understand.
- 11.2** Under the current statutory responsibilities, local public health teams working in councils have no direct role in responding to health protection incidents, responsibility for the control of communicable disease sits with Public Health England. However, it became clear at a very early stage of the pandemic that local public health teams would be required to step up and over the line, to provide direct outbreak response, working closely with regional health protection teams, and health and care organisations locally through an extended Local Resilience Forum Major Incident that would run for more than a year.
- 11.3** Alongside this response work public health services providing face to face support were stopped, and alternative service models found. The senior public health team were fully focused on providing health protection leadership locally, from advice and guidance on infection prevention and control, to chairing incident and outbreak management team meetings, supporting risk assessments, deploying the increasing testing capability from NHS testing, regional PCR testing, mobile PCR testing sites and eventually community lateral flow testing.
- 11.4** Enhanced surveillance was brought on-line quickly through a local Epidemiology Cell (EpiCell), providing near real-time modelling, and forecasting of impacts of Covid-19 on local hospital occupancy, as well as deep dives into local outbreaks to support contact tracing.
- 11.5** By the end of the first quarter of 2020, Government had announced that local councils would lead local outbreak response through the development of local outbreak management plans, delivered through Health Protection Boards and Local outbreak engagement boards, and supported by emergency funding via the Test and Trace Grant.
- 11.6** And through all of this, the wider public health teams not directly involved in the health protection response were supporting colleagues in both councils as an amazing community response was stood up to support people shielding and isolating, as well as ensuring high risk settings such as care homes were able to access vital personal protective equipment.
- 11.7** By the autumn of 2020, after a lull in infection rates over the summer, a further, more serious wave was experienced which saw two national lockdowns. Throughout this time, the shift from Government-led to local-led response continued, and the public health team and local councils took on

more and more responsibility through the Contain Strategy, supported by more emergency funding.

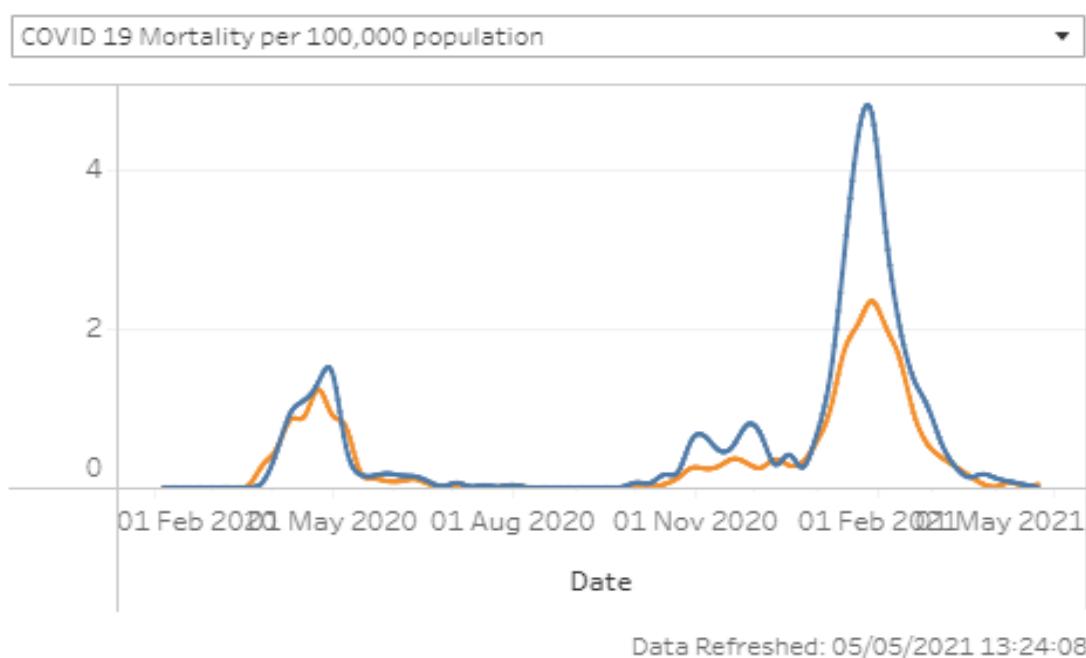
- 11.8** By March 2021, the local public health system had transformed the local response to outbreaks, through regional co-ordination of effort, supported by Government. This resulted in greater access and insights from surveillance data; a local contact tracing teams in Dorset Council following up the bulk of the positive cases locally, reducing time to contact; substantial testing capacity (including asymptomatic lateral flow testing); a significant communications and behavioural insights operation spanning the Integrated Care System partners; and two local outbreak engagement boards.
- 11.9** The dedicated health protection board has recently reduced its meeting frequency to every 2 weeks and provides vital situational intelligence to the Strategic Co-ordinating Group of the Local Resilience Forum effort. It is responsible for the delivery of the refreshed Local Outbreak Management Plan which identifies four priorities:
- Transmission must be brought, and kept, as low as possible
 - Surveillance of transmission and new variants must be optimal
 - Contact tracing and isolation must work, with a clear testing strategy
 - Vaccination must continue to be effective and delivered equitably
- 11.10** The immediate threat may have receded entering 2021-22, partly due to the success of the local vaccination programme. However, the risk remains, and the public health team continues to focus on maintaining our collective preparedness for the uncertainty of the next few months, preparing to respond to new variants of concern, ensuring surge testing capability, and ongoing work to ensure high risk settings can respond quickly to any new cases and limit the spread. The public health team continue to staff a dedicated day response and out of hours team.
- 11.11** The pandemic has brought into sharp focus the inequalities that are present in Dorset communities. It is anticipated that it has had a significant negative impact both on health and the prosperity of many of residents and maintaining a focus on working with partners to address these inequalities in the context of recovery remains essential.
- 11.12** Two graphs below showing the pattern of infection rates and mortality rates since the beginning of the pandemic as a case rate per 100,000 population (note there is an impact of test availability which affects the case rate particularly in the first wave) and the Covid-19 related mortality as reported through ONS (the data has been smoothed to show daily estimates from the weekly data).

Blue	Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole area
Orange	Dorset Council area

Graph 1



Graph 2



Vaccination programme

- 11.13** In early December 2020, the council was asked to support the vaccination programme for priority 1 (care home staff) and priority 2 (social care workforce) staff. Dorset was in receipt of early access to the Pfizer vaccine at Dorset County Hospital and by the middle of February local coordination had organised for 6,238 people to be vaccinated.
- 11.14** Recent Sage guidance is that 80% of care home staff and 90% of residents should be vaccinated for effective impact. The capacity trackers on May 19

02021 show an 88.2% take-up of vaccine by care home staff and 98.2% of residents.

- 11.15** Delivery of vaccination 1 as per Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) priority categories:

Type of Recipient	Total to date
JCVI Priority 1: Care Home Staff	2318 at DCH
JCVI Priority 2: Dorset Council Managed Staff	1589
JCVI Priority 2: Frontline Social Care Providers	2245 via Dorset County Hospital 500 estimated via University Hospitals Dorset
Total	6238

12. Feedback from residents

The residents' survey is undertaken on an annual basis to gather residents' perceptions on a variety of subjects including quality of life, community cohesion, feelings about Dorset and satisfaction with the council.

