

Executive Business Report

Birmingham City Council

City Council

22nd June 2021



Subject: Update on Birmingham City Council's continuing response to COVID-19 and proposed approach to recovery

Report of: Cabinet

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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 September 2020 and February 2021.
- 1.2. The focus of this report is on the Council's proposed approach to recovery planning, including emerging governance for delivery of economic and community recovery strategies.
- 1.3. In addition, this report provides an update on the Council's continuing response to the Covid-19 pandemic, identifying challenges and opportunities within individual service areas and considerations for the resumption of 'business and usual' services.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That the report be noted.

3. Introduction

- 3.1. As we head into the summer of 2021, it is sobering to realise that we have been living with the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic for over a year. In March

2020, when we entered the first period of national lockdown restrictions, no one could have anticipated the extent or the length of the crisis that we were facing. In many fundamental ways, Covid-19 has changed our world, and our city, forever. From international travel to local high streets, and from primary schools to live music venues, there is no areas of our lives left untouched by the pandemic. The social and economic impact of the virus will be with us for many decades to come, leaving an indelible mark on the global landscape.

- 3.2. Of course, the most profound impact of the pandemic is marked by the number of people lost. At the time of writing this report, Birmingham has lost 2,995 people to the virus. We extend our most sincere sympathies to all those across the city who have lost friends, family members and loved ones to Covid-19.
- 3.3. While the pandemic has been with us for a year, it has exposed and exacerbated long-running structural inequalities across Birmingham, revealing issues that have been hidden in plain sight for decades. The moral imperative to tackle these inequalities, and rebuild the resilience of all our communities, must play a major role in the wider recovery to ensure that we build a city that works for all our citizens.
- 3.4. Despite the challenges posed by Covid-19, we must look towards the future with hope. Birmingham City Council owes a duty to all citizens; not just to return to 'the way things were' before the pandemic, but to use this opportunity to reset, rethink, and reimagine a future in which everyone has an equal chance for success. Working with partners, we want to collectively raise ambitions across the city, building on our existing strengths and making the most of transformational opportunities such as the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games and HS2.
- 3.5. This will incorporate the key priorities outlined in the Council Delivery Plan: shifting focus from crisis to prevention, delivering sustainable growth, and embedding new ways of working across the Council.
- 3.6. We will take the lessons learned from the pandemic into the recovery. Working closely with partners and communities, including the voluntary sector, the Council will set out a bold and ambitious vision for the future of our city, putting Birmingham at the forefront of innovative policy and social transformation.
- 3.7. Details in relation to specific areas of response can be found as follows:
 - Recovery Planning and Governance; pages 3 – 10
 - Health & Wellbeing; pages 10 - 28
 - Education, Skills and Children's Wellbeing; pages 28 - 54
 - Communities (including Housing, Bereavement Services, and Community Safety); pages 54 - 74

- Street Scene & Parks (including Waste Management); pages 75 - 78
- Transport; pages 78 - 85
- Covid-19 Support Grants (including Business Support Grants); 85 - 90
- Council Finances and Resources (including Corporate Procurement and HR); 90 -101

4. Our approach to recovery

4.1.1. Prior to the pandemic, Birmingham was seeing growth at almost twice the rate of London, and four times the national average. While Covid-19 has had a profound impact on the city, both economically and socially, we are exceptionally well placed to become a global leader in recovery. With a number of transformational opportunities on the horizon, including the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games and the arrival of HS2, and the investment of millions of pounds of investment into the region, we are ready to take bold and decisive action to maximise opportunities for recovery across the city.

4.1.2. A forthcoming paper to Cabinet in July 2021 will set out the Council's strategic framework for recovery, bringing together the key themes, opportunities and decisions. This will include our approach to performance monitoring, and how we intend to evaluate the success of our recovery programme.

4.1.3. In addition to flagship economic and community recovery programmes, work is taking place across the Council to identify priority areas that have been significantly impacted by the pandemic. These include services in early years, mental health, domestic abuse, and housing. Individual recovery plans and activities are being developed in these areas, including the allocation of additional resource to insight and data functions to ensure that we have the intelligence we need to support communities.

