

Executive Business Report

Birmingham City Council

City Council

2nd February 2021



Subject: Update on Birmingham City Council's response to Covid-19

Report of: Cabinet

Report authors: Chris Naylor (Gold Commander & Interim Chief Executive)

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? ☐ Yes ☒ No

If relevant, state which appendix is exempt, and provide exempt information paragraph number or reason if confidential:

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, following previous reports brought to City Council in June and September 2020.
- 1.2. In addition, this report provides an overview of Council preparations for the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union on 31st December 2020.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That the report be noted.

3. Introduction

- 3.1. At the time of writing, 1880 people in Birmingham have lost their lives to Covid-19. Our thoughts are with their families and loved ones, and the medical and care staff who have attended to them.
- 3.2. As Birmingham celebrates the beginning of a new year, it is now clear that Covid-19 was not the short-term crisis that some commentators may have predicted (or hoped for) in March 2020. Instead, it seems that Covid-19 will continue to define 2021 just as it defined 2020; and that the lingering

economic and social impacts of the pandemic will be with us for many years to come.

- 3.3. The situation in February 2021 is characterised by uncertainty. Since the last update to City Council in September 2020, the United Kingdom has seen the introduction of a new tiered system of local restrictions and three national lockdowns, one of which is still ongoing. Birmingham businesses and communities have had to rapidly adapt in response to a complex landscape of quickly changing rules and restrictions, often with a notice period of days or even just hours. This has severely hampered both short-term business recovery and efforts at longer-term planning.
- 3.4. Birmingham City Council has continued to lobby national government for the support that our businesses need to keep running, as well as providing additional clarity on guidance and regulations where they are unclear. In this way we have hoped to mitigate what we recognise is an incredibly worrying time for our business community, and provide at least some small measure of stability and hope.
- 3.5. As the Covid-19 crisis continues, it is now in danger of becoming part of the new 'business as usual' for the Council. This is especially true as we turn our attention to new pressing issues on the horizon, including delivery of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games and the longer-term economic fall-out of Brexit.
- 3.6. However, we must not lose sight of the massive impact that the ongoing pandemic has had on the Council, both in terms of our day-to-day running and long-term strategic planning. We are incredibly proud of our hard-working teams and services as they continue to go above and beyond to support citizens and communities during one of the most difficult periods of their lives.
- 3.7. With the arrival of the vaccine in December 2020, there is hope on the horizon. We hope that by this summer we will start to see the impact of the vaccine on Covid-19 rates and hospital admissions, with restrictions slowly starting to lift thereafter. However, this is not the time to become complacent. We understand and empathise with the fatigue of many after months of restrictions, but we must all continue to play our part in reducing transmission and keeping each other safe. Social distancing, wearing a mask, and practicing good hygiene are all still vital steps we need to take to protect our national health service and the vulnerable in our communities.
- 3.8. There will continue to be uncertainty for some time, but the Council continues to work alongside partners and communities to plan for the recovery, and design a bright new future that we can all share in.
- 3.9. Details in relation to specific areas of response can be found as follows:

- Health & Wellbeing; pages 3 - 13
- Education, Skills and Children's Wellbeing; pages 13 - 31
- Communities (including Housing, Bereavement Services); pages 32 - 48
- Street Scene & Parks (including Waste Management); pages 49 - 51
- Transport; pages 51 - 60
- Covid-19 Support Grants (including Business Support Grants); pages 61 - 69
- Council Finances (including Corporate Procurement); pages 69 – 82
- Brexit; pages 82 - 89

4. Health & Wellbeing

4.1. Adult Social Care

- 4.1.1. The coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic is an unprecedented challenge for the nation, requiring an equally unprecedented response from the social care sector and its dedicated workforce.
- 4.1.2. Both the paid social care workforce and the tens of thousands of people in Birmingham who provide unpaid care have made an invaluable contribution during this time. They have worked tirelessly to support all those who need care or support, particularly those who are older or are living with underlying health conditions that might make them more vulnerable to the virus.
- 4.1.3. The following paragraphs are a snapshot of how the Council and our partners have come together to work with citizens during one of the most difficult periods in our city's history.

Supporting our service users

- 4.1.4. Covid-19 has had a profound impact on people receiving and providing social care, none more so than those who care for citizens in their own homes. Adult Social Care (ASC) staff have been in regular contact with our service users and carers during this period to offer them support, assistance and guidance during this challenging time.
- 4.1.5. In July 2020 we carried out a short online survey with service users, who told us that they would benefit from more frequent contact just to make sure that they are safe and well. These findings, alongside a report from Healthwatch about our response to the first wave of the pandemic, have helped us to

identify improvements in how we work with service users and their families in subsequent waves.

- 4.1.6. We now send out frequent information and advice letters to every person who is in receipt of care and support from Adult Social Care. These bimonthly letters also provide information about continuity care and further support options across the Council.
- 4.1.7. Initial 'safe and well' calls to citizens, carried out in summer 2020, were well-received and garnered positive feedback for the service. We are planning further 'safe and well' calls to all service users during the current lockdown. These calls are designed to monitor service user health and welfare status and identify those service users who may benefit from additional support, either from ourselves or our voluntary sector partners.
- 4.1.8. The risk of Covid-19 transmission to the most vulnerable citizens and carers has seen many providers pause regular services to protect their clients. We are working closely with those who used to access day care and respite services to identify alternative arrangements to meet their needs.

Supporting our carers

- 4.1.9. Working alongside partners, we have continued to support carers across the city during the pandemic. Council webpages, and those of the Carers Hub, are continually updated to ensure that they provide the latest information, advice and guidance. The Carers Strategy Group, made up of providers and commissioners, meets regularly to manage the response to Covid-19.
- 4.1.10. The Carers Support Service regularly reviews its services to ensure that it is optimising the offer to carers. It has seen a sharp rise in the number of carers registering for the Birmingham Carers Card, which validates the key worker status of carers and has proved to be useful in obtaining discounts, as well as facilitating priority access to supermarkets and online delivery slots.
- 4.1.11. Prior to the third national lockdown, outreach services, including safe and well checks, were due to be scaled back. However, in light of the new restrictions and surge in infection rates, the current protocol will continue until further notice. The Carers Hub will continue to offer emergency destitution payments to carers where these are required.
- 4.1.12. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has made the welcome decision to include carer allowance recipients and unpaid/family carers in the national vaccination prioritisation. However, these vaccinations must be accessed through the NHS, which poses a problem when we know that only a small percentage of carers have registered their caring status with their GP. ASC officers are exploring options to see if we can assist in raising awareness of vaccination entitlement with carers, and we await further information on whether carer allowance recipients can be automatically

notified of their vaccine priority status. The priority vaccination programme may help to identify thousands of hidden carers, providing a valuable opportunity to inform them of their rights and the support options available.

- 4.1.13. Unpaid/family carers are also now in scope for the ASC Project Welfare Initiative. Activity is underway to arrange a virtual meeting to enquire if there are any perceived gaps in the universal and carer support offer. Work is also progressing to identify the longer-term negative impacts of Covid-19 for carers and how this should be addressed as part of the city's recovery journey. Potential themes identified so far include: the financial impact of the pandemic, isolation, loss of independence, and the risk to health of both carers and the people they care for.
- 4.1.14. All Birmingham carers who provide an element of personal care, or are required to provide carer support in close proximity to those that they care for, now have access to free Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits through the council. Kits are delivered to their door and regularly replenished in line with need or usage.

Supporting our Shielded and Clinically Extremely Vulnerable

- 4.1.15. ASC has continued to work with colleagues from across the Council to support and protect our shielded and vulnerable cohort, whilst ensuring activities are not duplicated.
- 4.1.16. Full shielding guidance for Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) people was paused for most of the country on 1st August 2020 and the Government reviewed its approach to support based on latest understanding of the virus. New advice was issued to people who are CEV on 13th October 2020, aligned to the new Local Covid Alert Levels. The revised guidance was aimed at supporting people who are CEV to protect themselves from exposure to the virus, based on the level of risk in the local area.
- 4.1.17. In October 2020 the Government launched the national shielding framework, which signalled the introduction of a more localised approach to support rather than the hybrid national-local model in place during the first lockdown. Government decided that support to access food for those shielding would be locally led and that there would be no national food box scheme. It was confirmed that councils would be expected to support people to access food and basic support through routes that promote choice and independence, with direct provision of food being a last resort for those with no alternative. Councils were also provided with access to the "Supermarket Offer Toolkit" to enable the most vulnerable citizens to access priority supermarket slots.
- 4.1.18. As Covid-19 cases continue to rise, there have now been two additional national lockdowns (5th November – 2nd December 2020, and 5th January 2021 to present). In January 2021 the Department for Health and Social Care

(DHSC) issued updated advice to people who are CEV, writing to them directly to inform them of the reintroduction of Shielding guidance. Whilst the guidance to people who are CEV is not compulsory, they are strongly advised to follow extra precautionary steps to help keep themselves safe.

- 4.1.19. In Birmingham, there are over 36,000 people listed as CEV of whom just under 2,000 had re-registered for support as of 12th January 2020. Currently, around 60-100 CEV people are re-registering for support every day. These individuals are contacted via the Council's Covid Emergency Hub which continues to support vulnerable people in the City.
- 4.1.20. During the first wave of the pandemic the Council called on the West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) for mutual aid to undertake 'Safe and Well' checks to hundreds of 'uncontactable' shielded individuals, to support the visits being undertaken by Council staff. The WMFS have indicated their willingness to support with Safe and Well checks in this third lockdown and officers are working with WMFS to progress this.
- 4.1.21. National government have recognised that the new restrictions and the reintroduction of Shielding guidance create additional financial pressures for local authorities. The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) has provided councils with additional funding equivalent to £14.60 per CEV individual on the Shielded Patient List (SPL) for each 28 day period of restrictions.
- 4.1.22. For Birmingham this equated to a one-off grant of £520,000 for the second national lockdown. This funding was allocated to support people who are CEV, with weekly outcomes reported to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. The Council awaits notification of the amount it will be allocated for the first 28 days of the third national lockdown.

Supporting our communities

- 4.1.23. The core structures that supported the initial city-wide response to Covid-19 remain in place as we move through the winter. These include:
- A network of thematic organisations
 - Locality leads as part of the Early Help Offer (Children's Partnership)
 - The Neighbourhood Network Schemes (NNS) network
 - Maintenance of the database of services offered by Routes to Wellbeing (R2W)
- 4.1.24. These structures continue to meet and deliver core elements of support such as financial advice, access to food, and information, advice and guidance (IAG) services. The capacity of these support structures have been

strengthened through targeted funding from the Emergency Assistance Grant.

- 4.1.25. The impact of the current lockdown is being monitored by the thematic leads and locality lead organisations. Council officers meet weekly with BVSC to discuss emerging issues and prepare for support post-March 2021. The Active Wellbeing Society (TAWs) continue to act as the central point of delivery for food and ensuring onward distribution to localities, as well as acting as the single point of contact to access local community support.
- 4.1.26. ASC is working with the Council's Insight Programme to analyse data on levels of vulnerability across the city during the pandemic. The team are mapping CEV and lockdown demands, both to help inform the response to the pandemic and to develop strategies to support vulnerable citizens in the longer-term.
- 4.1.27. Organisations funded through the Adults Prevention and Communities Grants scheme have continued to refocus their activities to respond to the demands associated with the pandemic. The infrastructure of this scheme has been mirrored by the Birmingham Children's Partnership to provide urgent front-line resources for children and families in need. Further crisis support for children and families impacted by Covid-19 will be led by Education and Skills using the Winter Grant Scheme funding.
- 4.1.28. The Prevention Operational Group is also being re-focused to consider other vulnerable adults with care and support needs or on the threshold of care and support, including younger adults transitioning into adulthood at risk, carers, and people with Learning Disabilities and Mental Health requirements.
- 4.1.29. As part of the city's wider recovery journey, organisations supporting adults and children across the city are engaging in longer-term discussions about the development of an All Age Grant Prospectus, in order to ensure a whole life-course approach to investment within the community and voluntary sector. This will ensure that the services available to vulnerable citizens are not unnecessarily fragmented by the age segmentation of funding streams.
- 4.1.30. Sector leads are now also working with BVSC in their coordinating role to establish the infrastructure which will form part of the recovery journey. As a result of this work a draft recovery framework has been presented to Corporate Leadership Team. BVSC have been asked to develop an action plan for the middle of January 2021 for discussion by the Recovery Group and then for identification of lead senior officers and members support as needed.

Supporting our care providers

- 4.1.31. Throughout the pandemic, ASC have worked proactively with partners to provide robust practical and financial support for care homes and the wider care sector. The pressure on care providers is unprecedented, and partners have worked together tirelessly to assist the sector in coping with the impact of the virus, as well as enhanced testing and vaccination activities. As a health and care organisation, we recognise both the incredible efforts of providers in caring for their residents, and the further challenges they face as a result of ongoing requirements and changes in guidance.
- 4.1.32. Regular contact has been maintained with providers across the city to ensure they can raise concerns promptly, and regular information, advice and guidance is being published on the Council's website and social media. We have developed a care home tracker to help target extra support, such as enhanced testing and advice, to homes at highest risk. Where providers are facing staff shortages, support is being provided on a mutual aid basis and work has begun to pilot regular testing of care agency staff that are supporting our care providers as well as routine testing of the wider domiciliary care workforce.
- 4.1.33. System wide assistance has also been increased to support the care sector. This has included:
- Coordination of clinical support for care homes, including enhanced GP cover and on-site clinical support from the Enhanced Support to Care Homes Team.
 - Expansion of the Trusted Assessor model for hospital discharge to reduce the need for providers to conduct their own assessments.
 - Commissioning of additional care and support for citizens who are Covid positive and require care in their own home.
 - Provision of training on a range of issues including: Infection Prevention Control measures; appropriate PPE use; managing deterioration in care home residents' health; and mental health and bereavement support for staff.
- 4.1.34. The system has extended extensive financial support to care homes, implementing a previously agreed fee increase that reflects inflation and National Living Wage, as well as reimbursement of around £3m for additional staffing, PPE and other Covid-19 related costs. Temporary changes to costs of care and action to assist with cashflow has also been introduced. In addition, the Council have distributed nearly £17m of Infection Control Grant to providers to help improve infection control and reduce movement of staff within and between care settings.

- 4.1.35. The restrictions to visiting in care homes has been particularly difficult for people who have been unable to meet with their loved ones for an extended period, and partners have worked hard to balance these needs alongside managing and reducing the number of care home Covid-19 outbreaks. Visiting is recognised as being important part of maintaining wellbeing and revised national guidance has confirmed that providers are best placed to decide how to safely manage visits and balance the associated risks with regards to infection. The importance of involving residents and families in decisions is reinforced and it is clear that end of life visits should continue in all circumstances.

Supporting the health and care system over winter

- 4.1.36. Throughout the pandemic, partners across the health and social care system have come together to implement measures aimed at protecting citizens and shielding the most vulnerable, based on national evidence and guidance. Resources and capacity have been redeployed to focus on saving lives, protect the NHS and control the spread of the virus.
- 4.1.37. This winter is placing unique pressures on health and care organisations across the city. Covid-19 is co-circulating with seasonal flu and other viruses, and transmission has increased due to a number of factors including the emergence of a more contagious variant. Even as Birmingham came out of the second national lockdown, infection rates remained high, and are continuing to accelerate as we experience a third wave and further surges in demand. The health and wellbeing of both service users and the social care workforce, including unpaid carers, may impact on capacity, particularly as many people are tired and fatigued by the unrelenting Covid-19 pressures. The winter plan for the city reflects both regular winter preparations and specific Covid-19 specific activities, as well as further surge planning as we ride out the third wave.
- 4.1.38. The winter plan this year is also set in the context of provider viability challenges that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Actions include not only the system response to traditional increases in seasonal demand for services, but the impact of the virus on care capacity and viability. Advances in Covid-19 testing and vaccines are of course welcome, but bring with them increased uncertainty and expectation on systems already experiencing intense day to day pressures.
- 4.1.39. System partners across the city have continued to work closely to plan and prepare for the additional pressures that we face this winter, including the resurgence of Covid-19 cases. The plan sets out the clear and robust steps we are taking to ensure that the sector is prepared for winter and that we

protect both the people who need care and the workforce that supports them. The key focus now is on getting as many people vaccinated as quickly as possible.

4.2. Public Health

Strategic Response to Covid-19

- 4.2.1. The Director of Public Health (DPH) continues to lead the Public Health response to Covid-19, working closely with a range of both internal and external stakeholders including elected Members, the NHS, West Midlands Police (WMP), Public Health England (PHE), and organisations across the voluntary and community sector.
- 4.2.2. Partnership working plays a key role in the public health response to the pandemic, with regular activities including:
- Weekly briefings to all elected Members;
 - Monthly meetings between the DPH and Directors of Infection Control and Prevention at major hospitals across the city;
 - Weekly meetings with local NHS senior leads to ensure close working across the system;
 - Regular (three times a week) regional meetings with chief executives and Directors of Public Health from neighbouring local authorities;
 - Weekly meetings of the West Midlands Association of Directors of Public Health;
 - And, weekly meetings with the Chief Medical Officer and his team.

Governance

- 4.2.3. The Public Health team has taken a robust approach to governance and oversight of the Covid-19 public health response, including the creation of the monthly Local Outbreak Engagement Board.
- 4.2.4. Public health support is regularly provided to the Birmingham Strategic Command Group, the Birmingham City Incident Management Team, and the Birmingham Tactical Command Group. Public health has also led the Test and Trace Silver Command Group.

- 4.2.5. Regular updates on the Covid response are provided to the Health & Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in addition to Cabinet.

Health Protection Response

- 4.2.6. The Public Health team rapidly moved into an emergency cell structure in March 2020 to support the acute health protection response to the pandemic.
- 4.2.7. A team has been established to provide specialist public health advice to care homes, schools, workplaces, and other settings where there are outbreaks and clusters of cases. A second team has been created to follow up on cases that did not engage with the national contact tracing system. Both of these teams operate seven days a week, with consultant cover.
- 4.2.8. We have also established new data management processes to extract data from national systems, as well as analyse local data as it becomes available.
- 4.2.9. A dedicated Test and Trace team, led by Dr Mary Orhwere, was established in the summer of 2020, supported by a seven day rota of staff from the main Public Health team. Staff rotate into the team on four day blocks to support surge capacity.
- 4.2.10. On a weekly basis the team are responding to between 3-500 situations which require detailed follow up and support to help contain the spread of the pandemic in Birmingham.

Community Engagement Response

- 4.2.11. Public Health has undertaken extensive community engagement throughout the course of the pandemic, working closely with the corporate communications team to ensure that citizens have access to accurate information about Covid-19.
- 4.2.12. Headline engagement activities include:
- Commissioning 18 community partner organisations to undertake deeper engagement with specific communities, including Central and Eastern European communities, LGBT communities, faith communities, and disabled communities.
 - Commissioning partnerships with six local community radio stations, focusing on local ethnic communities and communities where English is not the first language.

- Conducting over 60 media interviews, including a weekly live Q&A on WM BBC radio and regular Facebook Q&A sessions with Birmingham Live.
- Facilitating over 30 interfaith meetings, and participating in monthly regional interfaith meetings alongside the West Midlands Metro Mayor.
- Dedicated engagement sessions with Birmingham masjids, and ministers/pastors from black churches.
- Attending over 100 ward meetings to support local elected Members in engaging with local communities.

4.2.13. We have adapted the existing HealthyBrum public health campaign to provide a trusted source of information and advice on Covid-19 for the general public. Since July 2020, the HealthyBrum twitter account has directly engaged with over 1200 people, with similar levels of engagement on Facebook. Social media channels have been used to drive over 8000 people to the BCC website for further information on Covid-19. One campaign, focused on increasing people's awareness of the NHS Covid App, reached over 51,000 people through Facebook advertising targeted at the highest prevalence areas of the city.

4.2.14. Public Health has developed and launched the Covid Community Champions programme, building on learning from Newham. To date, over 500 Champions have been recruited and supported through weekly live Q&A sessions with the DPH or Assistant Directors of Public Health. Champions receive weekly emails and text messages for cascade through their personal networks, and to date over 7,200 emails and 3,400 text messages have been shared into local communities through this route.