The results from this year show that there is a large increase in questions which relate to satisfaction with the council although other results are relatively stable.

Satisfaction with the council in 2020 was 72% – this is a large increase on the 2019 figure of 61%. Alongside this, agreement that Dorset Council provides value for money has increased from 39% to 48% between 2019 and 2021, and those who would speak positively about the council has increased from 30% to 43%.

Anecdotally, the survey interviewers reported that the council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic may help explain the increase in satisfaction.

13. Dorset Together (Community Shield)

- 13.1** The strategic approach to the Covid-19 crisis was developed and shared informally with the Cabinet and communicated to all elected members via the first all member webinar. The approach set out that 'during the Covid-19 crisis, Dorset Council will work to maintain critical services, sustain care, support the vulnerable and support our community'. To coordinate activity for the council, ten cells were stood up to lead pieces of work, one of which was the 'Community Shield' cell. This was a multi-agency partnership including employees from all directorates of the council, the voluntary and community sector, faith groups; Dorset CCG; Public Health Dorset and Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue.

- 13.2** As the pandemic has progressed and the response required has changed, this cell has evolved to coordinate a range of partnership community responses and is now named 'Dorset Together'. The approach of the group and the strategic response was endorsed by People and Health Scrutiny on 28 January 2021. The committee noted the critical and valuable contributions that had been made from all the various voluntary and community partnerships through the pandemic; and work on financial stability and food security and are keen to provide further scrutiny to the support that the council provides to the community and voluntary sector. A further report will be received by scrutiny in September 2021 on this issue.

The Shielding Programme and supporting clinically extremely vulnerable residents

- 13.3** The shielding programme commenced on 21 March 2020 and was initially paused on 31 July 2020 and reintroduced periodically through different periods of lockdown, pausing again on 1 April 2021. The number of Clinically Extremely Vulnerable people (CEVs) in Dorset increasing from 15,000 at the start of the pandemic to almost 25,500 at the end of the programme.
- 13.4** Dorset Council, like all top-tier local authorities was required to set up a local helpline; contact all CEVs and to provide support to meet basic care and wellbeing needs for all those that needed it. Early on a decision was made to use the council's contact centre number and this proved particularly effective and enabled the council to respond to emerging need and changes in policy over time. Initially employees were redeployed from other service areas and provided great support to residents and adapted to new roles very quickly. Over time as the need for a longer-term response was required and funding was received from MHCLG additional dedicated capacity was made available in the contact centre.
- 13.5** Our local response included the provision of information, advice and guidance; urgent deliveries of food and medicine; support from volunteers to pick up shopping, or medicine; peer support or befriending; and access to social care or mental health services. It was supported by a range of church, community, and neighbourhood support groups as well as by Age UK, Volunteer Centre Dorset, Citizen's Advice and Help and Kindness, who have been mapping and publishing local places to get help and support. Our colleagues in town and parish councils have also been providing local support.
- 13.6** Throughout the programme:
- 40,700 letters and 25,300 letters were sent to residents in response to changing policy and signposting to local sources of support
 - The contact centre supported over 4,700 clinically extremely vulnerable residents both through incoming calls and proactive calls to assess needs and offer advice and support. This included help with food, medicine, loneliness, care and support needs, financial support. These calls resulted in 610 urgent responses for immediate support and 1,399 referrals for matching to a volunteer.
 - Volunteer Centre Dorset matched residents following referral from the council or direct referral from other sources and support provided included supporting over 1,100 people with shopping; 598 people with dog-walking; 678 people with prescription collection; 477 people with phone befriending; 186 emergency food parcels and over 1,150 people with other requests for help.
 - Age UK offered a befriending service and made over 37,000 calls; received 22,000 calls and made 7,000 individual visits.

The Voluntary and Community Sector Network

- 13.7** The council and the voluntary and community sector network has met weekly since the beginning of the pandemic to coordinate responses, address arising issues, share good practice and avoid duplication.
- 13.8** Dorset Community Action (DCA) supported charities, community groups and social enterprises through a series of weekly online webinars and a dedicated helpline to answer questions about Coronavirus and the impact on organisations. Funding support for this was been provided by the council and DCA are now working closely with organisations to help support recovery planning.
- 13.9** Volunteer Centre Dorset continues to accept registrations of new volunteers and provides support and advice to others who need help maintaining their volunteer base. As well as providing support to clinically extremely vulnerable residents, they have facilitated teams of volunteers to support additional programmes such as vaccination programmes; Cosy at Christmas (where warm coats and pyjamas were distributed to families); Summer and Easter in Dorset (providing food and activities to children and families in school holidays) and the distribution of PPE to carers. They are currently developing an Ambassador programme to support with the anticipated increase in visitor numbers through the summer as lockdown eases.
- 13.10** Age UK North, South and West Dorset have continued to support vulnerable and isolated older people with befriending calls, online groups and delivery of pharmacy and shopping where the individual cannot do this for themselves. Plans now are moving towards the reopening of charity shops and the reintroduction of face to face activities.
- 13.11** Faith organisations have played a large part in the community response, coming together to offer support for those who have been bereaved through the operation of a helpline as well as through the provision of food banks and places and spaces for reflection. In many cases people have been supported to attend services digitally, which has greatly reduced social isolation for people that have traditionally been socially isolated.
- 13.12** The four Citizen's Advice officers have helped a significant number of residents experiencing financial hardship, offering advice and support on maximising income and managing debt; claiming appropriate welfare benefits and support for employment related issues as well as support for fuel poverty. As a result of the increase in needs related to debt, capacity has been increased through the provision of specialist debt advisors as part of recovery planning.
- 13.13** Dorset Race Equality Council (DREC) have supported many of Dorset's ethnic minority communities who may have been disadvantaged during the pandemic including Gypsy Roma Traveller; Eastern European and Muslim, many of which were not only dealing with the pandemic but also other critical issues such as the response to the Black Lives Matter movement and also the requirement for all EU nationals to register for settled or pre-settled status under the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS).