4.2. Maximising opportunities for recovery across the city

4.2.1. This has been a challenging year for Birmingham businesses, one which has necessitated a shift in our focus in order to respond to both immediate and changing future needs. We have continued delivering the Business Growth fund during this quarter as well as other grants to businesses. Over the course of the year we have successfully delivered a £10.8m Discretionary Grant Scheme supporting 1,700 businesses, alongside a £29.3m Additional Restrictions Grant Scheme (ARG) supporting 11,600 businesses. We are also working up proposals for a £7m Recovery Fund to help businesses to move from survival to recovery to be introduced in July 2021 and run to the end of

March 2022. This will be funded by an indicative £7m ARG top-up from national government.

- 4.2.2. We have supported businesses in their preparation for the planned easing of restrictions by taking steps to provide greater space for outdoor hospitality activity from April 12th 2021. We have closed roads to traffic in the city centre and allowed Victoria Square to be used for informal outdoor seating. We have also increased the footway widening and parklets installed in 2020 to support the latest reopening. These temporary changes will maximise economic activity and support local business while Covid-19 restrictions remain in place but will have an impact on delivery of the City Centre Public Realm works, with some projects delayed as a result.
- 4.2.3. But we must also focus on the future, and how we build back our economy.
- 4.2.4. Our Urban Centres have been increasingly important throughout the Pandemic and are a key part of the city's recovery. The Levelling Up Fund and other recently launched government investment funding will further allow projects within our centres to be progressed and we hope to maximise opportunities arising from these. Our development and regeneration projects, which will act to stimulate growth across the city, have also progressed over this quarter. These include Birmingham Smithfield where the demolition contract has been awarded and enabling and infrastructure works begun, Paradise where work has continued on Phase 2 of the development, and the City Centre Enterprise Zone, where funding approval for public realm improvements has been obtained. In addition, critical progress has been made on our East Birmingham Inclusive Growth project with the Delivery Board now established and the strategy adopted. The project Delivery Plan is now in development.
- 4.2.5. To further support the city's recovery, we need to maximise the economic value of the upcoming Commonwealth Games. A major milestone was achieved this quarter with our partners, the West Midlands Growth Company, successfully submitting to Government the Full Business Case for the £23.6m Commonwealth Games Business and Tourism Programme (formerly the Trade Tourism and Investment programme). This programme will promote Birmingham, the West Midlands and the wider UK as a world-class destination for trade, investment, education and tourism, drive long-term economic benefit and boost the UK and region's global reputation.
- 4.2.6. The development of a regeneration framework for Perry Barr – which will make best use of the opportunities presented by the Games and existing investment as a catalyst for future inclusive growth – also continues apace, with a particular focus on a spatial masterplan and delivery plan. Thematic Advisory Groups have been established and local engagement meetings are underway. Emerging themes include delivering new housing and infrastructure to support growth, creating a healthy place, maximising access to green spaces, knitting

new development into existing communities, and creating a strong and future-proof Urban Centre.

- 4.2.7. The existing programme of regeneration in Perry Barr has seen during this quarter the topping out of all the residential plots under construction on the former Birmingham City University site, and the removal of the flyover. Demolition to facilitate further highways works has been completed, and the early works for the station redevelopment are underway. Consultations on both Our Future City Plan and the Birmingham Design Guide, which will shape development in the City Centre and across Birmingham, have concluded during this quarter. Comments will now need to be assessed and revisions made.
- 4.2.8. Birmingham Municipal Housing Trust (BMHT) development across the city this quarter as resulted in 17 rental and 11 sales units being handed over, giving a year-end total of 108 rental and 43 sales units. Some delays continue as a result of Brexit leading to increased shortages and longer supply times on key elements including bricks, timber and steel. Prospects for additional development continue to be pursued, with BMHT having signed contracts on three projects for a total of 107 units during this quarter and are near to concluding an additional two contracts for another 421 units. BMHT are also looking very carefully at future house types with a view to changes in building regulations and the council's commitment to reducing carbon emissions.
- 4.2.9. We see Development Management Service performance going from strength to strength which assists the economic recovery plan. Over the past year we have dealt with over 10,000 applications, with nearly 8500 decisions being issued (significantly more than any other Core City). Performance continues to improve month on month, and is now better than it has been since at least 2013. New protocols have been adopted to improve the quality of the service and the speed of decision making has increased from about 75%-85% of applications dealt with in time at the beginning of the year to now around 90%. Planning Committee has approved a number of major applications which play an important role in terms of economic recovery and creating confidence.
- 4.2.10. The Cumulative Capital Receipts, generated through the disposal of council assets, totalled £38,634,244 by the end of Q4. This is significantly above our original target of £30m. Generating capital receipts from disposing of surplus assets provides a cost-efficient method of funding the Council's capital investment programme. The Asset Valuation programme was completed by the end of March and additional valuations required for the accounts are currently underway.