Testing Provision

4.2.15. Public Health has led the development and implementation of a testing strategy for Birmingham. Initially, this focused on testing site development for symptomatic testing through the PCR testing programme, with the identification and delivery of two drive-through and ten walk-through facilities across the city.

4.2.16. At the end of November 2020, the Council was asked to develop a testing strategy for asymptomatic testing using the new rapid result LFD testing kits. This has been developed on a hub and spoke model, with a focus on case finding, early containment of infectious cases in high risk settings, and using testing to enable activities such as dining in restaurants. The hub site

launched in early December 2020, with the first spokes going live in week commencing 21st December.

Health and Wellbeing Support

- 4.2.17. Over 3,000 citizens responded to our Birmingham Covid Impact Survey, helping to inform and shape action moving forward. Findings from this survey, alongside commissioned ethnographic research, will underpin the Director of Public Health Annual Report.
- 4.2.18. We have developed the BHealthy Campaign, tailored to focus on risk reduction for some of the modifiable risk factors most associated with Covid mortality, including obesity. Campaign resources were translated into over 20 different languages, and 19 webinars were held for community members to provide more in-depth information and discussion of topics.
- 4.2.19. In November 2020, we successfully bid for additional financial support from the Global Healthy City Partnership to invest in PPE provision for food banks and homelessness services. These materials were distributed across the city in December 2020.

Non-Covid activities

- 4.2.20. Understandably, Public Health has had limited capacity to work on non-Covid related issues during the pandemic. However, progress has been made in some priority areas.
- 4.2.21. Work has continued on creating a healthy food economy in East Birmingham, securing funding in partnership with several universities to undertake focused research in this area.
- 4.2.22. We have continued to deliver the key outputs of the Global Healthy City Partnership funded campaign to increase active travel in specific ethnic communities in ten key wards across the city.
- 4.2.23. Delivery of the Childhood Obesity Trailblazer Programme has been successfully reprofiled, working alongside partners the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC).

5. Education, Skills and Children's Wellbeing

5.1. Birmingham Children's Trust

- 5.1.1. At the time of writing, Birmingham is in a third period of national lockdown. The Trust is striving to deliver all our core services to children and families in need, including maintaining high levels of face-to-face contact. We continue

to play a system leader role, supporting and galvanising the wider children's partnership to ensure a strong multi-agency response is in place in the community, and that partners maintain home visits to our most vulnerable.

Trust activity and performance

- 5.1.2. Performance against the fifteen contractual Performance Indicators (PIs) has remained strong throughout the pandemic. In November 2020, the last quarter for which figures are available, ten PIs were at or better than target, four were within tolerance, and only one PI was outside tolerance, caused by delays in the family courts rather than something within control of the Trust.
- 5.1.3. Placement stability for children in our care is better than it has ever been. Only 2% of our children in care experienced three or more placements in a years, compared with the national and statistical average of 10%. This is testament to the work of our social workers and the commitment of our foster carers.
- 5.1.4. The Trust is maintaining its approach to supporting staff to carry out their work face-to-face, safely. We have experienced some difficult outbreaks in our short breaks care homes, but these have been managed well. We have had to suspend much face-to-face contact/family time for children in care, due to outbreaks in our contact centres, but we are working on recovery plans to resume this.
- 5.1.5. The locality-based Early Help offer has been maintained and will need once again to step up in this latest lockdown. Social work support to schools has increased, with Trust managers linked to schools for advice and support across the city.
- 5.1.6. A cohort of new Early Help workers is starting work, further bolstering the offer to families in need, and the SEMH Pathfinder (a schools-based family support service developed in and funded by the Trust in partnership with some schools) has extended its reach with some early success in Northfield. The initial allocation has targeted key localities where data suggests need is greatest.
- 5.1.7. We are once again working to ensure that vulnerable children are attending school. We recognise that, as in the first period of school closure, many children in care will be required to learn from home. All were equipped with a laptop in the summer to support this.
- 5.1.8. Throughout the pandemic we have maintained oversight of the quality of practice through practice evaluation, audit, practice forums, learning webinars and surveys of staff and with families. We have introduced additional data collection to ensure that we understand school attendance, visiting quality and service demand.

- 5.1.9. The Trust is experiencing greater pressure now than at any point in the pandemic: demand at the front door, staff vacancies and rising sickness all pose a significant risk, and at the time of writing leaders are developing additional contingency plans for the potential redeployment of staff to front-line practice.
- 5.1.10. We are also concerned about staff morale and wellbeing, not least in the context of this much more virulent variant. It is very important therefore that the vaccination programme for front-line staff in the Trust is underway and we are working hard to get everyone vaccinated who is in a 'critical worker' role. Trust staff and managers have worked tirelessly over the last 10 months to keep as many children and families safeguarded and supported during the pandemic.

Trust Financial Position

- 5.1.11. The Trust has been able to use Covid-related funding, drawn down through the Council, to cover critical expenditure related to the pandemic. The Trust has sought to minimise its call on these scarce funds and has spent less than initially forecast, incurring £1.6m of Covid-specific costs to date, all of which are eligible for the Government Covid grant.
- 5.1.12. In relation to its core budget, the Trust has driven down an anticipated £7m deficit earlier in the year to £0.5m. We continue to work hard to produce a balanced budget. The Trust has completed a review of its financial management by CIPFA (with a creditable rating of 3/5) and has just received a draft review of its strategic financial position commissioned with the Council, from which will emerge a joint action plan to ensure the Trust is operating as efficiently as it can, and that it has the resources it requires to deliver appropriate service levels.

Key Risks

- 5.1.13. The key risks currently faced by the Trust are as follows:
- Failure to agree a sustainable financial settlement with BCC.
 - The impact of further growth in demand as we emerge from this phase of the pandemic, and the potential safeguarding risks associated with any further restrictions.
 - The impact of the pandemic on the physical health and emotional wellbeing of our staff.
 - Maintaining an adequate social care workforce while we are constrained by the Council's Equal Pay concerns, and in a competitive regional market for social workers.

- Ensuring a strong focus on contractual dependencies such as corporate parenting, education, and housing, including an accommodation strategy that is flexible and responsive to local need.

5.2. Schools

- 5.2.1. We have continued to update our comprehensive risk assessment document as government and public health guidance changed, to support schools with reopening and then closing to most pupils again in January 2021. This risk assessment was a crucial support for Birmingham schools to remain open to pupils despite rising case levels during the autumn term.
- 5.2.2. Birmingham schools were open to all pupils from September 2020 until the third national lockdown in January 2021. Attendance data from the DfE during the autumn term showed Birmingham broadly in line with other core cities and elsewhere in the region, despite being subject to the highest level of local restrictions. Officers from Education and Skills, particularly those in the Education Legal Intervention team, provided additional support to schools and families to encourage pupils' attendance when schools were fully open.
- 5.2.3. The council, working closely with colleagues in Birmingham Children's Trust, has ensured that self-isolating vulnerable children and young people and those with SEND are supported. The Council has set up a robust taskforce with local partners including the city's schools' fora, Birmingham Children's Trust, Health, the Birmingham Education Partnership, West Midlands Police and others to provide a joint response that prioritises vulnerable children and ensures their needs are met more effectively. When schools were closed to all but vulnerable children and those of critical key workers in January 2021, this taskforce ensured that vulnerable families were supported.
- 5.2.4. The council is ensuring that all critical key workers are able to access school places to enable them to work during the third period of national lockdown. The council is also supporting schools who are reporting an increased number of requests for places for eligible pupils than in the first national lockdown.
- 5.2.5. We have provided significant support to all schools by facilitating regular webinars on key issues (including Public Health, safeguarding, attendance, risk assessments, buildings, the new Ofsted framework) and providing documents including flowcharts, checklists and FAQs to support them with remaining open. Further webinars are taking place in January to support schools with lateral flow testing and risk assessments in the new period of national lockdown.
- 5.2.6. Officers from Education and Skills have continued to work closely with public health on Test and Trace. Where suspected cases have arisen in school

settings, these have been dealt with appropriately and in full compliance with all Public Health guidance.

- 5.2.7. To support families with food costs incurred during the October half-term holiday, and in the absence of a national government scheme, the council provided one week of vouchers to families eligible for free school meals. These were distributed to families through schools during November.
- 5.2.8. A further two weeks of vouchers were provided to support families over the Christmas holidays, using Birmingham's allocation from the government's COVID Winter Grant Scheme. These were again distributed to families through schools before the end of the autumn term. The council has strongly recommended that all Birmingham schools take up the national voucher scheme to support families eligible for free school meals once it is in place from Monday 18th January. Using the COVID Winter Grant Scheme funding, the council has committed to provide a further week of vouchers to families to cover the February half-term period.
- 5.2.9. The council is working with partners to provide IT support to schools to enable pupils to access remote education. Hundreds of council devices have been repurposed for pupils to use and donations are being received through the Digital Education Partnership.

5.3. SEND

SEND Improvement and Transformation Journey

- 5.3.1. Despite the considerable disruption caused by Covid-19, work has continued at pace to deliver the SEND service improvement and transformation programme. Since the last update report to City Council in September 2020, key activities in this area have included:
- Continuation of weekly meetings with all schools and early years PVI settings to discuss children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) up until their return to on-site learning in September.
 - Keeping in regular contact with the families of pre-school children with EHCPs in the Early Years to provide remote advice around appropriate activities to support ongoing learning and development and in relation to transition.
 - Weekly virtual meetings with school leadership teams to discuss children with EHCPs were provided from April to October, at which point the SEND Inclusion Services resumed in-school support.
 - Regular SENCo (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) online briefings with updates from health and education in relation to Covid-19, as well as focused work on aspects of the SEND

transformational projects have taken place throughout the autumn. These have been well attended by SENCOs across the city with positive feedback.

- A programme of locality meetings for schools has taken place, providing an opportunity for SEN leaders to develop collaborative working across the consortia of schools and specialised services, including Occupational Therapy (OT) and Speech And Language Therapy (SALT).
- A programme of monthly online professional development webinars for schools and settings has taken place, led by a national SEND lead, with an initial focus on SENCo wellbeing.
- The development of online consultations with an Occupational Therapist or a Speech and Language Therapist has continued, offering advice and support around for SENCOs and class teachers for pupils returning to schools / working in bubbles, as well as more strategic input.

Supporting our SEND families

- 5.3.2. The Assistant Director for SEND and the Cabinet Member for Children's Wellbeing continue to have regular meetings with our Parent Carer Forum. These meetings have been very useful to ensure they are engaged in all service developments and make sure that the information and advice on our local offer website and locality working is relevant to families and carers.
- 5.3.3. The local offer website is continually updated to make sure that it provides the latest information, advice, and resources for SEND children and their families. The website also signposts to useful partner websites and resources.
- 5.3.4. The Parent Link Service is available to provide advice for parents/carers. Details about a series of parent webinars, focused upon SEND, are now publicised on the Local Offer website. Families can use an online booking service to reserve a place.
- 5.3.5. Our specialist advisory teacher services team have been providing a range of advice and ideas to support children and families at home during the past 6 months. If children are still at home, either because they are self isolating or are extremely clinically vulnerable, services continue to offer virtual support.

Special Schools

- 5.3.6. Throughout the pandemic, the service has worked with our 27 Special Schools to ensure that students, parents and carers remain supported. Regular meetings with the headteachers and the Assistant Director for SEND and the Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Culture have continued.

- 5.3.7. Weekly individual school meetings with SEND Link officers continued until the October half-term, at which point they were replaced by multi-agency drop-in sessions held every half-term. Headteachers can use these sessions to discuss individual pupils or wider issues relevant to their school.
- 5.3.8. Since January 2021, the local authority named contacts (SEND Link) allocated to each school (Mainstream/Special/ Independent) have held virtual meetings with school leadership teams. These meetings are intended to be a supportive discussion about the most vulnerable pupils with SEND who are not in school and to plan for their return. Specifically, these meetings will provide a space to:
- Ensure special schools have the up to date guidance and support needed to fulfil their duties, follow up on queries.
 - Provide challenge when settings are not fulfilling their requirements
 - Promote collaboration and innovation to meet the needs of our vulnerable children/young people
 - Escalate issues and opportunities to the local authority named contact
- 5.3.9. Schools are aware that they should contact their allocated Link officer for ongoing support regarding individual pupils.
- 5.3.10. Partners from social care and health are aware that these individual school meetings are taking place (information shared via the Joint Responses Group) and meet with school and Link officers to support planning for individual pupils when requested. Schools and SEND Link officers are aware of the named social care colleague linked to each school.
- 5.3.11. Weekly meetings are held with the AD for SEND and the SEND leads to address attendance of vulnerable pupils with EHCP and themes to be addressed each week.
- 5.3.12. Support and guidance for Special Schools has been sent to each headteacher, with a focus on vulnerable pupils and attendance.
- 5.3.13. 'Schools Causing Concern' meetings with the Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP) are being held to focus on solutions for individual schools.
- 5.3.14. Communication to parents has been refreshed and shared with schools and via the Local Offer. Each of the SEND Inclusion Services has an email drop box for parental contact which has been shared. The Parent Link Service is available, via phone or online, to address parent concerns and offer a signposting service.

- 5.3.15. We have continued to work closely with head teachers to ensure the supply of the necessary equipment to keep children and staff safe in Special Schools. The Council has continued to directly supply PPE to Special Schools through our corporate procurement function. This direct distribution of equipment contrasts with other authorities, who did not supply PPE to schools beyond initial emergency supplies when schools reopened towards the end of term.
- 5.3.16. Following October half term there have been some significant changes in the way PPE is being supplied to the Local Council from Central Government Departments. The Council can now only distribute supplies from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) which is COVID specific PPE.
- 5.3.17. All schools will be issued with emergency packs to be used until March 2021. BCC Officers are working with schools to discuss a process with our procurement and commissioning teams, with a view to schools becoming self-sufficient for the summer term.
- 5.3.18. We are continuing to work closely with health colleagues to provide joined-up support to those children who require aerosol generating procedures (AGP) whilst at school. Pods (small cabins) are in situ on several school sites so that the procedure can take place safely inside these structures. Updated government guidance, released in November, is being scrutinised by health to ensure the safe return of all these children.
- 5.3.19. We understand that many parents and carers are anxious about their children returning to school, especially if their child has complex care needs. Where there is a concern, schools have proactively worked with families to carry out individual pupil risk assessments focusing on reducing risk and enabling a return to on-site learning.
- 5.3.20. The Educational Psychology service has resumed school visiting and is now able to carry out observations and assessments of pupils within the school setting. During the first half term, pupils generally adapted well, and schools reported that pupil engagement was good. Since the half term holiday, there have been increased requests for support with meeting pupil's social and emotional needs. Some pupils are experiencing heightened anxiety, and some are struggling with curriculum engagement/regulation of behaviour. Schools are requesting advice on how to manage pupil behaviour whilst maintaining the safety measures put in place to reduce infection risks.
- 5.3.21. Meeting and training sessions continue to be held via MS Teams. There has been good take up of the Wellbeing for Education Return training and demand for other, more specialist training remains high.
- 5.3.22. Since the beginning of the third national lockdown, the EPS has responded to 20 requests for critical incident support. This is similar to the number of

requests for support received in the same time period last year. All requests have been responded to within 2-3 hours.

- 5.3.23. More broadly, the SEND service is in the process of supporting schools across the city in promoting wellbeing holistically and in adopting a graduated approach to address wellbeing and mental health issues by incorporating a four stage 'assess, plan, do, review' cycle.
- 5.3.24. We have been supporting schools to appoint wellbeing leads from within their leadership teams as well as dedicated practitioners.
- 5.3.25. Over the coming months, we will be providing tools, resources, support, guidance and training for wellbeing leads and wellbeing practitioners to assist them in being more effective in their roles. Educational Psychologists will be facilitating wellbeing networks to foster greater collaboration between settings and provide collective support within local areas.
- 5.3.26. The Home Bridging Team continues to support children and young people who are anxious about returning to school or are without a school place. Over the autumn term the team have supported children with their transition back into on-site learning, while ensuring that appropriate social distancing measures are in place.
- 5.3.27. Over the autumn term placements have been secured for a significant number of children, but the number of children awaiting a special school place is 78. Of those, 14 of these children are Looked After with a number of those from out of authority placements and several families have moved into Birmingham. The Home Bridging Team and Link Professionals continue to work directly with schools to establish early intervention and support across all Key Stages. Regular meetings are taking place between commissioning, special school DMG and Home Bridging to review current situation and ways forward.

Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

- 5.3.28. Over this period, we are working hard to keep the Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) process on track. The service continues to operate via telephone calls and video conferencing where possible, and decision-making panels have successfully moved online. Work has taken place to introduce three clear pathways for the assessment, review and where needed, a resolution to meeting the needs of children and young people with complex needs. The restructure of the SENAR service is underway, with commencement of the consultation with staff expected in the spring. The significant structural changes needed and have caused some disruption within the services and additional resource has been provided to support the management of the changes during this challenging period of change.

- 5.3.29. Link Officers continue to work alongside all agencies across the SEND landscape to seek resolutions to issues and improve outcomes for children and young people. The majority of referrals received are related to requests for assessment, school placements, communication breakdowns, and general request for advice and guidance.

Home to School Transport

- 5.3.30. Birmingham City Council currently conveys over 4200 children to SEND schools and resource centres, which presents a major challenge in the context of Covid-19 social distancing guidance and risk assessments. These children are transported on around 600 routes per day.

- 5.3.31. Despite the difficulties posed by the pandemic, we continue to support transport arrangement for our children and young people. To do this, we have put in place approximately 200 additional bubble routes, which has increased the total number of routes to around 800 per day. This has presented a challenge to the service when faced with a reduction of staff, drivers and guides relating to social isolation or shielding issues. However, despite these challenges we have:

- Continued to consult with all schools concerning new bubble routes and how they will operate;
- Continued to work with travel operators to plan new routes that meet bubble requirements whilst minimising change for each young person;
- Continued to issue guidance to travel operators, parents and schools on new routes and timetables;
- Established a Weekly School Report that identifies compliance issues for further investigation and remedy.
- Established a positive working relationship with the schools and the Parent Carer Forum in order to address ongoing matters;
- Established Compliance: Training, Supplier Audit and Site Inspections;
- Established and started implementation of the 365 ICT system for transport;
- Administered all outstanding personal budget applications and complaint enquiries;
- Established a daily catch up meeting to ensure successful development of the service;

- Introduced a Deed of Variation for the employment of Guides by suppliers;
- Established a timeframe for review for the existing Home to School Transport Policy;
- Introduced a telephone monitoring database to be able to manage more effectively a response to incoming calls;
- And, drafted a proposal for revised risk assessment and transport needs assessment.

5.3.32. Following feedback from parents, suppliers and schools, and significant performance challenges in September 2020, we commissioned an Inquiry, which undertook a comprehensive review of the service. At the same time, we recruited additional resources to put in place an Immediate Fixes Plan to address our key challenges at pace. The immediate fixes have already driven significant performance improvements, and this will be built upon over the coming months.

5.3.33. The findings and recommendations of the Inquiry were agreed by Cabinet and will be taken forward through a focussed change programme, which is currently being scoped and resourced.

5.3.34. The closure of schools in the latest national lockdown has meant that only those children who are vulnerable or are the children of critical workers are in school settings. This has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of children who need to be transported to 750 for week ending 15th January 2021, and a reduction in the number of routes needed to around 430 routes. This necessitated the increased use of single person vehicles rather than multiple occupancy vehicles. The service has continued to work with schools, parents, carers and providers to ensure the effective delivery of these routes and, in addition, it has reallocated resources to address issues such as the backlog in processing bus passes.

5.4. Birmingham Careers Service (BCS)

5.4.1. Careers Service staff have continued to deliver services on a virtual and agile basis throughout the duration of the pandemic, and are continuing to do so during the current national lockdown.

5.4.2. The service is offering careers information, advice and guidance services to NEET (aged 16-19), young people at risk of becoming NEET, and some young people who attend schools who secure a guidance service for their pupils on a traded basis with BCS. We are also in the process of working with and identifying other cohorts to target (due to small amount of funding) around those young people in year 11 who are home educated.