- 13.14** Dorset Community Foundation have worked with the council and others to raise funding, maximise funding opportunities and distribute grant funding across the sector through lockdown and repeated the successful Surviving Winter appeal to support with fuel poverty.
- 13.15** The council has worked with the formal voluntary and community sector to offer advice and support to informal mutual aid groups where it was required through the publication of guidance and tips for volunteers on staying safe, handling money and supporting dog walking; downloadable posters and flyers and through the provision of small grants.
Food Security.
- 13.16** Prior to the pandemic, Public Health Dorset and local councils in Dorset and BCP had identified food insecurity as an issue affecting many residents of Dorset. The Equality Impact Assessment undertaken by the Dorset Together group identified that as a result of financial hardship associated with the pandemic this may increase over time, which has borne out across Dorset as referrals for food support have increased.
- 13.17** The community response to ensuring people do not go hungry in Dorset has been excellent. The role of local food banks and local elected members in coordinating access to food for vulnerable residents has been immense supported by the generosity of local people, supermarkets and local businesses. Communities have developed a huge range of responses, including the delivery of hot meals, ready prepared meals, food parcels and the creation of new food banks, community fridges and social supermarkets.
- 13.18** Grant funding from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for the provision of food and emergency supplies has been used to provide emergency food relief but also to build more sustainable approaches to food security. This includes an embedded food link worker in Citizen's Advice Dorset, to help support individuals to address the underlying causes of food insecurity; supporting local food supply groups to identify and address support needs; coordination of emergency food delivery; support to homeless prevention charities; support for the creation of social supermarkets and community fridges; financial support to food banks; food supply mapping and grant distribution through Dorset Community Foundation or a range of food supply related projects and activities.
- 13.19** Further grant funding from the Department of Work and Pensions, through the Covid-19 Winter Grant scheme was used to support families eligible for free school meals and those experiencing financial hardship during the Christmas, Easter and half-term holidays through the provision of electronic food vouchers in partnership with schools. The funding was also used to provide help to families with children experiencing fuel poverty through the provision of grant payments distributed on behalf of the council by Citizen's Advice Bureau. This grant programme was extended twice through the winter, following the return of management information and a further grant from the DWP is expected which will be used to ensure the provision of free school meals over the May half-term.

Local Contact Tracing and support for self-isolation

- 13.20** Dorset Together has, in partnership with Public Health Dorset provided leadership to the development of support to residents to effectively self-isolate. Coordinated through the contact centre, this involved welfare calls and texts to individuals who had tested positive for Covid-19, signposting to local sources of support and providing a reminder of the importance of self-isolation. Initially focused on people that the NHS were unable to contact, this has over time grown, with responsibility for all contact coming to the council. Contact has been made either through phone call or text message with over 22,000 people (97% success rate).
- 13.21** Since the 23 March 2021, the contact centre team have taken on responsibility for all local contact tracing from the national team – contacting individuals directly and providing the instructions to self-isolate and provide advice and support as well as anyone they have been in contact with. Over 200 cases have been received and there has been a 96% success rate in reaching them.
- 13.22** Dorset Together has provided leadership and coordination to multiple initiatives throughout lockdown and has been a strong and effective partnership between statutory agencies and the community and voluntary sector, with true co-production and sharing of resources and ideas. The programme has been well supported by teams from across the council, including teams from Place; People - Children's and Adult's and Housing; and Corporate Development such as IT, Digital, Data and Communications. The group is now focused on planning for recovery and focused on support to the community and voluntary sector.

14. Delivering services

14.1 Care homes

Further to the assurance provided to Cabinet on 30 June 2020 continued support has been provided to care homes, and other community-based adult social care providers with the following activity and approaches:

- a) Maintaining streamlined communication from local authorities, including Public Health, and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). This has retained a single coordinated 'push' of information, national advice, guidance, and best practice which providers have reported very helpful in reducing duplication and interpretation of fast changing guidance. This has included the infection prevention control training updates.
- b) A Pan Dorset Outbreak Management Group (PDOMG) was established to include representatives from Public Health, the local authorities and the CCG to monitor Covid-19 cases and outbreaks across all Dorset care home settings. The group also monitor any reported cases from the domiciliary provider market. They work to a shared Pan Dorset Care Home Admission policy, to ensure a consistent approach when balancing demand to support fast paced acute hospital discharge versus ensuring health and safety of people living and working in care home settings.

- c) An Incident Management Team approach was adapted by the PDOMG to support registered care managers address and manage outbreak cases. This included infection prevention control training, guidance and regular welfare calls. The welfare support element involved a weekly telephone call to every care home during each peak of both Covid-19 waves, regardless of outbreak status. The feedback from home managers as to the value and benefit this provided has been overwhelmingly positive.
- d) In early 2021, amid Covid-19 wave 2, the local authorities jointly developed a shared standard operating procedure for providing care provider assistance. This was to be used in the event of a Covid-19 outbreak causing major disruption to service delivery. This involved working with the Voluntary Sector Co-ordination Group to develop a system whereby volunteers could support care managers to address issues such as staffing shortages and sourcing key supplies.
- e) In October 2020, in order to introduce more stringent infection control measures, anyone testing Covid-19 positive in a hospital setting, and who required care and support in a Care Home upon discharge had to transfer to a formally approved designated setting. Due to strict requirements and inspection criteria, there was only 1 site approved in the county of Dorset. Community hospitals were therefore utilised to provide that Covid-19 positive pathway from acute setting.
- f) Government grant funding for Infection Control Grant, Rapid Testing Fund and Workforce Capacity have been delivered to providers.
- g) In Autumn 2020, Dorset developed the Dorset Social Care Initiative recruitment campaigns to raise recognition of the social care workforce. Over 300 candidates supplied CV's during the campaign, additional micro providers and shared lives carers were also identified.
- h) The supply of PPE has now stabilised, with the national PPE portal in place to support registered care providers with regular supplies of equipment.
- i) There has been a significant slowdown in the number of care home outbreaks since the peak of Jan – Feb 2021. As of 17 May, in Dorset Council footprint homes, there are just 5 care homes impacted by a single Covid-19 positive case, versus 45 at the end of January 2020 where the majority were outbreaks (more than one case at any one time). As lock down restrictions ease, outbreaks will continue to be monitored and care providers supported.
- j) The council's Adult Social Care Quality Improvement Team are preparing to restart quality visits face to face, developing all policies and protocols to ensure Covid-19 guidance is adhered to.
- k) Sadly, since the beginning of the pandemic, care home managers reported 197 deaths to the Quality Improvement Team (this figure may

differ from other data sets as it is not mandatory requirement to report to QI Team).

14.2 Adult mental health and safeguarding

a) Safeguarding

Since the beginning of 2021, there has been a steadily increasing number of safeguarding concerns being referred, especially since the easing of the last lockdown. There is no statistically significant increase in the number of domestic abuse concerns being evidenced, and where they are raised, they are being progressed to safeguarding enquiries where appropriate. The service is responding well to the challenges, with some additional, short term support to meet the increased demand and if the pattern is replicated from lockdown 1, then the initial spike will clear and will return to a plateau position of activity. The service continues to have regular meetings with the statutory partner safeguarding leads. This builds intelligence across Dorset, and to make the team aware of any changes e.g. rise in calls to domestic abuse services that might not referred to ASC. The type of referrals continues to be a normal mix of concerns.

The team produce a bi-weekly report of the numbers and types of concerns which are shared across the ASC leadership team, including the providers of concern that is shared with the Quality Assurance team. This allows for a significant amount of oversight of the work the team is doing and refinement of process to reduce any inefficiency and reduce the number of 'No Further Action' cases to the team, which remain high.

b) Mental health

The Approved Mental Health Practitioner (AMHP) service activity remains high, with the acuity of people requiring an AMHP anecdotally increasing, corroborated by a higher number of people being sectioned than this time last year. There is still a very high number of out of hours contacts (After 5pm, before 8.30am Monday to Friday and the entirety of Saturday and Sunday) of which the majority were for social care support or information and signposting.

14.3 Housing

The number of housing approaches made to the council in relation to Covid-19 continue to be monitored and currently, numbers are at minimal levels.