4.3. **Economic Recovery Strategy**

- 4.3.1. Following a successful consultation exercise, the Birmingham City Council Economic Recovery Strategy was approved by Cabinet in March 2021. The

Strategy sets out the Council's role in supporting the city's economic recovery, and contains a range of development schemes which have the potential to add significant value to the local and regional economy, in addition to creating new jobs for residents.

4.3.2. The Strategy is based around four key priorities, aligning with both the Council Delivery Plan and the Community Recovery Programme:

- Creating a more inclusive economy
- Taking more radical action to achieve zero carbon emissions
- Strengthening our public services
- Building the strength and resilience of communities

4.3.3. Work is underway on proposals for a cross-partner Economic Recovery Implementation Group to oversee delivery of the strategy, working across the city to ensure an inclusive approach to recovery that leaves no one behind. This will include representatives from across the business community in addition to anchor organisations who play a key role in the local economy.

4.3.4. In addition to the Economic Recovery Implementation Group, an Employment Taskforce will be established to tackle the rapid rise in employment caused by the pandemic. This will join up activity across the city on skills development, economic development and unemployment, seeking to avoid duplication while maximising the benefits of a partnership approach. Youth unemployment will be an initial priority area for the Taskforce, taking a strategic approach to funding and investment to tackle the rise in NEETs and safeguard the future of young people across Birmingham.

4.3.5. An initial roundtable event took place on 26th May 2021 to help drive this area of work, bringing together over 60 representatives of stakeholder organisations from across the city and wider region.

4.4. **Community recovery**

4.4.1. During the course of the pandemic the Community Recovery 'cell', through the Community Recovery Working Group, has continued its work as a coordination and networking group, and has played a key role in facilitating the Birmingham Recovery Framework and a piece of work by Locality on Birmingham's Collaborative Neighbourhoods.

Birmingham Recovery Framework

4.4.2. From the earliest stages of the pandemic a co-ordinated voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector approach has been central to the civil response to the emergency. The Council has a long-term relationship with BVSC and, prior to the pandemic in 2019-20, established a strategic partnership arrangement. This arrangement aims to deliver a transformational

approach to engagement between the Council and VCFSE sector and seeks to bring together services and activities in an integrated way to meet the strategic challenges the city faces.

- 4.4.3. The Council deployed its partnership with BVSC early in the pandemic, with BVSC mobilising and coordinating the sector through the establishment of a cross-city VCFSE partnership (the C-19 Support Brum Partnership). This enabled the Covid-19 civil society response to be co-ordinated at a neighbourhood level (building on existing NNS structures and processes) as well as specialist thematic groups (including disabilities, domestic abuse, housing and homelessness, children and families, and mental health). There was daily contact with the Council through the command structures, and the sector response was mobilised within 48 hours using a distributed leadership approach.
- 4.4.4. The strength of this partnership approach and the results it has delivered for communities is now being recognised at a regional and national level as an exemplar in delivering a systematic and strategic approach to the Covid-19 crisis. This response to the pandemic has demonstrated the benefit of the much wider strategic and operational dialogues that can take place between the Council and VCFSE sector. The opportunity exists to maintain this momentum.
- 4.4.5. BVSC (in its strategic partner role) has been engaging with the Council and a range of cross sector partners both locally and nationally to start shaping the Covid-19 recovery vision. There is an aspiration in Birmingham to deliver something wider than just 'recovery' and an opportunity to consolidate the strong local authority/VCFSE sector working relationships that have been confirmed by the partnership approach to supporting communities throughout the crisis.
- 4.4.6. This has led to the development of a proposed Birmingham Recovery Framework by BVSC in partnership with the Council. The Framework sets out the strategic approach and delivery framework for community recovery. It reflects key existing plans and agendas (including Localisation, economic recovery, Everyone's Battle Everyone's Business, and WMCA's levelling up roadmap) and pieces together various emerging strands of thinking and activity to enable the Council to influence, inform, and embrace its role as a partner in communities. There is recognition that this is an evolving space which will continue to be influenced by the ongoing engagement with citizens, VCSFC sector, and elected members.
- 4.4.7. The Framework sets out a series of proposed actions and priorities that have been grouped together under six recovery themes:
 - 1. Develop a city recovery vision built on collaborative public services