- 5.4.3. Where possible, support services have been moved to virtual/online delivery, with careers advice and guidance provided to NEET young people and students via phone, email, WhatsApp, text, and social media. Microsoft Teams & Zoom are also proving essential and assisting an enhanced service delivery. The development of the website has also continued. A range of new online resources have been produced, all accessible via the website and social media platforms for parents, carers, young people and our partners.
- 5.4.4. The service has maintained contact with all schools, encouraging the referral of all Year 11, 12 and 13 pupils who are at risk of becoming NEET. This led to over 500 referrals within one month and ongoing referrals depending on the time of year.
- 5.4.5. An increase in staffing resource is also planned to deal with the increasing demand on the service from both schools and NEET young people, due to the current recession and dramatic rise in youth unemployment.

5.5. 14-19 Full Participation and Skills Team

- 5.5.1. Currently, post-16 providers are mandated to remain open.
- 5.5.2. The Full Participation team continues to support the Test and Trace team, remaining on duty for part of the Christmas holidays to ensure successful contact tracing. Support is provided on a rota basis, providing guidance to colleges and following up any queries raised by parents, staff, and other stakeholders. This includes both general requests for information and guidance, and whistle-blowing enquiries. Since the start of 2021, we have also supported Public Health by keeping stakeholders updates on lateral flow testing requirements for post-16 in education settings.
- 5.5.3. The 14-19 team worked with all eligible post-16 settings to make sure that 10 days' worth of retrospective payments were provided for all young people eligible for free school meals, covering the Christmas holiday period.
- 5.5.4. We have shifted the delivery of our 'business as usual services' to virtual and online platforms, including:
- An increased and flexible careers service
 - Employability and enterprise expertise through the Library of Birmingham and community library services
 - Targeted employability training and signposting through the Youth Service
 - Enhanced tracking of 16-18 year olds, to ensure that they continue in education or work (particularly those in Year 11/12)

- Identification of 16-19 year old apprentices and trainees who have withdrawn from learning or been made redundant, so that further support can be provided
- Signposting and sharing resources such as mental health support services
- Creating new virtual and online learning opportunities, including the planned delivery of Virtual Work-Based Learning Open Days
- Supporting Independent Training Providers to remain viable during the pandemic, and ensuring that they continue to enrol and support NEET young people

5.6. Employment and Skills Service

- 5.6.1. We are now in our third national lockdown, with a huge impact on local businesses and employers. We are rapidly scaling up delivery to help residents to upskill, reskill, and secure and/or sustain good jobs. We have adapted and reached new levels in partnership working with DWP, including Jobs Centre Plus (JCP), with West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP), and key employers such as NHS Trusts and construction industry leaders and their supply chains.
- 5.6.2. DWP has brought forward a set of support measures for employers and employees, with the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ('Furlough' scheme) and a range of loans and grants for employers, which the Council (Inclusive Growth Directorate) has been instrumental in delivering for the city.
- 5.6.3. West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) has created a Youth Unemployment Taskforce, chaired by Cllr Brookfield, Leader of City of Wolverhampton Council. This has also been supported by the Deputy Leader Cllr Jones, who is the WMCA Portfolio Lead for Inclusive Communities.
- 5.6.4. The WMCA Taskforce has overseen strong collaborative work, working with partners including the DWP and JCP, Local Authorities, the voluntary sector and local colleges and providers to develop a West Midlands Youth Offer delivered through JCP's Youth Hubs (new Youth Employability Work Coaches based at community locations) and an online platform that sets out training, education and support services available regionally, and at a city level.

Proposed approach to employment and economic recovery

- 5.6.5. Based upon previous responses to large scale redundancies it is proposed that we build upon the existing model with a staged but urgent "call to arms".

5.6.6. The ambition is to create a regional Jobs Taskforce, bringing forward a collaborative partnership connecting available provision into a single offer of support.

- This would cover support for individuals:
- who may be seeking a career path having exited formal education;
- have been made redundant through the lockdown, period of the pandemic or the ending of the furlough scheme;
- seen a reduction in their zero-hour contracts;
- are seeking a sector switch as the sector they are working in is facing a decline as a result of the pandemic.

Planning, procurement and social responsibility

5.6.7. We continue to 'sweat our assets' and gain maximum outputs from capital projects set out in the Covid-19 Birmingham Economic Recovery Strategy and other regeneration activity including Commonwealth Games related sites such as Alexander Stadium, Perry Barr Regeneration Scheme and major regeneration projects such as Peddimore, Smithfield, Langley, HS2, Birmingham Municipal Housing Trust, East Birmingham Inclusive Growth Strategy and S106 agreements on larger projects.

5.6.8. This provision is delivered through the Employment Access Team (EAT) which is also delivering the World of Work (WoW) job brokerage project funded by ESF.

5.6.9. WoW provides good equality of access to the jobs and skills opportunities, with BAME engagement at 63%, people with disabilities and/or long-term health condition at 16%. The project currently has an overall job conversion rate of 38% - this is higher than the usual target of around 33%. Job outputs are mainly in blue- and white-collar roles within the construction sector. We are currently bidding to extend this project to October 2023 to support ongoing recovery response.

Addressing youth unemployment

5.6.10. Through the EU funded Youth Promise Plus (YPP) project we currently have capacity to support around 1,500 young people per annum with one to one support for as long as needed (often 9 - 12 months).

5.6.11. The project also funds specialist support for young people who are care leavers, or referred due to complex situations. We receive direct referrals from West Midlands Police and the Youth Offending Service. The project has professional mental health support available that is linked to NHS mental health provision as needed.

- 5.6.12. YPP provides good equality of access to the jobs and skills opportunities, with young people who have Black and Asian Minority Ethnicity (BAME) representing 56% of those supported, and young people with disabilities and/or long-term health condition representing 19%. The project currently has an overall positive result rate of 34% - this is on a par with the usual level for similar projects at 33%. We aim to improve this or at least maintain in in the face of the pandemic impact on jobs and education/training.
- 5.6.13. The team are also working with GBSLEP and Solihull Council to create a Kickstart Gateway – proposed to support businesses to be able to employ young people aged 16 – 24 for 6-month paid placements under the Government’s Kickstart scheme. Subject to approval, this will start in spring 2021. Again, subject to final approval the Council is aiming to be a Kickstart employer in its own right to support young people with opportunities at this critical time in their lives.

Developing our Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Strategy

- 5.6.14. We are developing this programme to launch £650k pa levy funding support for Birmingham’s SME’s, with a direct link back to the Employment and Skills Team to manage recruitment to any new positions to ensure opportunities are focussed on our priority groups and localities across the City.

Providing a rapid response to recovery

- 5.6.15. Together with DWP, GBSLEP, National Careers Service, Solihull MBC and WMCA, we are supporting a local Redundancy Taskforce to bring forward a single point of access service to support our employers and help our residents into alternative jobs and sectors.

Providing support to furloughed workers

- 5.6.16. During 2020, 55,400 (12%) of the City’s workforce were placed on furlough – this will likely produce a second peak of redundancies at the end of furlough in April 2021. We are working with National Careers Service (NCS) whom the government has funded to provide furlough support, and through BAES we can provide skills development opportunities, and Library of Birmingham provides a comprehensive free business start-up service including legal and Intellectual Property advice provided pro-bono by city businesses.
- 5.6.17. In early 2021 we will hold a Self-Employment Summit, bringing together local support providers to ensure that residents can gain the support they need if self-employment is their goal.

5.7. Birmingham Youth Service

- 5.7.1. Birmingham Youth Service has continued to deliver youth work to young people in Birmingham throughout lockdown. This has taken on different

formats and the emphasis has changed depending on the level of restrictions and the National Youth Agency guidance.

5.7.2. Our priority is providing continued support to young people through the following agendas:

- Supporting NEET young people to find strategies to cope with the pandemic and access training, education and employment opportunities.
- Addressing youth violence and anti-social behaviour through our detached presence and partnership work with the VRU, (Place Based approach, Violence Interrupters) and CSP.
- Providing individual and tailored support to vulnerable young people either in small groups or one to one eg on to one, food parcels, doorstep check, support groups.
- Improving the voice of young people to ensure they can engage in decision making processes.

5.7.3. During the current lockdown the youth service will continue to deliver services through a mixed model of online/digital delivery, 'detached' work, one-to-one work with vulnerable young people, and support groups delivering small group work with vulnerable youth people.

5.7.4. This is consistent with advice from the National Youth Agency which has been endorsed by Public Health England, the Health and Safety Executive and DCMS. Youth workers are recognised as key workers and our role is to engage and support young people.

5.7.5. All small group work and face to face work will be carried out in the spirit of lockdown. There needs to be a clearly defined group for a clearly defined purpose. This should only happen if necessary and kept as short as possible. This is to ensure that we continue to support vulnerable young people when needed.

5.7.6. The Youth Service is also continuing to help with tackling the wider pandemic. The service is in negotiations with NHS regarding the use of a centre for administering the vaccine and also some of the sites are being used to deliver the lateral flow tests in community centres. This is being delivered with minimal disruption to delivery of the service to young people.

5.8. Birmingham Adult Education Service (BAES)

5.8.1. The service has now moved all provision to remote delivery for the duration of the third national lockdown, pending the release of any further government guidance.

- 5.8.2. In order to support learners without access to a suitable device for online learning, BAES has set up a 'laptop loan' scheme which is now fully operational. We will continue to respond flexibly to learners' needs with regards to modes of delivery and support, while always abiding with current restrictions.
- 5.8.3. Although the number of new enrolments for Term 2 (2020/21 Spring Term) is down compared to previous years, attendance numbers are steady. In some cases the start of courses is postponed to February to take advantage of any increase in demand.
- 5.8.4. BAES continues to support residents and learners by overcoming barriers to digital inclusion in a number of ways. Actions include:
- Delivery of a variety of courses in IT, including basic level 'IT Skills for Work' and 'Essential Digital Skills' We have had over 1,000 enrolments on these courses since September 2020.
 - Delivery of workshops to all learners, on topics including 'Becoming a Digital Learner' and 'IT Fundamentals'.
 - Planned rollout of an ESOL learning app.
- 5.8.5. During Term 1 (2020/21 Autumn Term), around 85% of provision was online and 15% was on-site (specifically for the most vulnerable and digitally excluded learners). BAES also implemented IT workshops (Becoming a Digital Learner) to train learners who joined a programme and had access to a device and Wi-Fi, but who did not have the knowledge or experience to access the full range of live lessons via online platforms, including interactive resources and support.
- 5.8.6. In Term 3 (2020/21 Summer Term), we anticipate the percentage of onsite provision to increase slightly. Appropriate safe spaces are available to support the most disadvantaged learners to study at our centres.
- 5.8.7. This academic year, our programme of provision has attracted more young learners (below 29 years of age) than previously, particularly in Health and Social Care (18% of the cohort), SEND (20% of the cohort), maths (23% of the cohort) and English (17% of the cohort). The Languages provision has continued to attract young learners (24% of cohort).
- 5.8.8. To date, we have completed circa 11,000 enrolments in Adult Skills and Community Learning courses and just over 12,000 when non-funded provision is included. Across the provision, enrolment of working age adults has increased.
- 5.8.9. In the Autumn Term, we launched the Route to Work scheme, which utilises a systematic approach to identifying the skills that unemployed learners require and leads to a package of tailored support.

- 5.8.10. The service's Community Hub continues to offer a valuable live resource for learners and citizens of Birmingham and is promoted broadly in-house and via social media. There have been over 5,100 visits to the Hub from 15th April 2020 (when it went live) to date. We continue to work with local and national providers - such as the 'Waiting Room' resource - to ensure up to date and relevant information is provided to learners and those in the wider community.
- 5.8.11. The Learner Services Support Team continue to offer monthly online sessions to learners, focusing on Safeguarding, Prevent, internet safety and well-being. There are also weekly 'Drop in and Chat' sessions which focus on well-being and course support.
- 5.8.12. The Learner Services Support Team have worked closely with curriculum colleagues to identify learners who are risk. A new initiative has been set up to provide out of class 'catch up' and homework sessions for learners at risk to ensure they are not disadvantaged. These are beginning on 18th January 2021.
- 5.8.13. Progress Coaches are supporting curriculum with enrolled learners who are not engaging, to improve retention and to offer any further support required including attendance, pastoral support, and signposting to external services. They are also facilitating 'Conversation Clubs' for ESOL learners, which have a health and well-being and COVID response theme. The conversation clubs are designed to encourage confidence and independence.
- 5.8.14. There is a new initiative to provide targeted dyslexia workshops for learners who have had a dyslexia assessment, however, these are also open to all learners who feel they would benefit from these sessions. They have been marketed through the Learner Dashboard and will begin mid-January 2021.
- 5.8.15. In response to COVID -19, we have identified the need for an inhouse counselling service which has now been approved, to support those learners who are in need.
- 5.8.16. In response to the government's ruling in respect of GCSE exams this summer, we are working closely with curriculum to provide extra support to help ensure that learners have the best possible chance of success at this difficult time.
- 5.8.17. The service will be taking part in the National Apprenticeship Week as we did last year. We will be providing a Power Point presentation outlining what an apprenticeship is, how to register with the National Apprenticeship website, and the supporting information available. This will be accessible via the service's Community Hub and will include information around contacting the Careers Team to arrange a follow-up 1:1 meeting for further assistance.

- 5.8.18. There will be a virtual Choices Event taking place on 12 February 2021 for learners considering their next steps. It will be broken down into two elements, education and employment. There will be speakers from FE Colleges, HE Institutions, Employers and Voluntary Organisations providing information. Follow up opportunities will be available to learners and tutors to arrange one to one, or class virtual meetings, to find out more specific information in respect of progression routes.

5.9. Libraries

- 5.9.1. Following the announcement of a third national lockdown, in line with BCC and industry (Libraries Connected) guidance, the Order and Collect Service has been suspended. All library buildings have been temporarily closed to allow us to revise our service offer in light of new restrictions.
- 5.9.2. A plan for the introduction of a new postal book delivery service (as a temporary replacement for the Order and Collect Service) is being developed. This is planned to commence operation in the week beginning 25th January. This will enable customers, including children and young people, to obtain books without having to leave their homes.
- 5.9.3. An enhanced online offer is being developed to include more learning resources, e-books, health and wellbeing advice and resources. This will include more live sessions for children and young people.
- 5.9.4. The service offer will be reviewed on a weekly basis with a view to reintroducing services such as Order and Collect, public browsing, publicly accessible PCs, and community activities. This will be subject to local circumstances and government guidelines.
- 5.9.5. Online services provided by the library service since lockdown include the following:
- 'Virtual library' website
 - Children's "Story Time" twice weekly (via YouTube)
 - "Rhyme Time" twice weekly (via YouTube)
 - Poetry sessions
 - Book review sessions
 - Book collections provided to homeless in hostels and hotels
 - Access to newspapers from across the world covering 100 countries in 60 languages
 - Addition of 1500 comics and graphic novels to website
- 5.9.6. Since lockdown, over 33,565 eBooks and 11,998 e-audio books have been loaned out to citizens.

6. Communities

6.1. Housing

Rough sleeping and homelessness

- 6.1.1. Birmingham has been praised by MHCLG for its response to homelessness and rough sleeping during Covid-19, and remains a national priority area to be supported in tackling rough sleeping. All those found to be sleeping rough are consistently offered accommodation and support.
- 6.1.2. We have been awarded £595,000 through the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP), a one year MHCLG/Homes England programme in response to the ongoing needs of those previously accommodated through 'everyone-in' and those currently rough sleeping. This funding will be used to ensure that as few individuals as possible return to the streets, and that services are in place to provide for all those who have remained or fallen onto the streets.
- 6.1.3. Winter plans are in place, including those for Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) which cannot use shared bedroom/dormitory spaces. Plans allow for an additional 900 bed nights October 2020 – March 2021, with further units if required. These plans should be further bolstered by a bid we have submitted to the MHCLG Cold Weather Fund, which will provide a further £90,000 if successful.
- 6.1.4. On 5th November 2020, Government announced the Protect Programme, £15 million of funding to be shared with 22 local authorities including Birmingham. This money is to be used to protect vulnerable rough sleepers over the winter and during the Covid-19 crisis. Through this programme, we have successfully secured additional funding of £495,000 to target support at the most entrenched rough sleepers and ensure sufficient capacity in the sector.
- 6.1.5. We are currently funding accommodation and subsistence for approximately 70 individuals deemed to be with no recourse to public funds (MRPF) in hotel, temporary accommodation and supported housing. This is in response to the Covid-19 threat and measures are in place to conclude this provision.
- 6.1.6. Since the first lockdown 7473 households have presented as homeless and 4058 households have had a full Housing Needs Assessment (HNA). We continue to support families and rough sleepers at the Domestic Abuse Hub and singles through services at Washington Court, Sifa Fireside, and St Basils.
- 6.1.7. The number of people coming through the Housing Options Centre via phone reduced during the second national lockdown (November – December 2020) to an average of 200 per week. We did, however, see an increase in presentations once the lockdown ended in December 2020. We are

resourcing the service to ensure there is enough coverage for all to be assisted.

- 6.1.8. Homeless prevention visits have recommenced, with all social distancing guidelines being observed. A sufficient supply of PPE equipment has been sourced.
- 6.1.9. We have already prevented 1,450 households from homelessness in 2021. 70 of these were assisted through the Homelessness Prevention Fund.
- 6.1.10. Demand for temporary accommodation continues to increase. On average 30 households a week are entering B&B accommodation, keeping total numbers remaining over 500. However, the average number of households leaving/moving out of temporary accommodation has also been increasing, with the majority moving into permanent accommodation.
- 6.1.11. There is still a shortage of self-contained/longer term accommodation due to the effects of Covid-19 on our contractors, who have taken longer than originally envisaged to resume business as usual. This is being closely monitored.

Evictions

- 6.1.12. On 21st August, Government made an announcement to extend its national ban on evictions for renters to the end of the year. Without this extension, there was widespread concern that it would lead to a surge in homelessness and Birmingham wrote to Government urging them to take action and provide financial assistance to support renters and landlords. This was revisited on 21st October and the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) guidance stated that there was to be no entry to residential properties to carry out evictions.
- 6.1.13. It was again further revisited by MOJ on 5 November due to national lockdown for 4 weeks which led to an extension of the furlough scheme and a continuation of the pause of evictions on residential premises.
- 6.1.14. On the 11 December the 'truce' period for evictions recommenced and ended on 11 January. However on 8 January the Secretary of State confirmed the ban on evictions will be extended further until 21 February 2021 – with measures kept under review. In addition, a new mediation pilot will further support landlords and renters who face court procedures and potential eviction from next month. It will offer mediation as part of the possession process to try and help landlords and tenants to reach a mutual agreement and keep people in their homes.
- 6.1.15. We continue to urge all council tenants who have concerns or find themselves struggling to pay their bills to contact us directly to discuss options. As a landlord to over 60,000 households, we have seen rent arrears increase significantly since March 2020. We have now reached out to over

18,000 tenants with arrears to try and understand what support is required to prevent them from falling any further into debt.

- 6.1.16. Help and support is available to all residents in Birmingham that require it. However, if tenants can afford to pay their rent, we strongly urge them to make this a priority to prevent any avoidable issues when the eviction ban ends.
- 6.1.17. We continue to work with national organisations and other local authorities across the UK to ensure a consistent and reliable approach to evictions if and when the ban is removed.