This may increase due to:

- the lifting of the current eviction ban at the end of May 2021
- notice periods reducing from 6 months to 4 months from 1 June 2021
- potential notice periods returning to pre-pandemic levels of 2 months from 1 October 2021

Accommodation continues to be provided to 49 households who were homeless or rough sleeping and had been accommodated by one of the government initiatives during Covid-19. Of this cohort 27 have been identified as having a history of rough sleeping and 4 are from the original intake. A further 8 are being accommodated as part of the Bus Shelter provision.

The number of households in bed and breakfast accommodation is returning to pre-Covid-19 levels, currently reduced to 82. Any vacant social housing is

now being advertised as normal on Dorset Home Choice and will be allocated in accordance with prioritisation and local nomination agreements.

Properties are now being advertised more quickly but due to Covid-19 safe working restrictions, preparations required prior to re-letting continue to take longer than normal. From this week arrangements have relaxed, and a faster turnaround time is expected once any backlogs are cleared.

Regular meetings continue with partners to support strategic and operational activities. This includes the purchase of Portland Youth Hostel and the council continues to offer supported accommodation to these households.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) response to Covid-19 included the Next Steps Accommodation Programme initiative providing funding opportunities to provide accommodation and support for rough sleepers. Dorset were successful in a bid to the fund and have subsequently purchased 10 one bed-roomed properties. Also purchased are 12 self-contained relocatable units for use by the Bus Shelter. A housing association bid has also been supported to provide three additional supported properties. The council submitted a further bid for the second phase of MHCLG rough sleeping funding with the announcement of results expected in June 2021.

Work continues with Dorset's rough sleeping cohort. Assessments include risk; level and access to support; health and financial factors. 42 of these households have moved into settled accommodation and 5 have moved into supported accommodation. Access to vaccinations for rough sleepers has been provided with partners in Weymouth helping 45 rough sleepers to have the vaccine. Dorset's registered providers were also offered access for their staff working in face to face roles with vulnerable residents in supported accommodation. A small number of rough sleepers have not had a vaccine and work continues to reach this group whilst 2nd vaccines were offered to the wider group of rough sleepers in May 2021.

The Dorset Council Housing Allocation policy was approved by Full Council on 10 December 2020 and will be implemented this year when a new housing software system goes live in quarter 2.

The council and its partners have regularly assessed and responded to domestic abuse issues since the start of the pandemic. Support services have continued to run with provision being enhanced and adapted to meet demand. Demand for advice and information regarding domestic abuse has been high.

14.4 Community and Public Protection

Services have continued to protect public health and provide advice and assistance to businesses negotiating the Coid-19 restrictions.

a) Bereavement and Registration

Services adapted to operate through the different levels of Covid-19 restrictions and manage peaks in demand due to the pandemic. Services, including Coroners which is jointly funded with BCP Council, have worked closely with colleagues at BCP and the Local Resilience Forum to ensure that plans were in place to manage all circumstances including the provision of temporary mortuary facilities.

A strong focus has been maintained on supporting the bereaved and funeral directors to enable a dignified commemoration of loved ones albeit with limited numbers attending Weymouth Crematorium. The ability to webcast services has been greatly appreciated by families.

The process for the registration of deaths has been simplified by the Government enabling telephone registrations rather than ‘in person’. It is hoped that this development will be continued as part of modernising statutory registration practices.

The registration of births and marriages and provision of marriage and civil partnership ceremonies have been greatly affected by Covid-19 restrictions. Employees have worked very helpfully with customers and received some wonderful feedback. Looking forward, subject to the Government’s roadmap, facilities for funerals and registration services will move to a ‘business as usual’ position with a high level of demand for marriage and civil partnership ceremonies.

b) Regulatory

Trading Standards, Environmental Health and Licensing have been at the forefront of interpreting Covid-19 restrictions and providing practical support to businesses, allowing them to trade safely when possible. Restrictions have changed frequently, and officers have been undertaking advisory visits and acting on complaint from members of the public. Close liaison with Dorset Police has ensured a proportionate enforcement response and there has been an excellent level of co-operation and compliance by Dorset businesses and no formal action under Covid-19 emergency legislation has been necessary. Port Health Officers have been working with shipping and cruise companies and Public Health Dorset to assist in managing on-board Covid-19 infections and arranging shore-based accommodation for those needing to isolate. Ship sanitation inspections are now being undertaken to enable cruise ships to re-commence UK based cruises. Looking ahead, the council will continue to assist businesses in re-opening and support new businesses, particularly in the food sector, that are registering with the council. There is a significant backlog of risk-based inspections from the past year that will be progressed in line with Government guidance. With restrictions on international travel, Dorset is expected to be particularly busy during the summer and this will place a heavy demand on services.

c) Community Safety

Community Safety has extended CCTV monitoring to provide intelligence to partner agencies about public safety in town centres, particularly at times when restrictions have eased. The Covid-19 Marshal scheme has been operating in towns providing a visible ‘on the ground’ source of advice and guidance to the public and acted as ‘eyes and ears’, feeding into the Multi-Agency Command Centre established to help manage summer demand. Their role is anticipated to be more focused around public safety and crowd management in resort towns as restrictions ease. Community Safety Patrol Officers have been valuable in Weymouth, supporting Dorset Police in dealing with anti-social behaviour again, usually as restrictions ease. There have been issues around the harbourside which agencies are helping to address.

14.5 Coast and greenspace

a) Country parks

The four country parks managed by Dorset Council have remained open where possible in-line with Covid-19 Guidance. During the summer period

visitor numbers were greater than expected as visitors took the opportunity to enjoy the summer weather. All the parks remained open during lockdowns two and three although additional facilities on site such as restaurants/café's, concessionaires, and activities, were closed as required. Moors Valley operated at limited car park capacity (60%) to reduce numbers to aid social distancing. Additional cleaning was provided for toilet facilities and hand cleansing stations and Covid-19 related signage provided around the parks.

b) Health and activity

There was a very limited offer of facilitated sessions provided between June and Nov and none since Nov 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions around groups of people gathering together. Wherever possible digital online resources have been made available to retain a service provision of health and wellbeing. In line with the Government road map, activities are scheduled to restart in May/June 2021.

c) Moors Valley Golf Course

The site operated at near capacity over the summer months but was closed during lockdown's two and three in line with Government guidance. The course reopened in March 2021 and has operated at near capacity since this date.

d) BBQs and wildfires

Following the Wareham Fire last year Dorset Council ran a '*BBQ's Burn More than Bangers*' campaign in summer 2020 in partnership with the Urban Heaths Partnership and have produced a BBQ options paper that was considered at Cabinet in April 2021. As a result, this summer will see a ban on BBQ's in high risk areas and increased 'No Fires' signage deployed in conjunction with Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and rescue Service around the council area

14.6 Leisure services

a) Leisure centres

The three council run leisure centres have been significantly impacted by enforced lockdown closures and restrictive operating conditions following the introduction of national guidelines. Activities such as swimming, fitness classes and gym sessions became bookable only sessions and numbers were limited to ensure social distancing guidelines were adhered to. There has also been a requirement for enhanced cleaning regimes in between each bookable time slots. During periods of closure, the centres have operated online fitness classes and many of the leisure staff were redeployed to support other front-line services.

b) Outdoor education service

The service has been severely impacted over the last 15 months, which the majority of its core business coming from school day visits and residential trips, much of which was not been permitted due to the enforced guidelines. The service has however worked very closely with Children's Services and provided 1-1 Alternative Provision care for

vulnerable young people and specialist provision for participants from the Arts + programme. The team were also able to continue to provide their Advisory Service on school trips to all of the eligible schools within Dorset. This has been particularly valuable as the restrictions have begun to ease and school trips start up again.

c) Arts and culture

The team have continued to provide support and guidance to the wider cultural sector, many of whom are grant funded by the council. Some of the Arts + programme was delivered virtually ensuring that a number of young people with special needs still had the opportunity to interact with the service.