2. Inclusive Economic Recovery, tackling existing and new inequalities so that no one is left behind
3. Community Capacity, Community Power, infrastructure and platforms of support to VCFSE organisations
4. Social Recovery, use of prevention, early intervention, whole life course approaches which changes our relationships with citizens
5. Localisation working in neighbourhoods
6. Service Integration across organisations to achieve an effective system for recovery

4.4.8. Several key shared principles are at the heart of the proposed approach, including being citizen-focussed; working through partners in communities; prioritising prevention and early intervention; and, tackling new and existing inequalities.

4.4.9. Delivery of the framework will be coordinated by the Community Recovery Board (covered in more detail below) which will work closely with the Community Recovery Working Group and other forums to advise on priorities, identify gaps, and ensure implementation of community recovery activity.

4.4.10. The Framework is due to be presented at Cabinet in July 2021.

Birmingham's Collaborative Neighbourhoods

4.4.11. Over spring/summer 2020, Locality were commissioned by the Neighbourhood Development and Support Unit (NDSU) within City Operations (previously Neighbourhoods Directorate) to undertake research into the response to the pandemic by the city's community organisations.

4.4.12. Interviews and roundtables were carried out with 11 community organisations, 10 Pioneer Places (made up of multiple community organisations and services), Council and sector stakeholders, elected Members, and Council officers. An existing report by Locality ('We were built for this') – which looks at the community response to coronavirus across the country – was used as a comparison and reference point.

4.4.13. The report produced by Locality ('Birmingham's Collaborative Neighbourhoods' (August 2020)) provides a snapshot of Birmingham's community-led response and what this means for resetting the civic and community relationship, particularly in the context of the Localisation agenda and post-Covid-19 recovery.

4.4.14. Locality produced a set of recommendations across the following four key themes:

1. Support a community powered economic recovery
2. Build collaborative public services

3. Turn community spirit into community power

4. Develop an approach to culture change across the Council

4.4.15. This will require the Council to work at a more local level and ensure solutions to the city's challenges are rooted in the experiences of our diverse communities. This aligns with our approach to Localisation as we strive to improve neighbourhood working and to build a culture of participation and public engagement.

4.4.16. Locality's recommendations form part of the Community Recovery workstream.

Community Recovery Governance Arrangements

4.4.17. New governance arrangements for community recovery are being finalised in readiness for the transition from emergency 'response' to 'recovery' in line with the Government's roadmap at the end of June 2021. While the roadmap may be pushed back, the differential impacts are being experienced by our citizens right now and the Council is ensuring it is on the front foot to respond to these challenges.

4.4.18. A proposal to establish a Community Recovery Board is due to be presented at Cabinet in July 2021 and members have already met in 'shadow' to scope governance and priorities and will continue to do so prior to the formal transition from response into recovery.