Private Rented Sector (PRS)

- 6.1.18. In October 2020, we launched 'Help 2 Rent', a PRS housing scheme for homeless families that is set to help hundreds of people find affordable housing, as well as support landlords in the private rented sector.
- 6.1.19. The scheme will look to provide incentives to landlords who offer 12-month fixed tenancies to those on the council's homeless and housing registers. Participating landlords will be able to select from a range of assurances such as landlord insurance, rental deposits or rental guarantees, tackling the barriers that commonly prevent landlords from accepting people on benefits, low-income families, and people on the council's housing register as tenants.
- 6.1.20. We are rapidly progressing work to tackle the issue of supported exempt accommodation, which has increased sharply in Birmingham over the last twelve months. Over 20,000 people were living in exempt accommodation in Birmingham in December 2020, compared to just 14,000 in November 2019. Poor quality exempt accommodation traps some of the most vulnerable people in society, leaving them without support, unable to take up employment and without any pathway to move on.
- 6.1.21. Birmingham has been successful in securing £1.04m in national government funding to support oversight work into the supported exempt housing sector in the city. A strong governance structure and project delivery plan is now in place to drive this project for the remainder of this financial year. The pilot seeks to explore how the provision of supported housing in Birmingham can be improved by:
- creating a Charter of Rights to make tenants and their families aware of the service they should expect, to be launched and rolled out over the pilot duration;
 - rolling out a Quality Standard for providers of exempt accommodation so that the service they provide meets a high standard;

- and, employing ten additional inspectors and additional benefit, community safety and social workers to carry out more inspections on properties to ensure that those living in these properties are not being exploited and are receiving the support they need.

6.1.22. A number of mini conferences have taken place across the city to provide an opportunity for MPs, councillors and residents to have their say. Discussions focused on what actions can be taken to improve the support provided to vulnerable residents, reduce anti-social behaviour and other negative impacts this accommodation is having on their neighbourhoods. In addition, the mini conferences discussed specific areas of the Private Rented Sector (PRS) including HMOs.

6.1.23. Cabinet has approved the commencement of consultation where conditions for selective licensing based on deprivation and crime have been met for 28 wards across the city.

Housing repairs and maintenance

6.1.24. Since Covid-19 restrictions were lifted on 15th June 2020, this service has returned to business as usual, completing routine repairs in customers' homes while abiding by all social distancing and safe working guidance.

6.1.25. The gas servicing backlog is reducing as officers are working hard to contact customers to make appointments to carry out the necessary works.

6.1.26. Contract works officers have returned to business as usual where possible, targeting the following priority areas: disrepair and litigation, void inspections, mutual exchanges, complaints and customer service visits.

6.1.27. Weekly meetings on voids continue to have an impact and the number of overdue voids is reducing. We are continuing to prioritise these works and reduce the repairs turnaround time, as well as working with Housing Management to reduce the mistreatment of properties by tenants, which increases the overall void turnaround and cost.

Housing management

6.1.28. We continue to update risk assessments to reflect changing national and local restrictions, working flexibly to ensure services are maintained and function as normally as possible. This includes the move to Tier 4 restrictions in Birmingham and the current national lockdown.

6.1.29. Visiting services continue to be undertaken virtually wherever possible and will only take place physically for urgent or emergency situations (externally where possible). As with other services, we have seen an increase in domestic violence over the course of the pandemic, and have stepped up public messaging and resources as a result.

- 6.1.30. Night-time security patrols are being maintained at normal levels, with internal assessments when visiting designated blocks and areas undertaken on a reactive basis where required.
- 6.1.31. Estate Services teams are focussing on business-critical tasks including: daily Block inspections, dealing with critical health and safety hazards, and the cleaning of high frequency contact points. Teams are also undertaking external activities where social distancing can be maintained, with provision for staff to start and finish earlier in the day to reduce contact with residents.
- 6.1.32. We are conducting weekly telephone contact with all sheltered scheme tenants, focussing on the lone and most vulnerable. Only critical face to face visits and health & safety checks are taking place, with common rooms remaining closed.
- 6.1.33. Lettings are continuing and being conducted on a virtual basis which is proving to be very successful.
- 6.1.34. The Careline Service which provides support to vulnerable residents remains fully operational, including repairs and new installations.

Housing development/Birmingham Municipal Housing Trust (BMHT)

- 6.1.35. A number of new developments are due to start on site, most notably the Farnbrough Road development in Castle Vale which is due to commence on site in Spring 2021. This is a joint scheme between BMHT and Pioneer to deliver 124 new homes.
- 6.1.36. Contactors continue to operate at 80% efficiency against pre-Covid activity, resulting in some forecast slippage in the BMHT 2020/21 budget.
- 6.1.37. We have pushed forward with tender evaluations and acceptance reports to ensure that we are ready to hit the ground running when Covid-19 restrictions lift. This includes a contract award in December 2020 for the development of Yardley Brook, set to deliver 300 new homes. Two additional contract awards were approved at Cabinet in November 2020 for final stage developments at Birchfield and Abbeyfield, providing 39 new homes across the two sites
- 6.1.38. Activity to identify and investigate sites is continuing so that the development programme can continue at pace once the crisis has passed. We anticipate bringing forward plans for development in Pool Farm to Cabinet in early 2021, which will seek to deliver 300 new homes.
- 6.1.39. Our contractors continue to work on site during the current nationwide lockdown, adhering to all Covid-19 safe working protocols. We are monitoring any emerging impacts on resources, suppliers and services.

6.2. Register Office and bereavement services

Birth registrations

- 6.2.1. Working arrangements in the Register Office have been reviewed, and new arrangements made in line with current Government guidance. This ensures greater safety for staff and the public when carrying out face-to-face registrations as required under legislation. Requirements for face coverings changed with effect from August 2020, and all people accessing the Register Office must wear a face covering unless they have a medical exemption. Staff are also encouraged to wear face coverings if moving about the office or in situations where social distancing is not practical.
- 6.2.2. Following the reinstatement of birth registrations on 1st June 2020, a fully operational service is now in place.
- 6.2.3. When the service recommenced, there was a backlog of approximately 6,200 births to be registered. By 31st December 2020 this had reduced to 2,890 applications in the system. Recovery arrangements are in place to continue to reduce the backlog and register new births, with registrations prioritised in chronological order unless there are exceptional or urgent circumstances e.g. passport applications.

Citizenship ceremonies

- 6.2.4. Citizenship ceremonies were cancelled between March and July 2020 in line with national legislation, but have now recommenced.
- 6.2.5. The Birmingham Registration Service is planning to introduce virtual ceremonies, avoiding the need for new citizens to attend face-to-face citizen ceremonies at the Register Office.

Marriages and civil partnerships

- 6.2.6. For the duration of the third lockdown, marriage and civil partnership ceremonies are only allowed in exceptional circumstances. The maximum number of attendees is six, excluding photographers, ministers, and registrars.
- 6.2.7. Notices of Marriage and Civil Partnership have been suspended during the current national lockdown.
- 6.2.8. Registrar General License requests for marriages and civil partnerships are being risk-assessed and considered on a case-by-case basis. Staff safety is paramount, and ceremonies for customers diagnosed with Covid-19 will not take place.
- 6.2.9. Applications to reduce the waiting period for marriages or civil partnerships are not being processed. Any notices of marriage or civil partnership cancelled due to lockdown have been refunded or rebooked.
- 6.2.10. Approved premise licences cannot be processed during this period. However, Birmingham City Council's Registrar Service is considering extensions to existing licences where appropriate and if it is allowable legally.

Death and still-births

- 6.2.11. The Coronavirus Act 2020 changed the death registration process, with electronic or telephone registration made permissible for the first time. Demand was high and changes were made to the initial process in response, increasing operational efficiency. This, along with the allocation of additional resources, has reduced waiting times down to less than half a day on average (provided that there are no complications).
- 6.2.12. The service has introduced new ways of working which have helped to improve the administration of death registration processes. Improvements have been maintained during the second wave of the pandemic, and additional staff are being redeployed to death registrations from birth registrations where possible.
- 6.2.13. While we saw an increase in demand of over 25% during November and early December, there are minimal backlogs in the service at present.

Bereavement services (burials and cremations)

- 6.2.14. For this emergency period, and in line with national requirements for social distancing, attendance at funerals is currently limited to 30 people. Funerals are being actively managed in conjunction with funeral directors and families to ensure that the risk of transmission of Covid-19 is minimised.
- 6.2.15. Services will normally be a maximum of 30 minutes. The number of services provided each week varies in line with demand.
- 6.2.16. Since August 2020, all persons attending funerals inside crematorium chapels are required to wear face coverings. Ministers must wear face coverings while going into and leaving buildings, and funeral director employees are encouraged to wear face coverings. All attendees at burials are also encouraged to wear face coverings.
- 6.2.17. The number of slots available for funerals is actively varied in line with demand, and has been increased since mid-November 2020.
- 6.2.18. Reduced daylight hours are impacting on the ability to provide more burial slots while maintaining time for personal cemetery visits. In the event that demand for burials increases significantly, there may be a need to reduce opening hours for the public, but this will only be done as a last resort.

6.3. Communities

Community centres

- 6.3.1. Following the Government announcement of a national lockdown on 20th March 2020, all council managed community centres were closed to the public. A few remained open on a restricted basis to accommodate essential community services such as food banks, including the council funded the

Active Wellbeing Society (TAWS)/Fare Share operation at Ladywood Health and Community Centre and later a local testing site at Summerfield community centre.

- 6.3.2. Subsequently, the service was allowed to open on a restricted basis and the council has undertaken extensive measures to amend normal operating procedures and introduce new Covid-19 secure arrangements to allow council run community centres to safely re-open to the public. This has included supporting user groups and tenants to develop risk assessments for their specific activities in accordance with the relevant guidance, for example, in relation to early years provision, sport and recreation, or places of worship.
- 6.3.3. The detail of the regulations setting out what activities are permitted has changed repeatedly with the successive introduction of the national lockdown, limited re-opening, “rule of six”, Tier 2, second lockdown and then Birmingham’s move to the new Tier 3. At each stage, the operation of around 160 community groups has been assessed and, where possible and permitted, groups have been welcomed back, limited by the following factors:
- Social distancing requirements which have significantly reduced the capacity of rooms and halls.
 - Heightened risk levels of some activities e.g. group singing.
 - Clinical vulnerability of group attendees.
 - Financial viability of groups running with limited numbers.
 - Ventilation requirements which limit the use of some spaces, or mean that spaces can only be used if doors and windows are left open to ensure a sufficient flow of fresh air.
- 6.3.4. During winter it has become necessary to find alternative solutions to leaving doors and windows open. The service is working collaboratively with other front line services, Birmingham Property Services and ACIVICO to develop a ‘Winter Ventilation Strategy’. In the first instance the deployment of CO2 monitors is being adopted in order to provide reassurance to customers and staff alike and to identify any particular problem areas where more permanent solutions may be required. However, we are experiencing supply chain issues as other local authorities and organisations follow suit.
- 6.3.5. As at 2nd December 2020, 37 groups and activities were back on site and only one of twelve centres remained closed. However, the move to Tier 4 and the subsequent third national lockdown introduced on 31st December have again further limited activities to nurseries, foodbanks and welfare support. Currently nine of the twelve community centres are open in part for permitted activities, with three closed completely.

- 6.3.6. The service is also still hosting a local testing station at Summerfield and a mobile lateral flow testing van at Sheldon.
- 6.3.7. The impact of the closures and operating restrictions on income generation and expenditure is captured in the council's Covid-19 financial tracker.

Localisation and neighbourhood development

- 6.3.8. A Localism Delivery Plan setting out the actions to be progressed in the next 18 months has been developed.
- 6.3.9. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have worked to develop virtual ward forums on the Teams Event Live platform, in an effort to maintain local community governance and engagement.
- 6.3.10. As of 7th January 2021, there have been a total of 53 virtual ward forum meetings with around 1,200 virtual attendees. From 2nd December, all recorded virtual ward forum meetings have been uploaded to the Neighbourhood Development Support Unit (NDSU) channel on YouTube, garnering over 1,000 views. Notifications of uploads are sent to all councillors and ward contacts, and will be added to the Council website. 44 ward plans have been completed.
- 6.3.11. Pioneer Places bi-monthly get-togethers have continued online, enabling peer to peer information sharing and learnings. Two 'Speak Truth To Power' sessions have been held with the Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods and the Interim Chief Executive. Officers from the NDSU have also worked with the national organisation 'Economy' to support Pioneer Places around their understanding of global and local economics/funding. Further workshops are planned for 2021.
- 6.3.12. External funding opportunities, generally relating to Covid-19, are circulated to staff, councillors, MPs, and community and voluntary organisations to promote sources of much-needed financial support during the current crisis.
- 6.3.13. Work continues on other aspects of the 'Working Together in Birmingham's Neighbourhoods' strategy, including: the development of the local Community Infrastructure Levy, Parish and Neighbourhood Councils, Assets of Community Value, and the running of two Neighbourhood Network Programmes and Perry Barr and Selly Oak. Work is also progressing with Locality on their national work around Community Ownership of Assets, alongside a number of other local authorities.

6.4. Community Safety and equalities

- 6.4.1. Community Safety and Prevent teams have resumed business as usual activity where possible, while working remotely and continuing to support the Council's response to Covid-19.

- 6.4.2. A Community Safety Team transition plan is now in place, with priorities identified and team capacity adjusted accordingly. These include strengthened links and coordination between the Community Safety Partnership Board with the other partnership boards in the city, including the Health & Wellbeing, Children's Safeguarding and Adult Safeguarding boards. This reduces duplication and ensures proportionate and effective responses are in place, whilst helping to reduce any identified gaps in activity or provision.
- 6.4.3. Officers have continued to engage and work collaboratively with all partners to ensure safety in our communities. This ranges from pre-planning and monitoring arrangements in response to a number of protests held in the city, to supporting West Midlands Police (WMP) and other enforcement partners to manage more complex incidents of anti-social behaviour.
- 6.4.4. The Birmingham Community Safety Partnership (BCSP) adopted a Gold/Silver/Bronze operating model during the pandemic. This arrangement was further reviewed as part of the transition plan and has continued to operate during this quarter:

- **Gold – Executive Board Core Group**

A Core Group of the Community Safety Partnership has continued to meet fortnightly and has set key priorities to work on during the current pandemic. These include domestic abuse, hate crime, modern slavery and reducing anti-social behaviour. The group have also begun work on developing a Community Resilience Framework to support the Council's recovery work.

The Core Group have also been finalising the performance measures for community safety to be included within the Council's Delivery Plan for 2022-24. These will form the basis of a new community safety performance framework.

- **Silver – Community Safety Partnership Operations Group**

The Operations Group continues to meet twice a week virtually, with a view to meeting weekly in the longer term.

In addition, the Community Safety Youth Focus Group continues to meet weekly with partners, sharing information with regards to supporting young people and working in partnership to reduce youth crime.

- **Bronze – Local Partnership Delivery Groups (LPDG)**

Under the transition plan the five of the six LPDGs have continued to meet monthly, whilst the City Centre LPDG continues to meet on a fortnightly basis. We are working in partnership with the police to ensure that elected Members are fully engaged with the work of LPDGs.

Prevent

- 6.4.5. The Council's Channel Panel has continued to work closely with the WM Counter Terrorism Unit to ensure that multi-agency arrangements are maintained for vulnerable individuals throughout the Covid-19 crisis. Channel Panel meetings have been held virtually on a monthly basis with minimal impact to processes although referrals are down due to lockdown.
- 6.4.6. The Prevent team have continued to work closely with the Home Office and civil society organisations, ensuring any disruption to project delivery has been minimised. Civil society organisations have now moved activities onto online platforms where face to face delivery has not been possible.
- 6.4.7. The Prevent Executive Board have also agreed a Terms of Reference for an Independent Review of Prevent Delivery in Birmingham which began in January 2021, with the aim of reporting back to the Birmingham Contest Board in June 2021.

Domestic abuse

- 6.4.8. Birmingham City Council has continued to work with Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid (BSWAID) to provide support for those at risk of domestic abuse. The Community Safety Team, alongside Housing colleagues, secured extra funding through the emergency Covid fund to support the additional capacity needed to deal with increases in domestic abuse enquiries. These funds have strengthened domestic abuse support capacity within the Birmingham City Council housing team, increased resources for the Domestic Abuse Helpline and enhanced the capacity of the sanctuary scheme. The funding has also provided two additional officers within the Community Safety Team, who will work within the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) process to support high risk victims and ensure that action is taken against preparators.
- 6.4.9. During the summer BSWAID extended their helpline's opening hours to cover weekends and bank holidays ensuring that those seeking help have the maximum opportunities to do so. For those unable to speak safely to operators, the charity also piloted a local webchat service through www.bswaid.org, where victims were able to use a confidential web chat between 10am and 2pm initially on weekdays. This service has now been extended to 4pm on weekdays.

- 6.4.10. The Domestic Abuse Hub, which the City Council opened in partnership with BSWAID in March 2019, remains open to those who are at risk of being made homeless as a result of domestic abuse.
- 6.4.11. The Domestic Abuse Local Strategic Partnership Shadow Board is chaired by Cllr Nicky Brennan in her role as Cabinet Advisor on Domestic Abuse and Councillor John Cotton (Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion, Community Safety & Equalities and Chair of the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership) is also a member of the Board.
- 6.4.12. The Board has been set up in preparation of the strategic oversight requirements of local authorities for the planned implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act in 2021. During the first national lockdown and throughout the summer of 2020 the Board met on a fortnightly basis to provide a coordinated partnership support offer to victims. This was supported by a BCC communications campaign which provided social media messages of reassurance and support to victims across the city. In September the Board resumed its monthly meeting schedule and continues to provide partnership support to victims. More recently the partnership supported the 16 days of action, a global campaign against gender-based violence. Partners from across the city worked together on this campaign.
- 6.4.13. To support the work of the Board and the delivery of the Domestic Abuse Prevention Strategy, two subgroups have been formed to focus on equalities and on children. The aim of both groups is to provide a tailored support offer to victims with protected characteristics, men and children.
- 6.4.14. Across the Council two Teams Live Events took place in September and October led by Chris Naylor and Councillor Cotton. The events highlighted senior leadership support for the promotion of a workplace culture that raises awareness of domestic abuse, breaks the stigma that is attached to reporting it in the workplace and signposts to organisations that can help staff. A domestic abuse Human Resources action plan has been developed to support the above work. A safe space for staff as victims of domestic abuse was also launched.
- 6.4.15. In December 2020 a cross-directorate domestic abuse officers' group was convened to discuss our coordinated response to tackling domestic abuse across the council. The meeting was chaired by Craig Scriven, Assistant Director for Organisational Development and Human Resources.

Exempt accommodation

- 6.4.16. Birmingham City Council is one of five local authorities that successfully bid to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to undertake a pilot project on exempt accommodation. Birmingham's pilot includes a specific community safety focus, given the levels of concerns in Birmingham

over potential links between serious organised crime and activities within parts of the sector. The Birmingham pilot includes proposals to introduce a complex case team to undertake work on high risk and complex investigations. The composition of the team has been informed by our experiences with other similar work programmes. It will be closely aligned with West Midlands Police and their current structures for addressing serious and organised crime.

Places of worship

- 6.4.17. National guidance for the safe use of places of worship during the pandemic was updated on 11th January 2021. Under the current national lockdown, places of worship remain open for communal worship. This is now one of the very few legal exemptions that allow larger numbers of people to gather. It is therefore crucial that places of worship and those attending comply with both law and the Covid-19 secure guidance. Under these restrictions, places of worship in England must only open for specific purposes.
- 6.4.18. The Council and faith communities have continued to work together to mark religious events throughout the pandemic, albeit in a different way, and the Council has continued to hold regular virtual meetings with faith groups, circulating guidance and key messages.
- 6.4.19. The 2020 Birmingham's annual Remembrance Sunday service was live-streamed from St Philip's Cathedral. While there was no public event in the city centre, people were able to join the service to remember the fallen by visiting the cathedral's website. Citizens could also share moments on social media from their own acts of remembrance at home and school and tributes to relatives who served in the forces using the hashtag #BhamRemembers.
- 6.4.20. The Council recognises the importance of religious festivals to all Birmingham's faith communities and the impact lockdown and social distancing measures have upon planned celebrations, especially for families. In keeping with our ongoing conversations and commitment with faith communities the Council will continue to mark important religious festivals whilst national restrictions are in place.
- 6.4.21. The festivals of Eid, Diwali, Hanukkah and Christmas have all taken place in very different ways in 2020 and throughout this most challenging of years, our faith communities have continued to provide inspiring and compassionate leadership.

Equalities

- 6.4.22. Over the last three months, Birmingham's residents, council staff, grassroots community organisations, faith-based organisations, practitioners and public sector policy makers have been sharing their views on the Council's

proposals to address and tackle inequalities that affect communities across the city.