14.7 Harbours

The Covid-19 response for harbours in Weymouth, Bridport and Lyme Regis has been as per BPA guidelines. This has largely restricted use in line with the lockdown periods. From 12th April Weymouth harbour was able to welcome up to two self-contained vessels rafted out per berth with facility showers closed but toilets open. Charter businesses commenced operation from the same date and experienced a high demand for their services. May 17th saw the reopening of all facilities and rafting up to 5 vessels per berth. All permanent mooring customers have been able to access their berths and bridge opening requests and use of the slipway have increased in line with this activity.

14.8 Customer services

Up until the 30 April 2021, the Dorset Council outbound Contact Centre contacted 4,011 clinically extremely vulnerable people for welfare checks. Whilst shielding officially ended on the 31 March 2021, contact has been continued with those that had registered for help up until the 23 April 2021. Further contact has also been made with 22,057 test and trace cases and offers of support for those self-isolating either by automated text and email messaging or calling.

From 8 January 2021, the team began contact tracing to identify all people that had been in contact with a positive Covid-19 patient. Furthermore, on the 23 March 2021 the team took over all contract tracing from the national team. Thus far, contact has been made with 353 out of 609 people using local sources of data to identify contact numbers. This is a 16% improvement on the National Tracing Team's contact rate. There is a new tracing system being rolled out in June/July of this year with the possibility of providing further support to Public Health Dorset with outbreak containment.

The Inbound Contact Centre has handled a total of 8,138 enquires (6,659 calls and 1,479 emails) ranging from complaints about people breaking the rules by visiting holiday homes and not socially distancing to Covid-19 business grants, test and trace support payments, access to priority on-line shopping, requests for social contact, volunteer support and signposting to Citizens Advice for help with money problems.

Across both teams, the Covid-19 Contact Centre has handled 35,559 enquiries and contacts so far. Over the past month the teams have been putting in place stand-up plans for surge testing as part of Operational Eagle. From late June 2021 the customer services team will prepare for customer access points to be integrated in our libraries or local offices for essential

customer access support or by facilitating appointments. Further information will be published in due course.

14.9 Libraries

Since the ending of Lockdown 1.0 in July 2020, libraries re-opened with a limited service offer of browsing and public computer use in a Covid-19 secure environment. For those who did not feel comfortable in visiting the library, a new 'Order and Collect' service was introduced, enabling people to pre-order a collection of books and other items for collection at the library door with nearly 7,000 orders processed since from July 2020 – April 2021.

In addition, a virtual library offer has been extended to include a wide range of e-resources to include books, comics and newspapers. These are available free of charge 24/7 through the library webpages. A programme of virtual activities and events for all ages is now provided to help people connect with others and continue to engage with the library service.

Libraries remained open for these services except for when legally required to close due to the national lockdowns.

All libraries re-opened again on 12 April with most offering their original opening hours to encourage use by children and families. As the regulations and risk assessments allow, more services such as activities and events will be re-instated.

14.10 Dorset History Centre (Archives & Records, Local Studies and Museums Development)

After careful risk assessment, the Dorset History Centre re-opened its doors to the public for the consultation of original documents as soon as government restrictions permitted it. The service was open on an appointments-only basis between 7 July and 3 November, and 3 December and 5 January 2021. It re-opened again on 15 April. Certain staff continued to work on-site throughout lockdown as their roles could not be undertaken at home. Externally funded project work was completed in relation to cataloguing and conservation on two significant collections. In addition, it was possible to remotely recruit and induct an externally funded digital preservation trainee. The service maintained its large digital engagement output using websites and social media to promote collections with 109 blogs and 386 tweets generated between June 2020 and 1 May 2021. In addition, 2272 remote enquiries were answered by staff. The history centre will deliver a full programme of virtual talks and activities for Local History Month in May.

The county's Museum Development Advisor had an extremely busy time supporting accredited museums across Dorset as they sought to deal with a massive loss of visitor income due to Covid-19. The Advisor was able to support the sector as it applied to a variety of government and council-administered funds such that a total of £3 million in critical grant aid was received by museums. In addition, the advisor oversaw the distribution and monitoring of a new revenue grant scheme to Dorset's museums and heritage sites totalling £283,000. A wide range of activities supporting museums in relation to their strategic planning, governance, finance, volunteering and digital services was also undertaken.

14.11 Highways

a) Parking

In most car parks charges have been removed for those attending Covid-19 vaccinations. Our car parks are now open to visitors and we are

enforcing against inappropriate parking. Motor homes have been a particular issue where people have not been able to or have chosen not to stay at camping sites. On street enforcement has been particularly necessary when we've experienced large visitor numbers as we've needed to ensure parking allows enough space for other vehicles to safely pass.

b) Pothole reinstatement and reactive maintenance

These works are a critical activity and have been provided since the outbreak of Covid-19.

c) Highway Surfacing Programme

Since June 2020 surfacing works have continued operating under Covid-19 safe conditions. Where possible opportunities have been taken during lockdown to complete schemes during the day which would normally have required night closures due to the volume of traffic. This has been appreciated by residents who as a result have not had the noise disruption during the night.

d) Highway Improvement Schemes

Schemes restarted last summer under Covid-19 safe conditions.

e) Distribution of PPE

Highways have stepped back from the distribution of food aid and prescription medicines but continued to help store and supply PPE to organisations within the Local Resilience Forum.

14.12 Planning

a) Business advice

A fast track business advice service continues to be provided to support urgent adjustments to Covid-19, such as changes of use for hospitality/food and drink, outdoor temporary structures for pubs, etc. This has included advising on situations which technically require planning permission, but where it is reasonable to advise that enforcement action would be unlikely if they need to do it quickly (where acceptable to do so).

b) Planning applications

There has been a significant uplift in planning application numbers since December 2020, and particularly since January 2021. Between January 2019 and December 2020, the service received an average of 376 applications per month. Since January 2021 Dorset Council has received more than 2,200 applications (around 570 per month – about 200 additions applications per month than the expected average). The uplift is placing significant demand on the service so additional steps have been taken, including streamlining of validation requirements, systemised report templates, additional use of external support (Terraquest) and recruitment of additional posts in the validation team.

a) Enforcement

Enforcement has been sensitive to business requirements in terms of changes needed to adjust to Covid-19 challenges in line with government guidance. This has included working closely with developers to remedy

breaches in a way that allows acceptable parts of the development to proceed.

b) Deferrals

Deferrals or phasing of payments of Community Infrastructure Levy to assist businesses with cashflow issues (where justified) is in place.

c) Building control

Inspections have continued throughout the pandemic other than during the strictest lockdown period when construction ceased. As with planning, applications have increased markedly in 2021.