4.4.19. The Board will play a key role in ensuring the Council can achieve success against the six themes set out in the Birmingham Recovery Framework. The primary purpose of the Board will be to coordinate and provide collective direction for the strategic approach and actions required around community recovery. However, it will also consider wider recovery links prior to EMT, Cabinet, and partnership documentation, including the following workstreams:

- Economic recovery
- Youth and adult pathways to employment, education and/or training
- Early years
- Mental health
- Domestic abuse
- Housing

4.4.20. The Board will be chaired by the Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion, Community Safety and Equalities (Councillor Cotton), with representation from BVSC (the Council's strategic partner organisation) as vice-chair. Internal thematic leads will be identified. A key objective for members will be to work collaboratively in order to examine and connect recovery workstreams across

internal and external programmes as well as the Council's wider reform work. The Board will feed into EMT as the Council sponsoring body for recovery and the City Board as the partnership sponsoring body for recovery.

- 4.4.21. Across the wider recovery programme, we are stepping up supporting resource (including a dedicated Programme Manager for Recovery and a Programme Director for the Housing workstream). We are also capitalising on key opportunities from a resourcing perspective (including bidding for emergency funds for prevention and promotion of mental health and wellbeing activity post Covid-19). Conversations are also underway to establish what recovery means in terms of levelling up. Any financial implications arising will be considered as part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

5. Health and Wellbeing

5.1. Adult Social Care

- 5.1.1. Since the last Executive Business Report Update in February 2021, the nation has seen a gradual lifting of Covid-18 restrictions. The Adult Social Care Directorate has continued to work with our citizens and partners, both statutory and non-statutory, as we take tentative steps towards recovery. Below is an outline of how the Directorate is working with some of those most impacted by restrictions, including those supported through our Day Centres, Carers Services, our wider community organisations and our partners. It also flags the impact on performance and finances and how these are now progressing in line with targets. Lastly, the section provides an update on how the Directorate is engaging with local and national partners around the development of 'Integrated Care Systems', which are due to be implemented nationally by 2022.

Supporting our service users

- 5.1.2. Day Opportunities services support approximately 1800 citizens with a wide range of support needs, including: older people, people with learning disabilities, people with autism, people with a physical disability, and people with mental ill health.
- 5.1.3. Due to the impact of the pandemic, Day Centres in Birmingham closed in March 2020. During the closure period, insights gathered from assessments, feedback from families and providers, and national reporting showed an increase in:
- reduced social interaction and cognitive stimulation
 - poor physical and mental wellbeing of citizens and carers
 - breakdown of routines for citizens and carers

- self-harming, aggressive and destructive behaviours of citizens
- fatigue, stress, lack of sleep for carers

5.1.4. BCC and external provider teams have maintained regular contact with citizens and their carers throughout the lockdown period. Because of the national Covid-19 restrictions, there have been limited options to support carers, but day care providers have worked hard to implement creative programmes of outreach support. These include: telephone and online services; doorstep and garden visits; assistance with appointments; virtual dance sessions; and online karaoke and Zoom chats. Distance Learning Packs proved extremely popular, with many themed around calendar celebrations such as Easter, VE day and Diwali.

5.1.5. After publication of the national government's 'Roadmap out of Lockdown' guidance, a process for reassessing the needs and preferences of Day Centre users commenced. Consideration of how to support citizens to transition back into a service is built into all service re-opening plans. The easing of restrictions enabled a phased reopening of Birmingham Day Cares from 26th April 2021. Due to on-going restrictions, reopening plans involve managing risks and being flexible to adapt to changing requirements. To minimise the risk of infection, services are initially able to operate at approximately 35% of pre-Covid-19 capacity. Outreach support is still being provided for those citizens who are either unable to attend centre-based services due to restrictions, or have chosen to delay returning to their centre.

5.1.6. As of 10th May 2021, of the nine BCC internal day centres and four gardening projects: six are open, five will have reopened by 1st June, and two are unable to confirm a date at this stage due to building related issues. There are also 44 Day Opportunity providers external to BCC, operating across 60 sites, 9 of which are outside of Birmingham boundary. As of 10th May, 36 sites are open, 11 more will have reopened by 1st June and 13 are unable to confirm a date at this stage due to building related issues.

5.1.7. Monitoring of both centre-based and outreach activity will continue for the foreseeable future, providing insight into the impact of the pandemic on citizens and carers.