- 6.4.23. A virtual public consultation, which kickstarted a city-wide conversation on a range of issues, closed on 14th December 2020.
- 6.4.24. The report 'Everyone's Business, Everyone's Battle: Tackling Inequalities in Birmingham', presented to Cabinet in September 2020, highlighted the full extent to which inequalities have impacted Birmingham – and how the city plans to address them. In addition to virtual conversations, 710 responses have been received to the online survey. An action plan shaped by the consultation findings is now being developed, setting out how the Council will take forward proposals for tackling inequalities, working with our communities and wider city partners. These will be presented to Cabinet for approval.
- 6.4.25. The City Council took a major step towards strengthening its internal approach to equalities matters in November 2020, with the publication of the first Workforce Race Equity Review. This report deliberately goes further than the Council's minimum legal obligations in order to ensure that robust action is taken to close the pay gap and other issues facing staff from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups. The actions are focused upon removing barriers and improving outcomes for current and future staff, providing career routes through to senior roles. The Council will also be working with independent human resources experts to undertake a thorough review of the Council's recruitment processes, HR policies and procedures, training and development, together with other related activity.
- 6.4.26. Following the launch of the RACE Equality Code 2020, Birmingham City Council announced that it will become an early adopter of the framework, which draws together over 200 recommendations outlined in reports, charters and pledges which aim to tackle diversity and inclusion challenges.
- 6.4.27. The RACE Code provides a set of standards and an overarching accountability framework based on best practice. It streamlines existing recommendations into actions for organisations and their workforces across every sector. This framework drives equity based on four key principles: Reporting, Action, Composition and Education (RACE). To deliver on the Council's ambitious plans to address structural inequalities and mainstream equality and cohesion, we have made a commitment to set up an Equalities and Cohesion division with in-house expertise. The Head of the Division has been recruited and is currently in the process of recruiting the wider team.

Armed Forces Covenant

- 6.4.28. During Covid-19, the council's Armed Forces Partnership has continued to take forward actions to support Birmingham's Armed Forces community, including veterans and their families.

- 6.4.29. Birmingham is the first city council to establish a cross-partner group to provide wrap around support to individuals and families connected to the Armed Forces with a coordinated approach to welfare. The Birmingham Armed Forces Operations Group reports directly into the Armed Forces Covenant partnership group. The Operations Group is attended by welfare organisations and charities such as the Royal British Legion, Walking with the Wounded and SSAFA, alongside statutory services such as the NHS Veterans' Mental Health Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS), Police and other organisations including housing associations, Department for Work and Pensions, employment support organisations and substance abuse charities.

Living Wage

- 6.4.30. We continue to work in partnership with the Living Wage Foundation and partner organisations to make Birmingham a real living wage city. In November, the council participated in the Living Wage Week 2020 to encourage more employers to tackle in-work poverty by paying the real living wage.
- 6.4.31. Due to the social distancing restrictions, there was an increased focus on social media and digital events in the run up to Living Wage Week. The Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion, Community Safety and Equalities delivered a webinar emphasising the importance of public sector organisations as major employers, showing leadership and a commitment to ensure front-line service workers such as carers, nurses and retail workers are not facing in-work poverty.
- 6.4.32. As a signatory of the Business Charter for Social Responsibility and as a major procurer of commissioning services, we want to ensure that contracted workers within the supply chain also are not experiencing in-work poverty. As result of these events during Living Wage Week 2020, the Living Wage Foundation received a record level of inquiries from large Birmingham organisations seeking to become accredited Real Living Wage employers.

Migration

- 6.4.33. Birmingham City Council continues to work with the Home Office and its providers, as well as with local stakeholders, to manage the additional local challenges in the asylum system. These are represented in the continued use of contingency hotel accommodation – in the first instance since October 2019, and in the second instance since May 2020. The Council's Public Health, Environmental Health, and Refugee & Migration Teams, as well as the Council's Executive, have also supported Public Health England (PHE), the Home Office and its providers in managing a large outbreak of Covid-19 at an official asylum accommodation unit in Birmingham. Officers have also supported the Lessons Learned exercise led by PHE and have supported

Home Office providers to make improvements in order that the site be reopened.

- 6.4.34. Birmingham City Council has been awarded £1.4m in European funding from the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund for an 18 month project to improve the welcome and advice & guidance pathways for newly arrived communities in Birmingham. This project is the second phase to two successful projects supporting new communities to settle and to prevent crisis and destitution when exiting Home Office provision. Birmingham City Council has partnered with the Refugee & Migration Centre, Central England Law Centre, and Asirt to deliver the project.
- 6.4.35. This partnership continues to act as a referral route from the Everyone- In and Next Steps Accommodation Pathway work for rough sleepers with No Recourse to Public Funds. Referrals have been made into the project that enable information and advice be provided to individuals, with a view to improving the options available to individuals on exiting this support. This includes access to legal representation and the resolution of immigration, welfare, housing, employment and other issues.
- 6.4.36. The Refugees & Migration Team has worked closely with the central Brexit Contingency programme to secure funding to support vulnerable and at-risk individuals to access the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS). This project is delivered in partnership with external organisations providing regulated immigration advice, as well as with Birmingham Children's Trust. The aims of the project are a) to expand the availability of EUSS advice for complex cases in Birmingham; b) to make available training around EUSS to frontline staff; c) to train Community Champions in EUSS; d) to allow the Council to become an ID Scanning Location.
- 6.4.37. The Government's resettlement programmes for refugees continue to be paused with no planned arrivals imminent in Birmingham. The UK Resettlement Scheme, planned to launch in 2020 and for which Cabinet has endorsed a pledge of 110 individuals, continues to be delayed with no revised start date set by the Home Office.
- 6.4.38. Resettled families in Birmingham continue to be supported via the Council's commissioned providers, which include arrival & orientation services, employment support services, active citizenship projects, tenancy & welfare support services, and mental health awareness projects. In addition, a well-accessed grants scheme continues to run alongside the commissioned services, for which the council has encouraged bidders to work with resettled families to identify and address gaps in services. Projects include parenting & family support services, driving theory courses, English as an Additional Language in schools support, a bicycle donation and maintenance scheme, and capacity building support. In November, the Refugees & Migration Team

hosted the first digital version of its Community Days for resettled refugee families, which was a well-attended and successful event.

- 6.4.39. The team has continued to run external partnership and forum meetings remotely, and to increase the profile of significant events in the migration calendar, such as International Migrants Day on 18th December.

Neighbourhood Advice & Information (NAIS)

- 6.4.40. Covid safety works have been carried out within NAIS offices at Erdington and Northfield to facilitate a safe return to an open door public service when national guidelines make this possible.
- 6.4.41. In the meantime, NAIS advisors continue to work from home delivering a range of advice services including welfare benefit, debt and housing advice. NAIS advisors have also supported the BCC Contact Centre with more complex enquiries when required and supported the City Council's Emergency Hub with calls from citizens requiring food and related money advice. They have also made outgoing calls to citizens who received regular food parcels during lockdown from The Active Wellbeing Society (TAWS.) In addition, NAIS advisors have maintained support to the Housing Lettings Team and the Home Options Team as well as supporting Citizens Advice Birmingham.
- 6.4.42. In the year to date (April to December 2020) NAIS advisors handled 24,697 enquiries from 9,915 different citizens. This included 1,599 foodbank referrals, during which money advice was also provided to ensure citizens had the maximum benefit to which they were entitled and to try and avoid further recourse to foodbanks.

Third Sector Advice Service

- 6.4.43. Historically, the City Council has supported third sector organisations to deliver advice services across the city. Contractual arrangements with accredited advice providers Citizens Advice Birmingham, Birmingham Settlement and Spitfire Advice Services have continued throughout the 2020/21 year albeit with advice being delivered over the telephone rather than face to face. With Emergency Welfare Assistance funding received from central government it has been possible to further enhance the funding provided to the third sector to deliver advice services for the period December 2020 to March 2021 to more fully respond to the growing demand for such services

7. Street Scene & Parks

7.1. Waste management

Activity undertaken relating to Covid-19

- 7.1.1. Throughout the periods of lockdown and varying restrictions imposed by either national lockdown or the tiers, refuse collections have been maintained. Staff have showed enormous resilience to not only maintain residual and recycling collections but also reintroduce bulky waste collections and open the garden service to new customers. Staff from Street Cleansing have been utilised to protect the collection service, but general street cleansing services have been maintained throughout the year.
- 7.1.2. There have been challenges to the service, with increased amounts of refuse being presented from each household as a result of more people working from home. It is regrettable that some collections have been missed, but later collected, due to an increase in the number of cars parked on the streets throughout the day causing access difficulties. The Christmas break had an effect on performance, including an increase of positive tests and self-isolation. Issues were compounded by the snow and ice, resulting in a drop of performance over the last 2 weeks. However, the service has now caught up and performance continues to improve, and at the time of writing the total number of 'dropped' roads across the city stands at 4 out of a total of 12,250.
- 7.1.3. As previously stated, this level of service has only been possible with the continued dedicated commitment from our crews and close cooperation with Trades Union colleagues.
- 7.1.4. Owing to the considerable queues at the Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) a booking system was introduced. This has had great success in reducing the queues, freeing up the highway and allowing the sites to maintain Covid safe operations. Initially, clearly demonstrating levels of demand, the sites were reaching full capacity on a daily basis. Over ensuing weeks the number of available 'slots' were increased and on-site capacity gradually increased. The service has now introduced a 'live time' cancellation and booking system. This means that available slots can now be booked 'same-day', subject to capacity at the chosen site. At the time of writing there is availability at all HWRCs.

'Business as usual' activity

- 7.1.5. Nationally there has been an increase in fly-tipping and many of the city's streets and parks have not escaped this criminal activity. The Council's Waste Enforcement Team has continued to operate during the pandemic and a number of successful prosecutions against individuals have been made.

- 7.1.6. The Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Parks, alongside officers from Waste Management and Enforcement, has contributed to the recent Scrutiny review into fly-tipping, looking at various options to reduce the number of incidences, increase enforcement activity against perpetrators and tackle this problem that blights our streets.
- 7.1.7. The replacement refuse collection vehicles which were delayed due to the first lockdown have now started to be delivered. 18 vehicles have been received to date and it is anticipated that delivery will continue at a rate of approximately 10 a month. These new Clean Air Zone (CAZ) compliant vehicles will be in service by June 2021 subject to maintaining the delivery schedule.
- 7.1.8. Following engagement and discussion during the summer with a cross-party group of elected Members, the procurement of the interim Waste Disposal contract continues and has now reached the more detailed bidder interaction stage.

7.2. Parks and Grounds Maintenance

Activity undertaken relating to Covid-19

- 7.2.1. With the first national lockdown coming to an end in the summer of 2020, operations relating to parks management have quickly returned to normal levels. Grounds Maintenance staff are working amended hours to limit interaction in depots. COVID Safe Operating Procedures and Risk Assessments have been agreed with staff and Trade Unions.
- 7.2.2. Birmingham's 232 play areas and outdoor gyms re-opened on 4th July with signage advising on safe use the maximum number of people allowed on each play area at one time. Re-opening of these facilities was very popular, and their use has been generally problem free.
- 7.2.3. Prior to the current national lockdown volunteering had recommenced in many areas of the city, led by Friends of Parks Groups. Volunteer activity took place in accordance with social distancing guidelines and Covid-19 restrictions on group activity. Staff worked closely with the Birmingham Open Spaces Forum to ensure COVID Secure Operating Procedures were in place and being followed.
- 7.2.4. With the latest lockdown, volunteering is once more suspended and the Cabinet Member has written to thank groups for ceasing group volunteering activities and adhering to lockdown guidance. Once lockdown is lifted we will support volunteer activities on site once more.
- 7.2.5. Parks, along with other divisions of the City Council, are regularly reviewing the government's Covid-19 guidance as they relate to events and outdoor

performances. As a result of the current lockdown all events and activities, as well as grassroots sports, have now been suspended.

‘Business as usual’ activity

- 7.2.6. The Parks Service has again retained its 15 Green Flag Awards. These national (and now international) awards recognise parks that are well managed and have good community input and support in their day to day management.
- 7.2.7. In July 2019, Cabinet agreed to receive £1.1m from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to run the Future Parks Accelerator (FPA) Programme, with the huge ambition to embed the value of green spaces across the Council. The programme has been running in earnest since December 2019, testing key proposals to help the wider Council better understand and recognise the value of our green spaces
- 7.2.8. The programme was due to end in May 2021 but, due to its initial success and the disruption caused by Covid-19, we have successfully secured an extension. The programme will now finish in March 2022, with the Council receiving an additional £204,000 to support the continuation of the work.
- 7.2.9. Improvements have already been seen in how residents engage with green spaces across the three pilot sites, with further work commencing on the Druids Heath housing development in January 2021. Implementation guides are now being developed on how to successfully replicate this approach across the City.
- 7.2.10. Strong links have been made with the Route To Zero (R20) taskforce as well as Planning, demonstrating the value that the FPA is already having across the Council.

8. Transport

8.1. Impact of Covid-19 on traffic levels

- 8.1.1. Having fallen to historic lows of around 25% of normal traffic in April 2020 during the first national lockdown, traffic volumes increased gradually until the beginning of September, when traffic stabilised at around 90% of normal volume on weekdays and around 80% of normal volumes at the weekend. The greatest increases were during the AM and PM peak periods, as people returned to school and work.
- 8.1.2. During the second lockdown period, traffic volumes decreased to around 75% of normal traffic on weekdays and 50% at weekends. The decrease was more pronounced in the city centre, with lower decreases recorded in many of the suburban areas of the city.

- 8.1.3. There have been no major differences in proportions of different types of vehicles (car, bus, lorry etc), except that van traffic is around 5% above normal levels.
- 8.1.4. After the second national lockdown was lifted on 2nd December, traffic returned to similar levels as before the lockdown (i.e. around 90% of normal levels), with slightly higher increases in the city centre than elsewhere.
- 8.1.5. Since we entered a third national lockdown on 5th January traffic has reduced to around 65% of normal levels (at time of writing). Further monitoring of traffic flows will take place throughout the lockdown

8.2. Emergency Birmingham Transport Plan & Active Travel Fund

- 8.2.1. Throughout the summer of 2020, an ambitious programme of active travel schemes were delivered across Birmingham, funded through Tranche 1 of the Department for Transport (DfT) Emergency Active Travel Fund.
- 8.2.2. A review of Tranche 1 schemes is underway, running from 16th November 2020 to 12th February 2021. This review will assess the impact and effectiveness of schemes, and decide whether they should be made permanent, modified or removed in the future.
- 8.2.3. £13.1 million of Active Travel Fund Tranche 2 funding has now been allocated to the WMCA, and it is anticipated that Birmingham City Council will be successful in its bid for £4.477 million of this funding. This will enable us to commence the next phase of transport schemes planned for the city, including:
- delivery of enhancements to schemes delivered as part of Tranche 1;
 - Places for People projects including more Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and School Streets;
 - further rollout of the City Centre Traffic Segments (Cells);
 - and additional Cycling and Walking Interventions; including further pop-up cycle lanes across the city.
- 8.2.4. As stated above, the outcome of the Tranche 1 review will assist in determining the final schemes delivered through Tranche 2 funding.
- 8.2.5. Other highway schemes at the design stage have been reassessed to ensure they support the Emergency Birmingham Transport Plan and support ongoing COVID-19 recovery. As we move into 2021, we will measure the success of the Emergency Transport Plan through a comprehensive assessment of schemes delivered through the Emergency Active Travel Fund, the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund, and other projects delivered by the Council and our partners. Focus can then begin to shift back to

business as usual priorities, including delivery of the Birmingham Transport Plan.

8.3. Public transport

- 8.3.1. Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) has continued to support the region in its recovery as well as continuing to provide a safe, clean, reliable integrated public transport system for the people of the West Midlands.
- 8.3.2. Following the initial period of lockdown, Bus and Metro returned to full service. Rail services were increased proportionally, and some services have seen the introduction of additional carriages, however the rail network has yet to recover to a full pre-Covid timetable. Rail operators continue to review service frequency and are supporting this with timetable changes.
- 8.3.3. Prior to the second national lockdown in November 2020 the bus network had recovered to over 60% of pre-Covid passenger levels, with a short spike in the days leading to the then-new restrictions. Service levels had increased to around 103% of pre-Covid provision, reflecting the need for additional capacity to enable social distancing. During the second period of lockdown patronage dropped to around 50% Monday to Friday and 40% on Saturday and Sunday, reflecting the fact that only essential travel was being undertaken.
- 8.3.4. From the 2nd December 2020, with the reintroduction of the area based tiered system, service levels were maintained at over 100% of pre-Covid provision. During this period patronage again recovered to over 60% and peaked at 65% on the busiest shopping days ahead of Christmas.
- 8.3.5. On Tuesday 5th January 2021 England entered a third period of lockdown, to be reviewed after an initial seven-week period. This lockdown includes the closure of non-essential retail, schools and colleges. Critically during this period construction and manufacturing are considered to be key industries and these have continued to function. As a result, this has meant that compared to the first period of lockdown patronage levels have remained higher, with passenger numbers at approximately 30% of pre-Covid levels. This retained level of employment has also meant that there are larger numbers of school children (of essential workers) continuing to travel.
- 8.3.6. At the time of writing, discussions are on-going with bus operators on proposed service levels with a review to these being reduced from 24th January. Key principles are to retain coverage of the network along with the times of the first bus and last bus, reducing any duplicate services and reducing service frequency. It is likely service levels will be at an average of 90% of business as usual.
- 8.3.7. Metro patronage has reduced to 40% of normal levels during the present lockdown with revenue less than this, but normal service levels have

continued to enable key workers and essential travellers to access Metro services. This however is under review and changes to service frequency may be implemented to match demand. Midland Metro is the only tramway in the UK with automatic passenger counting technology on board all trams and this enables a data led approach to capacity management.

- 8.3.8. Rail is operating at around 10% and operators will shortly be introducing a reduced timetable which is expected to be in place until late March.
- 8.3.9. Enhanced cleaning regimes have not only been vital to ensure the network remains safe but to assure customer that public transport is clean and safe to use. Cleaning of buses to meet central government guidance, and their own risk assessments, remains the responsibility of bus operators. However, through the West Midlands Bus Alliance TfWM have attempted to ensure this is consistent across operators to enable to us to take a network wide approach to building passenger confidence. In light of the new variant of Covid-19 bus operators are reviewing their risk assessments and ensuring that staff and customers are following the specified guidance. Bus operators and TfWM are in the process of reviewing and refreshing customer messaging to ensure passengers are remind of the key elements of the guidance.
- 8.3.10. In respect of TfWM managed bus stations, interchange and hub cleaning regimes have been enhanced with high volume touch points being cleaned every hour and shelters across our major interchanges and high boarding points are cleaned at least every 48 hours. Enhanced cleaning regimes are also in place across Rail and Metro also with additional cleaning of trams, tram stops and customer touch points using viricidal disinfectant.
- 8.3.11. Following the announcement of mandatory use of face masks on vehicles TfWM has worked with operators and partners to ensure a high level of compliance across the network and also made additional resource available for crowd management in busy locations. Enforcement has been managed through a task force in partnership with the Safer Travel Police team and front line TfWM staff who have been patrolling key interchanges to engage and educate those without a face covering and thousands of face coverings have been distributed. Over 1000 direction to leave orders have been issued to those who have refused to comply.
- 8.3.12. In addition to timetable changes, operators such as West Midlands Metro, West Midlands Trains and National Express West Midlands have all created additional functionality on their websites that provide passenger information. Various customer information features have been brought together onto the West Midlands Network website as further support to our passengers making it as easy as possible to find the information they need.