14.13 Waste

The Household Recycling Centres have remained open after the initial lockdown period. Social distancing measures and site operations have been maintained in line with the Waste Industry Safety & Health (WISH) guidelines with short term traffic management measures employed when necessary to prevent problems to other road users from traffic queuing to access the sites and maintaining access to transfer stations for waste collection vehicles.

Business waste collections have continued throughout the pandemic. The service has supported our business customers by suspending collections or adjusting collection frequencies to avoid customers incurring unnecessary collection costs whilst having to close due to government restrictions.

Waste operations and fleet maintenance are operating as normal within the Waste Industry Safety & Health (WISH) guidelines. Maintaining operating bubbles and crews as much as practicable and crew rooms and muster points remain closed until all social distancing rules are relaxed. The message remains that operational front-line crews do not need to wear face coverings whilst working but the sound and good hygiene regime needs to be maintained.

14.14 Education settings

a) Support for education providers:

The Corporate Director for Education and Learning led weekly touch-downs with headteachers alongside HR and Public Health colleagues throughout the last 12 months to support the sector in the response to emerging issues during the pandemic. These were more regular around the time that schools were asked to open testing stations. The council supported schools with managing the DFE provision of laptops to students and coordinated supplies of PPE to schools as this became available. Transport to school remained in place throughout the period of school opening with reduced student numbers because the students were drawn from the full range of destinations. This included SEND transport. Additional grants were provided by the DFT to support enhanced levels of school transport when students returned to school full time so that no school populations were mixing on buses.

b) Early Years

Early years settings largely were able to remain open during the summer and winter periods. There were challenges during lockdown periods with staffing availability. During the winter and early spring there were a number of settings where finances became difficult and some uncertainty

over national funding formulas being applied on the basis of reduced numbers. These added to uncertainty in the system. However, Dorset Council were able to support settings with emergency funding and no setting permanently closed.

c) Schools

Dorset schools were largely able to remain open to students and continue education for all children during the autumn and spring terms. Whilst there were periods when the number of students physically attending was restricted the majority of schools had a successful transition to remote education for those students who were not able to attend.

School attendance in Dorset was strong throughout the pandemic period with Dorset often ranking in the top 25 of all councils nationally. The tracking of vulnerable students continues and the locality response to supporting students has meant that where students are not attending when required there is rapid and productive contact made.

Statutory work around school admissions and SEND planning work continued throughout the pandemic. High levels of first preference admission to school were sustained by the admissions team. The adherence to the timescales for SEND work during the pandemic was good and remained consistently above the national average.

Improvements in plan quality were driven through and revised systems and process were implemented. There was a higher than normal number of complaints received during the times when people were working from home and this has meant an increased number of applications to tribunal.

The service has worked hard to maintain quick responses to these.

Relationships between the council and schools and wider education providers in early years and FE have strengthened over the last 12 months. The work on the Children, Young People and Families plan has proceeded, with the Best Education for All theme and the Best Start in Life theme both moving from ideation to embedded working during the last 12 months.

Schools and Early Years settings in Dorset have now largely returned to a business as usual operating model, with some adaptations remaining in place to support operating a Covid-19 secure workplace.

14.15 Children's Safeguarding

From July 2020 face to face visiting has been best practice. Virtual visits have been the exception, where a Covid-19 risk assessment has been undertaken due to a Covid-19 concern. Experience has been, even during the period from late December 2020 to March 2021, the vast majority of visits have undertaken face to face, respecting Covid-19 safety requirements. This has greatly supported social workers and family workers to undertake their important safeguarding work.

The numbers of contacts and referrals to children's services since the implementation of the integrated front door have been more in line with statistical neighbours. Planning ahead for all children returning to face to face teaching in school in September 2020, a successful Summer in Dorset was delivered with a range of activities to support many of Dorset's most vulnerable or isolated families to start to socialise and have fun over the summer. Support to schools was increased at the beginning of the Christmas

term by embedding link workers where possible, this supported schools to hear children's lived experiences during the national lockdown and wrap around with locality support or safeguarding support as required. An up uptick in contacts and referrals was experienced in October 2020 and December 2020 in line with further lockdowns, though through good partnership working and planning these increases were managed.

Children's lived experiences have varied over the last year but for those who have been referred to children's services the main themes have been domestic abuse within the family, parental drug and alcohol misuse, adults and children's mental health and wellbeing and families experiencing poverty. Latterly families who were not known to services previously have become known to us as they are experiencing the impact of poverty following employment loss due to the pandemic.

Safeguarding arrangements continue to be a focus during the pandemic with no changes to the statutory requirements for child protection conferences or looked after children, only the ability to hold these virtually. From June 2020 all child protection conferences have remained virtual whilst children in care reviews have gradually been held in a more hybrid model with the Quality Assurance and Reviewing Officer in the same place as the child and their carers and other meetings attendees being present virtually. Plans are currently in formation to agree how child protection conferences will move to an office base with the chair, social worker and family present at least, with a potential option for professionals to join virtually. Police, health partners and schools have continued to attend conferences and in the main provide reports for them.

From June 2020 until May 2021, numbers of children with a child protection plan has seen an increase and now reduction to levels normally expected. The main increase was in September, October, and November 2020 when numbers rose to 360. This is higher than statistical neighbours and allowed quick identification of an increased level of understandable anxiety in the safeguarding system from partners and at times the council. It is understood that this was a result of the end of the first lockdown and the workforce and partners adjusting to the locality model. In May 2021 there are 286 children with a child protection plan, more in line with statistical neighbours. The locality and partners have been able to lean into families more and see across the locality as to which support services can come alongside families at times of need, meaning child protection processes are only used when a child is at risk of significant harm from their care giver.

Dorset's responsibility to review the care plans for children in care is being maintained with a combination of virtual and in person visits and reviews. Decisions on direct face to face meetings with children are being managed on an individualised basis. In addition to reviews in the week and preparation for up and coming reviews, Independent Reviewing Officers continue to make additional contact with young people who are placed out of county and young

people who are living in semi-independent accommodation. From January to March 2021 more providers were requesting virtual visits if a person in the provision or connected to had symptoms of Covid-19 or had been in contact with someone who had. A Covid-19 risk assessment was undertaken to inform how these visits should take place and monitoring of virtual visits has supported face to face visiting taking place whenever possible.

The number of children in care has safely decreased from 483 in June 2020 to 442 May 2021. This is a combination of increased line of sight to ensure that the right children are entering care at the right time with all other plans for them exhausted. Once children are in care, the focus has been on ensuring that a permanence plan is timely and child focused, either with a return to their birth family, a family member with a special guardianship order or adoption. For children who will remain longer in care efforts have been made to secure a permanence plan through long term fostering. Ensuring that over 98% of children also have an up to date permanence plan has focused on children who have been in care for too long and supported the progression of their plan for them to leave care to their permanence option in a planned way. It is still the case that there are too many children in care but with careful planning with family members, increased locality working and clear and focused permanence planning the numbers of children will continue to safely reduce. Active support from Quality Assurance and Reviewing Officers is also supporting this important work.