Future public transport operation

- 8.3.13. Data insight and analysis continues, especially with the introduction of the tiered systems and additional lockdowns. BCC and TfWM have trialled working with DfT data to help to try to understand the change in the movement around the region. This proved to be too coarse and the decision to pursue the use of more granular mobile network data is being explored, this is currently in progress with the WMCA Procurement Team. At present we are using a range of data to look at how we can manage increased demand on the transport network when vulnerable groups start to be vaccinated.
- 8.3.14. There is currently a great deal of uncertainty about the coming months and years in terms of the pace and nature of the recovery post-Covid and the likely impact of this on demand for travel. During the crisis, public transport services have received significant public subsidy in order to maintain service levels at largely pre-Covid rates in order to maintain social distancing. This level of subsidy is not sustainable long term and it is currently unclear what level of subsidy will continue after March 2021. Any reduction in subsidy whilst patronage levels and associated revenues from fare boxes are reduced will certainly result in a reduction in service levels, notwithstanding any impact on transport policies to encourage mode shift away from private cars. In the short term this will impact most severely on those citizens that already suffer the greatest amounts of social exclusion and deprivation, the very same citizens who have been worst impacted during the Covid-19 crisis. There is analytical work being undertaken, utilising Swift data, to identify the “core” users of the public transport network to enable a greater understanding and to allow considerations of equality in the decision making process.
- 8.3.15. Moving forward it may be that the Covid-19 crisis will act as a catalyst for alternative models of public transport operation such as franchising models or elements of re-regulation, especially if higher levels of public subsidy are required during the recovery.
- 8.3.16. Despite various potential scenarios and trajectories, it is clear that public transport will continue to play a key role in the future integrated transport network, especially in the context of a low carbon green recovery and ambitious carbon reduction targets in line with BCC’s R20 strategy. Protecting public transport networks and rebuilding public confidence that it is once again safe to use public transport will be critical. We have an opportunity as restrictions are lifted to encourage and embed a change in travel behaviour towards public transport and active travel and keep the levels of car usage down. Through marketing and messaging campaigns TfWM will aim to restore confidence and ensure the essential service our integrated transport system provides can recover quickly and continue to

support their long term goals to improve air quality, reliability and reduce congestion.

Future public transport infrastructure

- 8.3.17. The delivery of TfWM schemes has continued whilst working in a safe manner and in accordance with government guidelines.
- 8.3.18. The Westside Metro Extension has used the pandemic in a positive way to progress the works along Broad Street with a large portion of the construction work being accelerated. Despite Covid-19 restrictions, work on the project has progressed well, and the Midland Metro Alliance have co-ordinated with businesses along Broad Street to plan paving works outside their premises at times which are convenient wherever possible.
- 8.3.19. Tram stops have been installed and all of the track and road surface along Broad Street has been completed and there is now continuous track from the existing Line 1 through Centenary Square and out to almost the terminus at Hagley Road. This leaves installation of the remaining paving and Overhead Line Equipment poles as the last main construction work on Broad Street before cables are run and the testing of the tram systems commence in the second half of this year.
- 8.3.20. Work is also progressing on Metro's Birmingham Eastside Extension (BEE). Utility works have progressed on Lower Bull St and in Digbeth Centre, and discussions have been held with the Department for Transport and HS2 about the phasing and co-ordination of tram and Curzon Street station works. This should hopefully enable TfWM to proceed quickly to full delivery of the BEE scheme, although the date of opening to passenger service remains under discussion. Main works proceed in earnest during the first half of this year.
- 8.3.21. The majority of the enabling works for the Sprint Hagley Road section have also been completed and hope to confirm the start of the main delivery work there in February 2021.
- 8.3.22. Work on the infrastructure to support the first cross-city services through Birmingham starts to move into delivery by Spring 2021 and the first planned operations from 2022 between Druids Heath, Moseley, Birmingham City Centre, Cape Hill, Smethwick and Dudley. This Government funded scheme will progress through the year in phases along the route to improve bus journey times and improve accessibility across the city.
- 8.3.23. Construction commenced on the A45 Sprint route just after the Christmas period. A site compound has been established at Bordesley Green to support construction activity. In line with COVID-19 guidance, steps have been taken to safeguard the workforce by introducing a lateral-flow COVID-19 Testing Programme for anyone coming on to site. This includes construction workers

and all office base staff and visitors. In addition to this a track and trace / temperature sensor.

- 8.3.24. Progress on the A34 Sprint continues with construction set to commence on the route early in 2021. Tenders for packages B (Great Barr to Stadium) and C (Stadium to Perry Barr) are due to be returned in late January. Contracts are anticipated to be finalised by mid- February with construction starting by late March. This scheme is on track with its project timelines.
- 8.3.25. The tender for Package D (Perry Barr to Birmingham) is due to be returned in late February. Contract signature is expected in late March with the start of construction the latter half of April.
- 8.3.26. TfWM have been supporting BCC on the A34 Highways Scheme by developing and deploying a mitigation strategy with dedicated travel demand management resource and communications packages. Work has been undertaken to improve the performance of the network by upgrading and revalidating traffic signals, installing CCTV and static automatic traffic count (SATC) cameras which will provide visibility of traffic volumes and enabling the identification of and rapid response to incidents. The Regional Transport Coordination Centre (RTCC) will also coordinate across transport authorities and operators in the management of the network to ensure we minimise delays.

8.4. Parking

- 8.4.1. All BCC car parks are open except for Victoria Road multi-storey car park in Sutton Coldfield. Usage at nearby surface level car park remains low indicating there is insufficient demand for parking in the area to warrant reopening the multi-storey.
- 8.4.2. Paradise Circus multi-storey car park is closed to the general public but reopened in the week commencing 7th December to allow parking for NHS staff and patients only attending the newly created Covid-19 testing centre at the NIA. This arrangement will run 7 days a week until 18th February 2021 (except for Christmas week).
- 8.4.3. From Monday 11th January, Millennium Point Car Park is being used to support the NHS COVID-19 Vaccination Programme at the Millennium Point COVID-19 Vaccination Hub.
- 8.4.4. Car parking spaces are available free of charge at Millennium Point Car Park for NHS staff working at the Millennium Point COVID-19 Vaccination Hub. Staff will be working 12 hours per day.
- 8.4.5. 1-hour free car parking is also available at Millennium Point Car Park for people attending the Millennium Point COVID-19 Vaccination Hub to receive a vaccine.

8.4.6. Parking charges in Council car parks and on streets (where applicable) have recommenced. Concessions for NHS staff, health and social care workers and NHS volunteer responders remain available.

8.4.7. The consequences of the pandemic and the subsequent restrictions applied to the operation of businesses, offices and the retail sector on the income generated by parking services have been very significant for the 2020/21 financial year. Officers are developing best estimates for income for 2021/22 in an attempt to understand the potential for on-going budget pressures. Beyond the recovery from the pandemic, officers are also working to model the impact on future parking income with respect to changes in travel behaviour as citizens are encouraged to find alternative travel methods to private car use as part of the aim to reduce vehicle-borne emissions.

8.5. Road safety

8.5.1. Road traffic collisions and casualties in Birmingham have been analysed for the period April to August 2020, covering the period of the first national lockdown. This data has been compared with data from the same period during the previous three years.

8.5.2. Compared to the same period in the previous three years, April to August 2019 vs April to August 2020, road traffic collisions (RTCs) across all categories are down as follows:

- All RTCs are down by 64%, and all KSIs (killed or seriously injured) are down by 49%.
- Involving pedestrians down by 82%, and pedestrian KSIs are down by 72%.
- Involving cyclists down by 52%, and cyclist KSIs are down by 33%.
- Involving powered-two-wheeler road traffic collisions down by 41% and powered-two-wheeler KSIs are down by 30%.
- Involving children down by 72%, and child KSIs are down by 53%.

8.5.3. We are continuing to promote national campaigns such as the Road Safety Charity Brake's 'National Road Safety Week'. The theme of 'No need to speed' this year was particularly pertinent due to increased speeding concerns reporting during the period of lockdown. Birmingham City Council's own 'Slower is Safer' campaign was also promoted as part of this.

8.5.4. In advance of Road Safety Week, all school staff in Birmingham were invited to attend a special road safety webinar. This gave information on existing support and resources available, plus further guidance and information on the issue of speeding.

8.5.5. Above all, in order to reduce the number of vehicles on the roads in Birmingham, citizens are encouraged to walk or cycle where possible, particularly for shorter journeys.

8.6. Return to school travel advice

8.6.1. Walking and cycling continue to play a vital role in ensuring that pupils can attend classes safely, helping to make space for those who have no alternative but to use public transport.

8.6.2. We have been maximising the additional travel planning support provided through funding from the Department for Transport. This has given us with the ability to work with a greater number and variety of schools than normal, including secondary schools where we are seeing particular issues around pupils being driven to school rather than using public transport.

8.6.3. Using TfWM data, including watch spot areas, high bus boarding and congestion data from the pulse reports, priority areas have been mapped.

8.6.4. Key successes include:

- Communicating important school restart travel messages and promotion of resources, especially to 80 identified high priority schools.
- Production of a specific risk assessment around pick up and drop off times, and the journey to and from school. Further guidance was produced related to social distancing at the school gate.
- Tailored messaging and support packages to schools who are experiencing issues with public transport or congestion at the school gate. Other bespoke messaging and offers of support has been given to schools affected by the Emergency Active Travel Fund Schemes, for example schools within low traffic neighbourhood areas.
- Signing up and beginning travel plans with about 10 schools.
- Trialling of the Agilysis Active Streets Assessment Tool to allow us to identify and prioritise schools for possible physical infrastructure measures.
- Additional resources will be made available to schools to support use of Modeshift's 5-minute walking bubble maps
- Development and delivery of webinars to school staff including topics of road safety, clean air and getting started with Modeshift STARS. We are also looking to develop additional webinar presentation slides and accompanying notes on the topics of 'Developing and delivering a travel plan' and 'Gaining

accreditation' to add to our existing CPD programme and further promote Modeshift STARS.

8.7. eScooter trial

- 8.7.1. The eScooter trial was launched in August 2020, initially covering the city core (area bound by the A4540 inner ring road). This is a privately-operated service, delivered in partnership with the Council and TfWM. In early December 2020, the trial zone was expanded to cover a much larger area of city outside the core city centre, The current trial zone covers the city core and areas to the north and southwest of the city around the flagship blue cycling routes along the A38 and A34, reaching key destinations such as Birmingham City Hospital, the University of Birmingham and Queen Elizabeth Hospital.
- 8.7.2. As of mid-January 2021, there were 379 active e-scooters in the trial area, with plans for further fleet expansion up to 750.

8.8. E-cargo bike trial

- 8.8.1. Following a competitive application process, the Council was awarded an e-cargo bike grant by the Energy Saving Trust in May 2020. The council has purchased 20 e-cargo bikes, 16 of which will be allocated to local partners and 4 will become part of the council's fleet. The purpose of the trial is to demonstrate different uses of e-cargo bikes through case studies and data that the partners will produce.

8.9. Clean Air Zone (CAZ)

- 8.9.1. Following agreement from Ministers, the Council confirmed on 8th October 2020 that Birmingham's CAZ would now launch on 1st June 2021. Simultaneous to the announcement of the launch date for the CAZ, the team also launched its Exemptions and Mitigations measures, which are designed to provide additional time to prepare for the CAZ and/or encourage the upgrade or replacement of vehicles that do not meet the emission standards of the Clean Air Zone.
- 8.9.2. As of the end of December 2020, the team has approved a total of 862 exemption applications and approved applications to the taxi and private hire fund to a value of £0.394m.
- 8.9.3. We have acquired business continuity assurances from third parties to ensure project delivery remains on track during the ongoing COVID pandemic and continue to monitor the evolving situation.

9. Covid-19 Support Grants

9.1. Business Support Grants

9.1.1. Since the last update report to City Council in September 2020, the business support grants landscape has become increasingly complex, with a number of new business support grants schemes announced by national government.

9.1.2. The majority of current business grants schemes are linked to the tiered system of local restrictions, implemented by national government in October 2020. Birmingham has now spent time in every tier of restrictions with an associated business grants scheme, which means that since October 2020 we have had to design and administer five separate business grants schemes (not including new schemes for Tier 4 and the third national lockdown). The scale of the challenge facing Birmingham City Council, in comparison to some other local authorities which have only been in one or two tiers, is significant and continues to increase as new schemes are announced.

9.1.3. Despite these additional challenges, we have continued to work with national and local partners, including the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce, to lobby for the support and additional funding that our businesses need to survive the current crisis.

9.1.4. At the time of writing this report, we are currently administering five separate business support grant schemes:

- Local Restrictions Support Grant (Open) (for open but impacted businesses, covering time spent in Tier 2 from 14th October to 4th November 2020, and Tier 3 from 2nd December to 30th December 2020)
- Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) (for closed businesses, covering time spent in national lockdown from 5th November to 1st December 2020, and Tier 3 from 2nd December to 30th December 2020)
- Local Restrictions Support Grant (Sector) (for businesses in sectors that have been required to close nationally, covering the period 1st - 4th November, and 2nd December onwards)
- Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) (a discretionary support grant scheme for businesses who may not qualify through other schemes, with locally set criteria)
- Christmas Support Payments for 'wet-led pubs'

- 9.1.5. Applications for existing business support grant schemes opened on 25th November 2020. This is an entirely online process. Considering the complexity of the current schemes, and after consultation with the local business community, we decided to ease the administrative burden on businesses by designing a 'one application' process. Under this process, Birmingham businesses only need to make one online application to be considered for all existing and future business support schemes.
- 9.1.6. This 'one application' approach is different from most other local authorities, which have mainly chosen to operate separate application processes for each businesses grant scheme. However, we believe that our process minimises the administrative burden for businesses and maximises available funding and resources. The current process also ensures that businesses are automatically triaged for support under the discretionary Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) scheme if they do not meet the criteria for other schemes.
- 9.1.7. Delays in receiving finalised guidance from national government has presented an additional challenge to the service, with teams having to manage the expectations of businesses that are, understandably, desperate for any additional financial support available. Any grants paid in error are likely to require repayment from businesses, which means that the Council is unable to finalise the design of schemes until guidance is agreed.
- 9.1.8. As of 15th January 2021, we have received 14,056 applications for support from businesses. Taking into account the five schemes currently in operation, this means over 70,000 individual considerations that need to be made by the team. All applications must be assessed against the eligibility criteria for each scheme, as well as a nationally mandated anti-fraud check through the Government's 'Spotlight' system.
- 9.1.9. Once an application has been processed and a decision made, businesses receive one lump sum payment covering all business grant schemes. The average time from application receipt to payments is currently 25 calendar days.
- 9.1.10. Additional resource has been deployed into the business rates team from the council tax team to help process applications, with nearly 100 FTE working on grants. Normal staffing within the business rates team is 25 FTE. Overtime is in place and being maximised, in addition to a number of staff who opted to work over the Christmas period to maintain momentum. External recruitment, or redeployment of staff from other areas of the council, is not a viable option due to the level of training that would be required.
- 9.1.11. We recognise that this is a worrying time for many businesses, and regular emails are being sent to all applicants to keep them updated on timescales and likely payment dates. The business rates team is proactively working

with both colleagues and external stakeholders, including the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce, to develop a communications plan around the grants schemes.

- 9.1.12. The below tables set out the latest position with regards to business support grants as at 15th January 2021 (not including the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) discretionary scheme). So far, we have paid out just over £10 million in grants to eligible businesses.

Period of report: 25 th November 2020 – 15 th January 2021 (not including Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) Discretionary Scheme)	
Total number of applications received	14,056
Total number of applications paid/approved for payment	7,125
Total value of applications paid/approved for payment	£10,642,000

Period of report: 25 th November 2020 – 15 th January 2021 (not including Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) Discretionary Scheme)		
Scheme	Total no. of applications paid/approved for payments	Total value of payments made/confirmed payments
LRSG (Sector)	80	£99, 872
LRSG (Open)	1798	£1,749,655
LRSG (Closed)	4389	£7,076,733
LRSG (Closed) <i>*ARG discretionary element</i>	361	£1,006,899
Christmas Support Payments for wet-led pubs	145	£145,000
LRGSOV2	127	£138,982
LRGSCV2	225	£317,905
Total	7,125	£10,642,000

- 9.1.13. At full capacity, we project that we will be able to process around 2,500 grants per week, which would mean clearing all pending applications by the end of January 2021 (for the five existing schemes).
- 9.1.14. Guidance has now been received from national government for the two new business support grant schemes linked to Tier 4 and the third national

lockdown. The service is in a good position to process these additional payments using existing applications from businesses, but the sheer number of assessments required means that some businesses may not be assessed until February 2021.

9.2. Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) discretionary scheme

- 9.2.1. In contrast to the other business support schemes which have nationally set eligibility criteria, the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) discretionary scheme provides additional funding to local authorities to distribute according to locally set criteria. Using this funding, councils are able to establish their own business support grant schemes or business support programmes according to local priorities and need.
- 9.2.2. Birmingham has received a total allocation of £22,836,320 from national government to be distributed through this scheme.
- 9.2.3. Since the current round of business support grant schemes opened on 25th November 2020, all Birmingham businesses who do not qualify for the Local Restrictions Support Grant (Open), Local Restrictions Support Grants (Closed) or Local Restrictions Grant (Sector) are automatically triaged for discretionary financial support through the Additional Restrictions Grant process.
- 9.2.4. This includes the following:
- Supply chain businesses severely impacted because they wholly or exclusively supply businesses in the hospitality, accommodation, events or leisure sectors
 - Sector business that are operating in shared premises or where the landlord is liable to pay Business Rates
 - Bed and Breakfast businesses which are classed as domestic and subject to Council Tax will also be eligible for support
 - Businesses which have been severely impacted due to government restrictions
- 9.2.5. To receive grant funding through this scheme, businesses must demonstrate that their business has been 'severely affected' by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and/or restrictions on operations.
- 9.2.6. The below table set out the latest position with regards to the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) discretionary scheme, as at 15th January 2021. So far, we have paid out £1.8 million in grants to businesses through this scheme.

Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) discretionary scheme		
Period of report: 25 th November 2020 – 15 th January 2021		
Application status	No. of applications	Total value of payments made
Received, in review	1086	
Awaiting further information	83	
More information received	28	
Approved	1167	£1,804,610
Duplicate	19	
Rejected	234	
Total	2617	£1,804,610

- 9.2.7. The first round of ARG discretionary scheme funding closed to new applications on 15th January 2021. A new ARG grant scheme is currently in development, for those businesses in key sectors that continue to be impacted by tiered restrictions.

9.3. One-off grant payments to hospitality and leisure businesses

- 9.3.1. Using funding from the ARG discretionary scheme fund, we will be paying out one-off grants of £10,000 to hospitality and leisure businesses in Birmingham with a rateable value of over £51,000. These businesses have previously been ineligible for any business support grant funding due to their high rateable value.

- 9.3.2. 421 eligible businesses have been identified by the Council from business rates records, with grants targeted at businesses in the following sectors:

- Restaurants
- Pubs, clubs and bars
- Museums and art galleries
- Cinemas and theatres
- Bingo halls and amusement arcades
- Cafés and coffee houses

- 9.3.3. Eligible businesses do not need to apply for these one-off grants, but will be required to provide the necessary banking details to process payments. Council officers have begun contacting businesses to confirm their eligibility and payment details, with an aim of processing all payments by the end of January 2021.

9.4. Social Isolation Payments (SIP)

- 9.4.1. Two support schemes were established by national government in September 2020 to provide financial assistance to individuals on low incomes who are asked to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace but are unable to work from home. These are the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme and the Test and Trace Discretionary Support Payment Scheme.
- 9.4.2. These schemes are designed to help ensure that people who test positive for Covid-19, and their close contacts, are able to self-isolate for the required period to stop the onward spread of the virus.
- 9.4.3. Anyone told to self-isolate on or after 28th September 2020 may be eligible for a (backdated) payment of £500 under these schemes.
- 9.4.4. Local authorities were required to have arrangements in place to administer payments through both schemes by 12th October 2020.
- 9.4.5. National government has provided ringfenced funding for these schemes, with Birmingham receiving a total allocation of £1,186,663 (£741,500 for the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme, and £445,163 for the Test and Trace Discretionary Support Payment Scheme). Allocations to local authorities were based on DHSC modelling.
- 9.4.6. Eligibility criteria for the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme have been set nationally by Government, with eligibility restricted to people who:
- Have been told to stay at home and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, either because they have tested positive for Covid-19, or because they have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive; **and**
 - Are employed or self-employed; **and**
 - Are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result; **and**
 - Are currently receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit.
- 9.4.7. The Test and Trace Discretionary Support Payment Scheme is designed to support individuals who do not meet the criteria for the main scheme, but nonetheless would face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work from home. This scheme has some nationally set criteria, but local authorities were advised that they could also introduce their own locally set criteria to ensure that support goes where it is most needed. Any locally set criteria must operate in addition to, rather than instead of, nationally set criteria.