A small number of young people are awaiting a match to a suitable placement. From July 2020 children who were waiting to be placed for adoption were matched with their adoptive families and successfully joined them. This was easier once Covid-19 restrictions were eased. A new Foster for Dorset recruitment campaign has been successfully launched and this has already seen an increase in the number of households who wish to consider becoming foster carers. Support for fostering households has been ongoing throughout the pandemic, with many carers continuing to welcome children to their family throughout times of health uncertainty. Retention of foster carers has remained good during this period and support has been given to carers in establishing Dorset Foster Carers Association.

Covid-19 has caused a contraction in the placement provider markets and suitable placements have been harder to source and are also more expensive. Some internal foster care placements have been restricted due to shielding, however, placement stability has remained relatively unchanged and has improved in some cases. From September 2020 more foster carers have been able to care for children again after shielding. However, once Ofsted were able to turn their regulatory responsibilities back on it was apparent that many children's homes were deemed unsuitable by Ofsted, meaning the span of potential providers for placements for children was decreased.

All care leavers continue to receive support from their Personal Advisor (PA), through phone calls, text messaging and face to face visits asking what the PA can do to support them e.g. shopping, medicine, but also to ensure they get medical advice if they need it due to the pandemic. Every young person is sent a weekly text reminding them to keep in touch, let their PA know if they become unwell or require any support. 10 mobile smart phones have been provided by the ICT department for vulnerable care leavers to enable them to keep in touch. PA's have purchased sim cards and data bundles to ensure that care leavers can keep in touch with the people who are important to them.

Since July 2020 focus has remained on hearing the voices of care leavers and building on the foundations of the local offer for care leavers.

Many children who are disabled have found the Covid-19 restrictions and shielding requirements during the initial lockdown and subsequent lockdowns challenging. This was due to the change in routine and levels of children's comprehension of what was happening. In addition, many children were not able to access their usual educational settings, placing additional pressure on them and their families and support networks. This was also impacted by the reduced availability of care workers able to enter homes to provide much needed care or respite for parents. For families who were shielding we signposted to appropriate resources to ensure they had access to shopping and medication.

Teams have worked closely with families and where needed, have taken steps to increase support levels to children and their families such as increasing direct payments and short break provisions. Summer in Dorset also offered community based activities to children and families being supported by the council.

Children with significant learning difficulties have found face to face visits with staff wearing PPE or having to socially distance challenging. The return to school for many more of Dorset's children who are disabled was a welcome step in September but given some significant health needs, for some children it was a longer period of time for a return to school. The gradual lifting of lockdowns has seen more care worker activity, especially since September 2020 in people's homes but it is fair to say much community provision for children who are disabled is still to return.

Recognition must go to employees at The Cherries who continued to provide a face to face, loving and caring provision for children who are disabled throughout the last year, at times needing to activate their Covid-19 contingency plans, but never having to reduce their levels of care.

The Pan-Dorset Children's Safeguarding Partnership retains its statutory function and are developing new working arrangements through this period, prioritising key current issues, such as concerns about the increased risk of domestic abuse. Weekly operational and strategic meetings were in place until March 2021 to ensure a robust and co-ordinated response to support vulnerable children and families. These have now retuned to more business

as usual through the Safeguarding Partnership and Community Safety Partnership. The challenges this crisis has placed on families is recognised and the council is a partner to a new local campaign on domestic abuse #youarenotalone and are supporting children and families for whom this is a reality.

There have not been significant pressures in respect of workforce and sickness of self-isolation due to Covid-19. Permanent posts within children's social care have continued to be recruited to and all management posts from the Director of Children's Services to team manager are permanently recruited to. A recruitment campaign for experienced social workers from South Africa and Zimbabwe was extremely successful with ten social workers joining Dorset in November 2020. Rolling advertising for social workers and Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) and student programmes support continues and has led to the fortunate position of having just seven social work vacancies by July 2021, which will hopefully be filled soon. The locality offer, strengths-based practice framework, professional development offer and manageable caseloads have made Dorset an active place to practice good social work. The workforce has been impressive, child focused and motivated.

14.16 Democratic services and 2021 Elections

Dorset Council initially suspended democratic decision making committees when the pandemic impacted on the country in March 2020, but these restarted virtually once The Local Authorities (Coronavirus)(Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings)(England) Regulations 2020 ('the regulations') had been enacted in April 2020. Virtual meetings have enabled democratic decisions to continue in a transparent way, with residents and interested parties being able to watch a live stream of the meetings, or to watch a recording at a time more convenient to them. Public participation has continued, albeit any questions submitted have been read out by officers rather than being asked by the member of the public directly.

After 6 May 2021, the council could no longer rely upon the remote meeting regulations, but with legal limits on social contact (until at least 21 June 2021) the council could not legally and safely hold council and committee meetings that are attended in person. Subject to limited exceptions, council agreed that all council meetings that were not executive in nature should continue to be held virtually from 7 May until such time as social distancing requirements are removed, with committee members expressing a 'minded to' decision in respect of recommendations set out in officer reports.

All elections were suspended in 2020 until 6 May 2021. On 6 May, Dorset Council administered the Police and Crime Commissioner election postponed from 2020, and also 6 parish by-elections and 7 Neighbourhood Plan Referenda that had been scheduled throughout the last 12 months but could not take place until 6 May 2021.

15. Workforce

- 15.1** The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the ability of the workforce to undertake their roles in a number of ways. Employees have themselves

experienced symptoms of the virus and been required to self-isolate as a consequence of coming into contact with others who have experienced symptoms or tested positive for the virus. In addition, the closure of schools and restrictions to adult care services, such as day centres, placed an increased demand on employees to take on caring responsibilities during times at which they would ordinarily work.

- 15.2** Whilst employees worked as flexibly as they could to mitigate any impact of having to care for others, there was inevitably times when this was not possible and therefore time away from work was required.
- 15.3** In total, approximately 2% of working days were lost as a consequence of all covid-19 related absences. Service priorities have had to be reviewed and amended as a consequence of the impact of covid-19. This has included the diverting of resources to support the council's covid-19 response.
- 15.4** Whilst the pandemic has increased absences overall, the council has seen a reduction in sickness absence over the last year
- 15.5** The council has redeployed employees to ensure critical services were maintained during lockdowns and other restrictions. This was established as a 'skills agency'
- 15.6** Since June 2020 the skills agency has had three periods which have resulted in requests for Dorset Council staff to support services which were struggling from a lack of resources. These periods were in June and October 2020 and from January 2021 to the current time.
- 15.7** In June 2020 the Skills Agency continued to receive requests for help from areas such as the Digital Helpline, Housing & Community Services, Corporate Services, and the Brokerage Team.
- 15.8** In early October 2020 the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) requested that the Skills Agency was reactivated as several areas within the councils needed additional support. The areas included the Contact Centre, the Brokerage Team, and the Health Protection Board.
- 15.9** The Skills Agency did provide some resources but found it difficult to fulfil all requests, particularly in the Brokerage Team and the Contact Centre. These areas were a challenge as they were keen to use the same resources who were allocated in the first lockdown due to their knowledge gained of the service area and the tools used to record and process information. The original resources had come from different areas across the council and in many instances, they were no longer available as their service was no longer classified as 'low' priority or the skills required were not available from the pool of resources available.
- 15.10** Between January 2021 until the end of April there have been 10 further requests for help. These included requests from the Better Days Delivery Lead, Adult Care and Emergency Planning for which resource was allocated to all requests.