- 9.4.8. Under the nationally set criteria for the Test and Trace Discretionary Support Payment Scheme, eligibility is restricted to people who:
- Have been told to stay at home and self-isolate by NHS Test and Test, either because they have tested positive for Covid-19, or because they have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive; **and**
 - Are employed or self-employed; **and**
 - Are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result; **and**
 - Are **not** currently receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit; **and**
 - Are on low incomes and will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they are self-isolating.
- 9.4.9. As there is only a limited amount of funding available under the Test and Trace Discretionary Support Payment Scheme, we judged it necessary to introduce additional, locally set criteria to ensure that we support those who need it most. Based on the available funding pot of £445,163, and estimating a payment of £500 for each eligible individual, we are only able to support a total of 890 citizens through this scheme.
- 9.4.10. We have therefore limited eligibility for the Test and Trace Discretionary Support Payment Scheme to individuals who have less than £6,000 in capital or savings, **and** fall into at least one of the following categories:
- People who have applied for any of the benefits mentioned in criteria 4 or been refused and have made an appeal against the decision, as they meet the other statutory and discretionary criteria.
 - People from abroad who are excluded from claiming benefits but meet all the other statutory and discretionary criteria, as long as someone has the right to work in the UK.
 - Applicants who have a gross weekly earnings figure of no more than £372 per week (40 hours x £9.30 per hour living wage (living wage as defined by the Living Wage Commission)).
 - Applicants who would suffer severe financial hardship if a payment is not made (and can evidence this).
- 9.4.11. Applications and payments for both schemes are administered through the Benefits Service, with additional funding provided by national government to cover administrative and start-up costs.

- 9.4.12. We have consistently received around 500 claims for support a week through these schemes, which is considerably higher than the initial DHSC estimate of around 200 claims per week. No additional funding for the administration of the schemes has been provided.
- 9.4.13. Before a claim can be paid, applications must be checked against the national DHSC 'CTAS' eligibility validation system. We have experienced multiple issues using this system, with significant delays in confirming eligibility for payments, which has slowed down the process considerably. Concerns have been raised directly with DHSC, and the situation has been closely monitored over the lifetime of the scheme with specific escalations in place. Similar difficulties have been faced by other local authorities.
- 9.4.14. As of 22nd January 2021, we have now received a total of 8,803 applications for support. A breakdown of these applications is provided in the below table.

Application status	No. of applications
Approved, paid	2,057
Rejected, do not meet criteria	2,822
Pending – awaiting further information from citizens or DHSC	1,016
New applications, awaiting review	2,908 (<i>including 2,359 received in last two weeks</i>)
Total	8,803

- 9.4.15. As of 22nd January 2021, we have now paid out a total of £1,028,500, including:
- 1,306 'standard' payments paid out under the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme, totalling £653,000
 - 751 'discretionary' payments paid out under the Test and Trace Discretionary Support Payment Scheme, totalling £375,500
- 9.4.16. We continue to await further information from national government about whether these schemes will be extended past the original closing date of 31st January 2021.

9.5. Council Tax Hardship Fund

- 9.5.1. National government has provided local authorities in England with £500 million in new grant funding to support economically vulnerable households. This money has been allocated based on each council's share of the national

caseload of working-age recipients of Council Tax Support (CTS), with Birmingham City Council receiving £17.4 million.

- 9.5.2. Local authorities are expected to use this additional funding to reduce the council tax bills of all working-age recipients of CTS by £150, or to clear the balance where less than £150 remains to be paid for the 2020/21 financial year. These reductions are to be applied regardless of whether residents have been financially impacted by Covid-19.
- 9.5.3. This support scheme commenced in April 2020, and will continue to be operated for the remainder of the financial year, with all in-year/new CTS applicants receiving the discount.
- 9.5.4. To date the Council has reduced the bills of 95,026 residents using this additional funding. Residents have not had to apply for this reduction, with discounts being applied automatically.
- 9.5.5. Citizens that are on a low income are encouraged to apply for Council Tax Support online at www.birmingham.gov.uk/benefitsnewclaim. Where residents are unable to complete the online form, they can call the contact centre and book a telephone appointment to complete an application over the phone.

10. Council Finance and Resources

10.1. Finance (position as at 15th January 2021)

- 10.1.1. Government has provided grant funding to Birmingham to support the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. A total of £586.8m of grant funding has been confirmed to date, including £128.5m of un-ringfenced grants and £6.5m reimbursement for unachieved sales, fees and charges (SFC) income for the period to July 2020. The second SFC claim for £6.4m was submitted to MHCLG on 23 December 2020 to cover the period August to November 2020. £44.2m of the un-ringfenced grants has been transferred to a dedicated reserve to manage the ongoing pandemic through the higher risk winter months.

- 10.1.2. The below table summarises current grant allocations.

Grant	£m
Support to business due to national lockdown and additional restrictions	
ARG Top-Up	10.1
Closed Business Lockdown payment	57.8
Closed Addendum payment	28.9
	96.8

Community Testing Funding - to support expenditure incurred in undertaking Covid-19 testing in the community. Reimbursed at £14 per test.	2.2
Total funding confirmed	99.0

- 10.1.3. Government has announced a national scheme for £100m to provide some support to local authority leisure centres. The Council is putting together a bid. The current assumption is that we could secure funding of approximately £3m which would cover supplier relief claims for the period December 2020 to March 2021. However, the impact of the latest restrictions and closure of leisure sites has not been factored into these figures and further information is awaited from Government as to how the claim may be affected.
- 10.1.4. As part of the Local Government Provisional Finance Settlement on 17th December 2020, Government has confirmed that there will be some additional funding to mitigate the pressures in respect of Covid-19 for 2021/22. This is in the form of £43.8m of un-ringfenced grant to fund expenditure pressures. It was also confirmed that the income compensation scheme for lost fees, charges and sales would be extended by a further 3 months to June 2021, using the 2020/21 income budgets as the baseline for the compensation and that £762m would be provided nationally to compensate councils for 75% of irrecoverable loss of council tax and business rates revenues in 2020/21. The funding of the income compensation scheme and the collection fund scheme will be dependent on the losses identified, but it is anticipated that Birmingham may receive around £39.6m to cover Business Rates and Council tax losses.
- 10.1.5. In a letter to local authorities on 8th January 2020, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government called for councils to increase efforts to ensure that rough sleepers have secure and safe accommodation over the winter period. This means making offers to people who may have previously been offered accommodation but rejected it or left accommodation, and individuals new to rough sleeping who require help to move on from rough sleeping. There was also a call for local authorities to ensure that all those receiving interventions are registered with a GP and included in the local vaccination plans.
- 10.1.6. It should be noted that the financial impact of the current national lockdown is still being evaluated.
- 10.1.7. The below table provides the latest overview of pressures and risk that the Council is facing up to 2021/22 and provides a comparison between this forecast and the confirmed un-ringfenced grants. The total forecast additional spend/loss of income to the Council on COVID-19 related general fund

activities for 2020/21 and 2021/22 is £153.8m including risks. This is inclusive of additional expenditure, loss of income and likely risk materialising. The 2021/22 position will be better understood as we start to plan recovery and the 'new norm'.

Forecast pressures on expenditure and income			
Financial year	Expenditure £m	Income £m	Total £m
2020/21	71.874	56.908	128.781
2021/22	2.678	22.293	24.971
Gross GF Pressures	74.552	79.201	153.752
Grant Received	N/A	N/A	(128.519)
Income Reimbursement Received (April – July 2020)	N/A	N/A	(6.455)
Net GF Pressures	74.552	79.201	18.778

- 10.1.8. The un-ringfenced grant allocations currently exceed the two-year costs identified to date. However, the Council expects that further costs may materialise as a result of winter pressure and wave 2 of Covid-19, which are not yet reflected in the numbers above. Costs will be kept under constant review and updated for future reports. However, when risks are also factored in, costs could exceed the allocation by £18.8m. However, this will be partially mitigated by the amounts that the Council will be able to claim under the Government's income compensation scheme for income losses for the period August 2020 to March 2021, currently estimated to be a further £15.4m. When this is taken into account, the residual shortfall is £3.4m inclusive of risks.
- 10.1.9. It should be noted that additional costs are beginning to be identified for 2022/23 and beyond, mainly around slippage on planned savings proposals, including lower assumptions around ability to grow income. These will be addressed as part of the budget process.
- 10.1.10. Basis and assumptions
- Forecasts are based on decisions and emerging actions where Finance are sighted on these.
 - Where estimated figures have been used these will continue to be reviewed and updated.

- Forecasts reflect the impact of service closure or restrictions as a result of social isolating policy from national government, such as leisure centres.

10.1.11. A return on the latest estimates of costs and losses of income due to Covid 19 was submitted to MHCLG on 11th December 2020, which was based on the Strategic Cell report for week commencing 4th December 2020. There will be no return in January due to the Christmas break; to account for this the November return requested actuals for both October and November, and a forecast for December. The next return is expected in early February. The MHCLG return also asks for full year costs and therefore is in line with our Strategic Cell reporting. The Council estimated total costs in 2020/21 of £225.506m General Fund and £7.107m HRA. This includes expenditure in relation to ringfenced grants in line with Government instructions. The impact of Covid-19 as per the MHCLG return is summarised in the below table.

MHCLG November Return Summary	
2020/21 Impact	£m
Additional Costs	83.708
Income Losses (after Business Rates Relief)	97.462
Ringfenced Grant Expenditure	45.336
Total General Fund Impact	226.506
HRA Impact	7.107
Total Impact Submitted to MHCLG	233.613

Emerging financial risks

- 10.1.12. The financial risks are considered to be a most likely impact of £21.858m.
- 10.1.13. It must be noted that this is an emerging and evolving set of financial risks and will continue to be monitored and updated as there is greater visibility by Finance of financial decisions being made. We are also comparing with other Local Authorities to ensure consistency of financial reporting.

Business Rates Grant and Hardship Fund

- 10.1.14. The Council has received £231.6m Business Rates Grant.
- 10.1.15. The business rates grant scheme ended on 30th September 2020. The Council made grant payments to 18,153 businesses, totalling £217.9m.
- 10.1.16. In line with Government guidance the Council set aside 5% (£11.6m) of its estimated underspend on the business rates grant scheme to fund a discretionary grant scheme. The Government anticipated that this would be

used to support small businesses with fewer than 50 employees that do not have their own business rates assessment, B&Bs that pay Council Tax rather than business rates and some charity properties.

- 10.1.17. The Council determined how to allocate the grants using its local knowledge within the Government's criteria.
- 10.1.18. Round 1 of the Council's discretionary scheme went live on 1st June 2020. Almost 2,000 applications for grants were received by the Council for that round. A total of 1,026 applications were approved for this round and grant payments to the value of £4.582m were processed. The Council launched round 2 of the scheme on 3rd August 2020 and of just over 1,300 applications were received, 725 were paid. Payments for this round have now completed, and total £6.217m. This means that payments for both rounds total £10.799m.
- 10.1.19. There were applications totalling £0.6m that were received in advance of the 30th September cut-off date, but which could not be processed at the time due to missing information. The required information was received after 30th September, and the Council is awaiting advice from BEIS as to whether these claims can now be processed.
- 10.1.20. Now that final payments have been made on all schemes, the underspend of £2.3m must be returned to BEIS.
- 10.1.21. The Government has announced funding will be provided to support BIDs. Birmingham has received £0.212m.

Support to Business During Restrictions

- 10.1.22. The Government provided £47.287m of grant to Birmingham in November 2020 to support businesses who face restrictions during the national lockdown and during periods then restrictions were in place due to high alert levels for the area. The scheme went live on 23 November, and to date £8.664m has been spent.

Council Tax Support Hardship

- 10.1.23. Work has begun on applying discounts to the Council Tax bills of those receiving Council Tax Support. These will be paid for from the £17.383m Hardship Grant for Council Tax. To date, 95,026 discounts have been applied to those in receipt of Council Tax Support, totalling £8.0m. Cabinet on 4th December 2020, approved the recommendation that £6.4m of COVID costs in relation to food provision be funded from the Hardship Grant. This means that there is £3.0m of the grant left. The fund needs to continue to be allocated to new cases for CTS for the remainder of the financial year. Hence, any further increases in the caseload need to be considered first –

and this will be highly dependent on the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on the economy.

Other Ringfenced Grants

Infection Control Grant

- 10.1.24. The Council has received an allocation of £18.5m as part of the Infection Control funding. To date, expenditure from the grant totals £13.2m, consisting of Phase 1 and 2 payments to providers and providers of extra care, supported living and home support. This means that there is a further £5.3m of grant left to be committed, but which has been identified to support care providers.

Test and Trace Service Support Grant and Contain Outbreak Management Fund

- 10.1.25. The Council has received £10.7m to develop and action its plans to reduce the spread of the virus in the local area and a further £9.1m of Contain Management Funds, a total of £20.9m. Commitments against the grant total £13.5m (£7.3m in 2020/21 and £6.2m in 2021/22) including salary costs, software and system costs, communications, equipment, enforcement, testing facilities and welfare support and community swabbing. The commitments against the grant are currently under review and will be updated in future reports.

Welfare Assistance Fund

- 10.1.26. An additional £63m was confirmed by Government on 11th June 2020 to assist those who are struggling to afford food and other essentials due to Covid-19. Birmingham has been allocated **£1.9m**. A report was approved by Tactical Cell on 8th September and the indicative cost of the programme is expected to be £1.9m, meaning the whole grant has been committed.

Reopening the High Streets Safely

- 10.1.27. The Council expects to spend its £1.017m fully in 2020/21. To date, £0.408m has been spent.

Test and Trace Support Payments

- 10.1.28. From 28th September 2020, individuals are entitled to a Test and Trace or discretionary support payment of £500. The payment is intended to support those on low income who are unable to work from home if ordered to self-isolate, and therefore will suffer some income loss. Government announced a national grant of £50m to support this scheme and Birmingham has been allocated a total of £1.317m. The breakdown of this grant allocation is as shown in the table below:

	Allocation	Payment value to be made	How many citizens can be paid?	Across 18 weeks eligibility period	Top up possible
SJP Payments	741,500	£500	1483	82	Yes, by Govt if exceeds
Discretionary Covid-19 Payments	445,164	£500	890	49	No, 4 month fixed cash envelope
Administration	130,335				In discussion with DHCS
Total	1,316,999				

- 10.1.29. The scheme went live in Birmingham on 12th October 2020 and ended on 31st January 2021. Over 4600 applications under the scheme have been received and to date £1.003m of this grant has been spent on both standard and discretionary payments.

Compliance and Enforcement Grant

- 10.1.30. On 22nd September Government announced £60m of funding nationally to support additional compliance and enforcement activities. Birmingham has been allocated £0.890m. The proposed spending breakdown for this grant is as shown in the table below. To date, £0.117m of the grant has been spent.

	£
Covid Marshalls, equipment, bicycles, PEE, and tabards	241,600
Universities	80,000
Faith Group Covid Champions	30,000
Environmental Health – staffing, PPE, Bodycams, IT, vehicle costs etc.	290,100
Letter drop and advice	30,000
Media and publicity	50,000
Parks – signage, adverts, Marshalls	167,200
Total proposed plan	888,900

Next Steps Accommodation Programme

- 10.1.31. The Council has been successful in securing £0.595m funding from the recent bidding round for the Next Steps Accommodation Programme. The bid submitted was to cover extended emergency accommodation costs, Washington Court accommodation scheme and 2 additional transition

support workers. A further £0.639m has been provided to Birmingham to provide longer term solutions for rough sleepers. To date, £0.456m of the initial grant has been spent.

Funding for the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV)

- 10.1.32. The Council has been allocated £0.520m funding (equivalent to £14.60 per CEV individual on the Shielded Patient List) for the 28-day period that lockdown restrictions are in place. The funding will be an un-ringfenced section 31 grant to provide maximum flexibility, but councils are expected to use the funding to deliver the activities and outcomes outlined in the Shielding Framework.

Domestic Abuse Capacity Building Fund

- 10.1.33. The Domestic Abuse Bill includes a new duty on Tier 1 local authorities to assess the need for, and commission support to victims and their children, safe accommodation in England. Each Local Authority in England has been allocated £0.050m to assist early planning and preparation work ahead of implementation of a new duty due to come into force April 2021. Further details of Birmingham's spending plans will be reported when known.

Covid Winter Grant Scheme

- 10.1.34. On 23rd November Government announced £170m would be made available in early December to support those most in need across England with the cost of food, energy, water bills and other essentials. Of this national amount, Birmingham has been allocated £5.189m. To date, £1.598m has been spent.

10.2. Human Resources

- 10.2.1. HR Covid-19 support began in February 2020 with the release of All Staff Guidance which communicated what was known about the virus at that time along with the initial precautions to take and where to seek further advice and guidance.
- 10.2.2. There followed a series of Manager Bulletins and staff guidance updates signposting HR mechanisms developed and implemented to support the workforce to continue to provide key services, whilst ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of BCC employees, service users and citizens. Regularly updated Covid-19 guidance for managers and employees has been made available on the council website, addressing the latest developments and issues raised by trade unions (accessible to all staff online).

Risk Reduction Framework/Risk Assessment

- 10.2.3. Following national guidance, a BCC specific Risk Reduction Framework was compiled outlining key considerations for employees in vulnerable groups, building related control measures that were being put into place and the process for services areas to follow with regards to continuing to provide services or in relation to those that may be considering a return to work. This framework supported staff with risk factors, including certain ethnic groups, older employees and staff with underlying medical conditions with a robust individual risk assessment to mitigate risks.
- 10.2.4. A prepopulated Sample Risk Assessment was developed for BCC and one tailored for schools and a number of MS Team risk assessment training courses were delivered to managers. A system was established for requesting PPE whereby the identification of such measures could via local risk assessment could be centrally assessed and supplied following a hierarchy of need.
- 10.2.5. The undertaking of both local risk assessments by managers and those related to properties and assets was also supported by HR, in addition to auditing the effectiveness and adequacy of those assessments when put into practice. Trade Union consultation took place throughout the process and feedback was used to shaped systems accordingly.
- 10.2.6. A wider stress risk assessment at service level was developed, with a pilot carried out within Waste. The identification of root cause stressors was conducted by Occupational Health, with the consideration of management interventions picked up by Organisational Development. This approach is now being offered to other teams where criteria is met and indicators direct the organisation towards the assessment of underlying factors related to the service.
- 10.2.7. A Health Surveillance Needs Assessment has been undertaken during the pandemic to confirm that the occupational health needs of the organisation are adequately managed. In line with this an annual return audit for those responsible for properties and assets (Responsible Persons) has been launched.
- 10.2.8. Lastly, a Be Heard audit of safety management was launched in November to increase central knowledge of the adequacy of arrangements in place related to health, safety and welfare of staff – both in relation to where they work and in relation to the activities they carry out.

Home working

- 10.2.9. With the implementation of Business Continuity Plans and the resultant increase in agile working, Home Working Guidance was updated and equipment (chairs, keyboards, mouse, camera, laptop riser) made available

to those working from home, along with establishing a safe process for collection and instructions for adjustment and use.

Covid-19 testing

- 10.2.10. BCC Keyworkers and those performing certain critical roles across Birmingham were provided access to Covid-19 tests via Occupational Health. A few thousand workers were triaged for testing with Birmingham and Solihull Clinical Commissioning Group prior to the .gov system going live. In addition, Birmingham care homes were sent a bundle of useful links to the various support available to them whilst working under some very difficult and upsetting circumstances.
- 10.2.11. Lateral Flow (rapid) Testing – HR and OD worked together with facilities and tactical cells to mobilise 80 staff to be recruited, onboarded, trained and paid in 4 days with the first test done at 8am on Friday 4th December. This will now be rolled out for prioritised workers and key partners across the city as part of the testing strategy.
- 10.2.12. LTS Allocation Roll Out – OH have developed a system for triaging Birmingham Keyworkers for a number of ringfenced COVID tests at Local Test Sites. This work will allow swift testing for those in critical roles when arranging a test via the .gov route may not be possible.

Flu vaccinations

- 10.2.13. The Flu Vaccination for BCC and BCT employees (including those working in maintained and non-maintained schools) was negotiated with an external provider and a booking system set up so that free access to the vaccine was easily achieved and without delay to further increase workforce resilience during the pandemic. 2000 employees accessed the vouchers and received a vaccine over the flu vaccine season.

Taxi Medicals

- 10.2.14. Occupational Health (OH) put measures in place to support Licencing with regards to the need to continue to perform taxi driver medicals during the pandemic, considering the significant risk of continue extension of the validity of the medical certificate. Both processes and office layouts underwent thorough risk assessment to allow the provision of this key service to continue.

Occupational Health Referrals

- 10.2.15. Manager referrals to Occupational Health understandably increased during the period, some of which continued to be related to BAU, the majority related to the pandemic. The team focused efforts on providing managers with sufficient guidance to support employees in front facing roles, employees with underlying health conditions, those within vulnerable groups

and those required to shield. The team also advising the development of associated local and individual risk assessments and interpreting the hierarchy of control measures and options made available.

Psychological Therapies

- 10.2.16. Occupational Health have set up Psychological Therapies (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) for both individuals and for team level interventions. The interventions are evidenced as the most effective currently available (as recommended within NICE guidelines).
- 10.2.17. Current coping mechanisms and the demands of role and working patterns are reviewed. The sessions are a proactive, evidence-based intervention for employees, aim at preventing sickness absence and the development of diagnosable mental health problems.

Strategic Cells

- 10.2.18. Representatives from HR have played a significant part in the Strategic Cells that were formed as a part of the command and control structure implemented during the major incident, with the Director for HR and Organisation Development taking charge of Business Continuity. Numerous cells meetings take place and are attended by HR daily and have supported the management of key emerging issues across BCC Directorates. HR have supported the Health and Welfare Cell and joint cell decisions regarding risk assessments and standing up services.

Sickness absence and RIDDOR reporting

- 10.2.19. The collection of and analysis of sickness absence data has been an important consideration during the pandemic in order to track any clusters, trigger the necessary manager interventions and HRs responsibilities under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrence (RIDDOR) Regulations to notify the HSE of any confirmed cases where there is reasonable evidence to suggest that the exposure was via the workplace / work activity. There has also been the additional need to verify the existence and adequacy of associated Risk Assessments in such circumstances.

Employee health and wellbeing

- 10.2.20. Since March 2020, Organisational Development's Culture Change Team (Health & Wellbeing) has increased the number of communications, resources and support for colleagues working remotely as they adjusted to the new ways of working, e.g. 4 pillars of support (Employee Assistance Programme, Mental Health First Aiders, Occupational Health, Chaplains), A-Z Wellbeing guide, monthly top tips now moved to fortnightly Your Wellbeing Matters newsletter, health and wellbeing support guide as a one-stop shop

for support and advice and other specific advice on financial wellbeing, sleep etc. These are available on the intranet.

- 10.2.21. The first-ever health and wellbeing survey was launched June 2020, and high-level results were published August, with presentations to Directorate Management Teams taking place between September to November. In September, directorate level results were published with audio recording and subtitles which were available for all staff to watch on the intranet. Furthermore, presentations to staff at directorate and divisional level were conducted to highlight the results of the survey, a high-level “you said, we’re doing”, and summarised to the 4 pillars of support.
- 10.2.22. The survey results indicated 20% of respondents were working carers (361 colleagues). Resources were directed towards the Working Carers Network and other Employee Networks such as the Menopause Workplace Forum to increase their presence and visibility so colleagues can access peer-to-peer support.
- 10.2.23. In October, for Domestic Abuse Awareness Month, BCC launched a safe space for colleagues to access support for colleagues who are survivors of domestic abuse including controlling behaviour and coercive behaviour. This safe space is for staff to be listened to, provided with initial support and signposted to specialised organisations. Further guidance and information is available on the intranet.
- 10.2.24. In terms of engagement, there were two Yam Jams, the first with Craig Scriven (Assistant Director for Organisational Development) in April 2020 and the second in October 2020 co-hosted with our Employee Network chairs, occupational health, the Stop Loan Sharks Team, and Organisational Development. Other engagement activities include:
- Managers Bulletins;
 - internal communications with intranet page articles;
 - Yammer Employee Health and Wellbeing group;
 - monthly top tips;
 - Your Wellbeing Matters fortnightly newsletter;
 - presentations to directorate and divisional teams;
 - and the launch of the first health and wellbeing focus group on 9th December 2020.
- 10.2.25. Furthermore, an Employee Assistance Programme survey was launched to capture 150 colleagues’ views on the existing service and what we need to consider for the procurement process for a new contract.

- 10.2.26. A draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy, alongside a second staff Health and Wellbeing Survey, has now been launched on the Intranet.

Trade Union consultation

- 10.2.27. Every week HR hold two meetings with Trade Unions to discuss 'business as usual' issues as well as issues arising from Covid-19. Trade Union feedback has shaped staff guidance and developed a number of processes to support staff during COVID response. After lengthy negotiation, agreement has been reached on a process to resolve as many HR cases as possible without the need for formal hearings. Following a request from trade unions to recognise additional costs for staff maintaining good hygiene by cleaning clothes/uniform/PPE, a payment was negotiated and made to staff at the end of 2020.

Business as usual activity

- 10.2.28. Business as usual has seen the development of the Council Plan which includes a more agile workforce adopting new ways of working, the Apprenticeship Strategy, improved Employee Relations, a review of pay and grading the development of further mandatory training sessions and senior leadership development programmes.
- 10.2.29. The Workforce Strategy has been refreshed to support delivery of Council Delivery Plan which includes culture change, workforce planning, performance, engagement, equality, diversity and inclusion.
- 10.2.30. In addition, the HR/OD Business Plan & Target Operating Model includes two critical programmes which have both progressed significantly during the pandemic; the 1B programme and New Ways of Working.
- 10.2.31. There has also been progress made with regards to property and asset compliance, improved standards at higher risk locations, and the development of a single Risk Marker System for field workers.

10.3. Corporate Procurement

- 10.3.1. The Council's corporate procurement function has supported the wider procurement of PPE and Covid-19 testing, by:
- Liaising with the LGA's national PPE Procurement group that regularly meet with DHSC, MHCLG, CO and DfE.
 - Discussing the market position with regional groups such as Warwickshire Manufacturers Alliance, Midlands Engine, WMCA and LEPs to then reflect this position back to DHSC to put the argument that a longer-term PPE strategy needs to provide local manufacturers/suppliers the opportunity to support the national supply.

- Liaising with regional Heads of Procurement to coordinate activity where required.
- Supporting the implementation of lateral flow testing in Birmingham, including the establishment of the hub at the Utilita Arena, letting contracts for a mobile testing service and pharmacy testing services. CPS is currently working on standardising engagement/contracting with employer and community spokes.

11. Brexit

11.1. Brexit Readiness Programme

- 11.1.1. While the United Kingdom officially left the European Union (EU) on 31st December 2019, that did not mean that Brexit was over. Throughout 2020 and the Covid-19 pandemic, Birmingham City Council has continued to prepare and plan for the end of the Brexit transition period on 31st December 2020, including the likely impact of any deal or 'no deal' scenarios.
- 11.1.2. The Brexit Readiness Programme (BRP) was established in 2019 to oversee the Council's preparations for Brexit, working across eight workstreams. These workstreams, and their main areas of focus, are briefly outlined here:
- **Workstream I – Trading Standards**
Monitoring and managing identified risks around imports, exports, product safety, market surveillance, fraud and changes to regulatory regimes.
 - **Workstream II – Environmental Health**
Supporting businesses around exports to the EU, particularly in relation to live exports and Export Health Certificates.
 - **Workstream III – EU Funding**
Understanding the impact of the loss of EU funding, both for the Council's EU-funded services and the wider West Midlands, and developing alternative funding strategies and ways of working.
 - **Workstream IV – EU Settlement Scheme**
Supporting the 94,000 European citizens in Birmingham to keep their rights to live and work in the UK, and access public services. This includes vulnerable adults, looked-after children, and care-leavers.

- **Workstream V – BCC Supply Chain and Procurement**

Focusing on potential challenges within the Council's supply chain due to changes in exchange rates and import costs, as well as any potential legal or operational issues with existing supplier contracts.

- **Workstream VI – Economic Impact on BCC Revenue & Services**

Understanding and preparing for the impact of the predicated economic shock on the Council's revenue and demand for services.

- **Workstream VII – Communication**

Development and implementation of a communication plan to inform and raise awareness of Brexit-related risks and issues, both internally and externally.

- **Workstream VIII – Regulatory Change**

Supporting other workstreams and Council services in monitoring regulatory changes as a result of Brexit, and understanding the likely impact of such changes.

11.1.3. The BRP provides a dedicated programme management function for the coordination and oversight of all Council activities relating to Brexit, ensuring a single point of contact for all Brexit-related issues, plans, risk assessments and reports. It also acts as liaison with a wide range of national and local stakeholders, including the WMCA, other local authorities in the West Midlands, national government departments and external stakeholders in the business community and voluntary sector.

11.1.4. The internal Brexit Contingency Working Group (BCWG), chaired by the Assistant Chief Executive and including representatives from all services involved in the Brexit response, continued to meet monthly throughout 2020.

11.1.5. In September 2020, Cabinet agreed a financial contribution of £198,000 from the Council's Policy Contingency Budget to extend the Brexit Readiness Programme for a period of one year from January 2021 onwards. The BRP will therefore continue to coordinate the Council's activities in relation to Brexit over the next twelve months, with a new focus on understanding the impact of the agreed Brexit deal on the Council, local communities and businesses, both in the short and longer-term.

11.2. Impact of Covid-19 on Brexit planning

11.2.1. At the beginning of 2020, it was hard to imagine that the Council would soon be facing a crisis even more pressing than the end of the transition period

and the possibility of a 'no-deal' Brexit. Over the last year, we have had to rise to the challenge of two 'once in a generation' events happening at the same time, with the Covid-19 outbreak in danger of diverting sorely-needed time, resources and attention from Brexit preparations.

- 11.2.2. The redeployment of national government and civil service resource away from Brexit planning to the Covid-19 response had a significant impact on preparations at every level, from interruptions to negotiations with the EU to delays in the clarification of key points of guidance around EU citizens' access to benefits. Continued levels of uncertainty all the way through to the end of the transition period threatened to undermine the ability of the Council, our partners, and the business community to effectively plan and assess risk.
- 11.2.3. The vast majority of economic forecasters predicted an economic shock in 2021 due to Brexit, creating 'perfect storm' conditions of a decrease in local authority revenues at the same time as an increase in demand for services. The only disagreement was on the extent of this decline, and whether the United Kingdom might avoid the reasonable worst-case scenario through the negotiation of a robust exit deal. Instead, we saw both United Kingdom and West Midlands GDP plunge in 2020 due to the Covid-19 crisis, with an increasingly volatile economic landscape making it even more difficult to accurately predict or mitigate the financial impact of Brexit. In November 2020, despite some early signs of economic recovery over the summer, UK GDP remained 8.5% below the level of February 2020 (the last month before the economic impact of the pandemic was felt).
- 11.2.4. By the end of 2020, many businesses found themselves in an extremely precarious financial position, and poorly positioned to prepare for the end of the Brexit transition period. Multiple national lockdowns and restrictions on operations, while necessary to keep people safe, dealt a significant blow to the Birmingham and West Midlands economy, and by November 2020 24% of UK businesses were reporting that they had either already run out of reserves, or would do so by the end of the year. Where resources and capacity still remained, businesses focussed on surviving the pandemic rather than preparing for the end of the transition period. Engagement with the local business community revealed a high level of 'change fatigue', with many businesses reluctant to begin planning for the end of the transition period without a final agreed deal. In a survey carried out by the British Chambers of Commerce, 32% of businesses reported that Covid-19 had reduced their capacity to effectively prepare for Brexit.
- 11.2.5. On 24th December 2020, a Trade and Cooperation Agreement was finally agreed between the UK and EU. Up until this point, all Brexit preparations had been taking place on a dual footing, forced to take into account the likelihood of both deal and 'no-deal' scenarios. While welcome, the last-

minute nature of this deal left both businesses and local authorities with less than a week to review the agreement and prepare for new regulations and restrictions on trade, coinciding with the Christmas and New Year holiday period. This challenge was further exacerbated by the emergence of a new, more contagious strain of Covid-19 in the south-east of England, leading to the temporary closure of the border with France and chaos at major ports.

- 11.2.6. Despite all these challenges, Birmingham City Council continued to work with local and national stakeholders throughout 2020 to prepare for the end of the transition period, taking a lead role in regional planning and communications through our membership in the West Midlands Combined Authority Brexit Pooled Fund.

11.3. Priority areas of focus

Loss of EU funding

- 11.3.1. In July 2020, we carried out an impact assessment to understand the impact of the loss of EU funding on Birmingham and the wider West Midlands and the risks for Council services. Between 2014 and 2020 the Council received £85 million in funding through the European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF), directly supporting 78 FTE staff and a number of projects and services that will play a key role in the Covid-19 economic recovery. These include SME support, employment and skills, youth and career services, urban planning and regeneration, and the transition to a zero-carbon economy.
- 11.3.2. In 2017, national government announced its intention to establish a UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to replace ESIF funding, ensuring that communities across the UK would not lose out as a result of Brexit. However, following that initial announcement, no further information was forthcoming about the design of the fund or how much funding would be available, affecting our ability to plan for the long-term and putting some of our most vital services at risk of closure.
- 11.3.3. The very nature of the ESIF means that its loss, without an adequate UK replacement scheme, would disproportionately impact regions like the West Midlands and dramatically increase regional inequalities, putting Birmingham at a further disadvantage as we seek to recover from Covid-19. Over the last few months of 2020 we stepped up our lobbying to national government for further information about the UKSPF. Through the BRP, and our membership in key partnerships including Core Cities and the WMCA, we will continue to press for further details of the UKSPF and the funding that Birmingham and the West Midlands can expect to receive.

Assessing supplier risk

- 11.3.4. In the latter months of 2020, as part of the preparations for a potential 'no-deal' scenario, we carried out an online survey with over 561 unique vendors to the Council to understand their Brexit preparedness and the level of risk to the Council. Within this group, we identified 242 'priority' vendors, holding 327 key contracts for the Council.
- 11.3.5. We received responses from approximately 27% of vendors, providing key data that we used to RAG rate their Brexit preparedness and assess risk to Council services and key corporate functions. Where responses were rated Amber, contract managers were alerted so that they could proactively identify, manage and mitigate any risks or arising issues.

European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS)

- 11.3.6. There are an estimated 94,000 European citizens in Birmingham, and they represent a valuable part of our global community. To retain their right to live and work in the UK, and access public services, they must apply for the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS) by the 20th June 2021.
- 11.3.7. We are aware that there are still a large number of EU citizens – potentially as many as 20,000 – that have yet to apply to the EUSS. A significant proportion of this group will be vulnerable citizens who need guidance support to complete their applications, and there is an important role for the Council to play in providing this support, working alongside our partners in the voluntary and community sector.
- 11.3.8. Local authorities and health and social care trusts supporting looked after children and care leavers have mandatory obligations to identify and register all eligible children to the EUSS.
- 11.3.9. Over the past few years we have carried out a range of engagement activities to get the message out about the need to apply for settled status, as well as offer additional support to those who may need help with their application. This includes:
- The creation of a dedicated EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) information and guidance page on the Council website, including information about local organisations that are able to provide further support
 - A BCC EUSS social media campaign, with videos of EU citizens working for BCC sharing their own experiences of the EUSS
 - The establishment of an EUSS Working Group, working together with voluntary sector organisations and community groups across Birmingham. This group meets regularly to discuss progress and challenges in the scheme, and build a collaborative approach to

improve the support and advice available to EU citizens in Birmingham.

- Publication of an open letter to Birmingham citizens, on behalf of the Deputy Leader, asking everyone to get the word out about the EUSS

11.3.10. The BRP successfully applied for grant funding from the Home Office to run a series of targeted engagement activities between November 2020 and March 2021, reaching out to EU citizens in vulnerable groups. This money will be used for:

- Basic advice, engagement and signposting: OISC L1 advice will be provided by partner organisations. This advice and guidance will be outreach based as much as possible, with “hosting” arrangements coordinated by the BCC EUSS Project Coordinator, who will access the BCC ASC Neighbourhood Networks Community Asset Register of over 1,000 trusted community organisations.
- Expert immigration advice for practical support with EUSS applications: This advice will be follow-on for complex casework identified as part of the project activities providing basic advice and information. There will also be access to this advice through referrals into other projects (same partners; to avoid double counting).
- Community Champions training scheme: 30 volunteers to be trained from specific EU communities in the city. Trained to identify and signpost to agencies.
- Small-scale community events: Up to three community drop-in style events to be organised and targeted in specific areas or communities in the city.
- Training for frontline staff: Training to be produced and provided for Job Centres, Social Workers, Housing Officers, and VCS (including commissioned providers of services in: homelessness, modern slavery, children in care) to recognise, inform and signpost on EUSS. Includes regular info sheets / briefings to larger networks such as schools.
- EUSS Document ID Scanning location: Becoming an ID Scanning location will allow the Council to take an active role in supporting EUSS applications for people with limited digital access. The service will be available at a “home” in the Libraries or Registry Office Services and will also be partially mobile, visiting libraries, places of worship, community centres, etc.

- Designated monitoring and tracking capacity for children in care and care leavers: A new post for the Children's Trust to understand and track progress with the registration of children in care. They will support social workers in identifying eligible children and in ensuring they have access to information, advice and training on EUSS through the project partners.

11.3.11. We have also successfully bid for additional funding from the West Midlands Combined Authority Brexit Pooled Fund, for a collaborative communications campaign across the West Midlands, aiming to:

- Develop a WM approach to guide, support and encourage the EU citizens to apply for the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) and get their status,
- Improve the collaboration and coordination of the EUSS initiatives in WM led by the Home Office, local authorities, voluntary sector organisations and community groups,
- Develop and implement a West Midlands specific communication campaign focusing on:
 - Warm, clear and simple messaging for the targeted audience (especially the vulnerable groups),
 - Signpost to all available advice & support including the voluntary sector organisations funded by the Home Office
 - Communicate the important notices, modifications, adjustments and new deadlines,
 - Using different communication channels and materials, such as:
 - Banners on school railings,
 - Posters for bus stops, GP surgeries, police stations, housing associations, etc.
 - Leaflets for social workers, housing officers, etc. who are in direct contact with EU citizens and their family members, especially the vulnerable groups).

11.4. Understanding the impact of Brexit

11.4.1. The UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) is one of the biggest trade deals ever made, providing a framework for the future UK-EU relationship in several key areas. However, it will not end the debate on the United Kingdom's relationship with Europe and the future role that we want to play on the international stage.

- 11.4.2. Uncertainty for businesses and local authorities is likely to continue well into 2020, as the implications of the TCA are better understood. The TCA falls short of the UK's stated aspirations in several key areas, and there is much still to be negotiated, including:
- Mutual recognition of professional qualifications
 - UK membership of EU standardisation and regulatory bodies
 - Service sector and financial services
 - Data sharing provisions
- 11.4.3. We can expect the longer-term impact on the economy to become more visible with time as the costs of compliance begin to stack up for businesses and further negotiations take place.
- 11.4.4. Birmingham City Council will have a key role to play in the months and years ahead - not just in providing support and guidance to businesses, but in understanding the longer-term social, cultural and economic impact of Brexit for Birmingham and the West Midlands. The immediate challenge for the Council will be to understand the specific impacts of Brexit and where these diverge from and interact with the impacts of Covid-19, and what this means for the Birmingham recovery journey.