- 15.11** Additionally, in January 2021 a request was made by Dorset County Hospital for administrative resources to support ward clerks in hospitals. A call for volunteers was issued in this instance as resources could be asked to work on Covid-19 wards. Volunteers did come forward, however the requirement from hospitals for volunteers to physically attend hospital wards during normal office hours Monday to Friday made it impossible to deliver against. This was because volunteers could not be freed up from their substantive posts due to existing pressures within their service areas.
- 15.12** Lastly Adult Services requested that the Skills Agency look for volunteers from the Dorset Council workforce to support Care Home's in the form of either administrative or supportive care for residents. 13 volunteers have been assigned to 11 different care homes mostly in the form of physically attending the Care Homes and predominantly helping by proactively engaging with residents to free up Care Home staff to undertake skilled work.

16. LRF recovery position and plans

- 16.1** Recovery is being led at a strategic level by the Dorset Local Resilience Forum (LRF) which is the principal mechanism for multi-agency cooperation under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.
- 16.2** The LRF coordinates the local response to emergencies across Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole and operates within an established regional and national structure. Its members include 'category 1 responders' (those organisations at the core of emergency responses such as the emergency services, health bodies and local authorities) 'category 2 responders' (mostly utility companies and transport organisations) and voluntary organisations.
- 16.3** The LRF will continue to have a commanding role in Covid-19 recovery during and after the release from lockdown, and that governance is expected to remain in place until March 2022 at the earliest. The current recovery strategy and workplans are attached at appendix I.
- 16.4** The LRF has identified four overarching aims for Dorset's recovery, which are:
- After Covid-19 Dorset communities will be more cohesive, resilient and sustainable, and Dorset will remain a safe, vibrant and beautiful place to visit, live and work.
 - The recovery programme will address the unprecedented impacts of the Covid-19 and support the UK Government's four-step Roadmap to offer a route back to a more normal life.
 - Through close partnership working and community cooperation, the recovery programme will successfully transition back to business as usual practices and achieve a new state of new normality where we live safely with Covid-19.
 - The recovery programme will have captured the lessons from the response and recovery phases and embedded them into our culture of

empowered community focus, supported by effective partnership working across all sectors; public, private and voluntary.

- 16.5** Five sub-groups have been established to define and deliver the LRF's detailed recovery plans, which are focussed on:
- Welfare
 - Community
 - Economy
 - Environment
 - Information & Learning
- 16.6** Each sub-group has a lead officer identified and will be developing targets and measures that will indicate when its recovery work is complete.
- 16.7** The council's Overview Committees has been asked to help develop the sub-groups' action plans. It is suggested that the LRF recovery sub-groups are aligned to the Overview Committees as follows:

LRF Recovery Sub-Group	Responsible Overview Committee
Welfare	People and Health
Community	Place and Resources
Economy	Place and Resources
Environment	Place and Resources
Information & Learning	People and Health

- 16.8** Further discussion will be had at the People and Health Overview Committee on 6 July, and the Place and Resources Overview Committee on 31 August. The work done by the Overview Committees will inform an update of the council's Corporate Plan to reflect Covid-19 recovery.

17. Financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

Financial year 2020/21

- 17.1** Dorset Council predicted an overspend from the outset of the pandemic. A combination of cost pressures, lost income from sales, fees and charges and potential shortfalls in council tax and business rates collection were the principal causes. During the financial year additional general grant from Government was announced as well as support for lost income. We also started to see a recovery in our income due to the easing of lockdown restrictions and we worked hard on all fronts to bring costs down.
- 17.2** Despite the protracted impact of subsequent lockdown arrangements, by the time the [Qtr.3 report](#) was produced, the impact on the council's budget was forecast to have reduced to £18.6m. This fell further in the January and February monthly forecast updates and whilst (at the time of writing) work is still in progress to finalise our outturn for the year, our latest estimate is that the impact of the pandemic on the council will have been in the region of £15m.

Financial year 2021/22

- 17.3 The pandemic also provided some real challenge to the budget setting process for 2021/22. The long-term impact of Covid-19 on the council's services was extremely difficult to model in terms of demand for services and cost and despite £8.6m of un-ringfenced Government grant this year, there is still a significant amount of risk to some of our key budget deliverables.
- 17.4 A separate report on the outturn for 2020/21 is coming to the same Cabinet meeting as this report and the July meeting will receive a paper for Qtr1 of 2021/22. More detail will be provided in those papers, so it is not repeated here.

Dealing with the impact

- 17.5 Previous Cabinet reports made it clear that any overspend would need to be funded from reserves and the first of these to be called upon would be the general fund. The balance of this reserve started the year at £28.2m, so if the final impact of the pandemic on the council's budget does turn out to be £15m, this will reduce the general fund to £13.2m. This figure is below the bottom end of the operating range (£20m) and the minimum level (£15.7m) agreed by Cabinet when the [budget was agreed](#) in January.
- 17.6 As part of closing the accounts for 2020/21, and in order to put the council on a solid foundation for preparing the budget strategy for 2022/23, the S151 Officer will therefore be bringing forward proposals to repurpose the council's reserves to mitigate the risks that the council faces and to establish funds to invest in resilience and transformation.
- 17.7 This is work that was originally intended for 2020/21 but the response to Covid-19 meant that resources were not available to carry out the work. There was also significant risk to the council's budget, and it was unclear how much of our reserved funding would be needed to fund the in-year impact so it was not possible to plan effectively for future strategic use and purposing of reserves.
- 17.8 As well as delivering a strategic repurposing of predecessor councils' reserves, this work aims to increase the balance of the general fund to the £31.5m agreed by Cabinet when the budget was set.

18. Equality impact assessment

- 18.1 The action plan that was developed from the EqIA on how well Dorset Council responded to meeting the needs of vulnerable communities has been regularly updated and is overseen by the wellbeing sub-group of Dorset Together.
- 18.2 Some key developments include:
- As part of developing Local Outbreak Management Plans, Public Health developed the Trusted Voices initiative a two-way communication channel with key community organisations/leaders.

- Dorset Council undertook an internal survey on translation and interpreting services to develop intranet guidance.
- The engagement team working on the Trust Voices initiative have worked with ethnically diverse communities to encourage vaccination take up.
- Residents survey in October included questions about economic impacts of Covid-19.
- Case studies capturing local initiatives were sent to the LGA for including in Covid-19 good practice guide.
- Help & Kindness undertook a pilot project in local print assets in Dorset communities, which is helping to influence work around digital inclusion.

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.