Supporting our carers

5.1.8. The Directorate has continued to work closely with Forward Carers (Birmingham Carers Hub) to tailor the offer of support in line with the lifting of restrictions. All carer providers and commissioners have been meeting on a fortnightly basis to address any issues arising from Covid. Through enhanced partnership working, providers have been able to combine resources to deliver an effective service to our carers, as well as increasing responsiveness to rapidly changing circumstances.

- 5.1.9. Forward Carers are now focusing on wellbeing, resilience and recovery for staff and supporting delivery partners. The organisation is also beginning to think about how to support carers to resume face-to-face contact. Services are looking at the possibility of holding small face-to-face sessions during Carers Week, and hoping that the summer will provide opportunities for more outside contact.
- 5.1.10. Over the last quarter partners came together with NHS vaccination leads to support the roll out of the vaccine to informal carers (as prioritised by the Joint Committee on Vaccine and Immunisation). Each partner took a highly collaborative approach; doing what they said they were going to do and communicating regularly. Partners worked together in a solution focused and action orientated way, acknowledging the national policy but not being constrained by it - making decisions to do what was right locally. There were no complicated procedures or processes, things were kept as simple as possible.
- 5.1.11. This process provided a valuable opportunity for the health, social care and carers organisations to work collaboratively and effectively. There is a commitment from members to continue working together as a BSOL-wide carers group to:
- Improve GP engagement – partners have established a small working group to consider the role of GPs in identifying and signposting carers to Forward Carers/Carers Trust.
 - Cleanse data on emails and phone numbers for carers.
 - Approach NHS Digital to propose that information about local carers services is sent out to all those who came forward for a vaccine.
 - Hold regular BSOL meetings so we can work together on common issues, e.g. GPs, Carers Week in June.

Supporting our community organisations

- 5.1.12. The network of community organisations that supported the city through the peak of the pandemic are continuing to deliver core elements of support such as financial advice, access to food and crisis payments, and information, advice and guidance (IAG) services. The capacity of these support structures was strengthened through targeted funding from the Emergency Assistance Grant and they continue to receive ongoing requests for support. A proposal to continue funding BVSC to retain the current infrastructure until the end of March 2022 is being considered, as this would enable both the development of community recovery and also ensure that mechanisms are in place to step up a community response in the event of a third wave.

- 5.1.13. The Council's Insight Programme are working with the Directorate to analyse data on levels of vulnerability across the city during the pandemic. The team have mapped demands at a locality level and to develop strategies to support vulnerable citizens in the longer-term. A learning session is planned for May/June 2021 to explore this further.
- 5.1.14. 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 and the changes associated with recovery. 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.
- 5.1.15. 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.
- 5.1.16. 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 the Corporate Leadership Team. BVSC have developed an action plan and the Recovery Group is in the process of identifying lead senior officers against the actions.

Supporting our health and care system

- 5.1.17. Over the course of 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.
- 5.1.18. Although Covid-19 demand has decreased in hospitals, there continues to be a high number of people attending A&E, and high levels of activity across hospital sites. Hospitals and out-of-hospital teams are experiencing unpredictable levels of demand, and continue to focus on supporting people to remain at home wherever possible. Support is being provided to maintain the health and wellbeing of people who use services and the social care workforce, including unpaid carers. This continues to present a potential risk to capacity, as staff are tired and fatigued by the past year and ongoing pressures in the system.
- 5.1.19. As we move into recovery planning, system partners are working together to build on and embed streamlined processes in line with the Hospital Discharge Service Operating Model and Policy.

Performance update

- 5.1.20. Social Care and Health have continued to provide extensive support to registered care providers during the last quarter and throughout the pandemic. Officers have published regular information and guidance, secured the continued funding for a dedicated Infection Control Service, and continue to support providers around Covid testing and vaccination of the Social Care workforce. The Directorate has distributed over £23m in national grants and £3m Council funding to support providers during the crisis.
- 5.1.21. The Customer Journey model has bolstered our strengths and community assets approach. Our Early Intervention Teams have been working on embedding the multidisciplinary approach, applying the home first principles, reducing length of stay and improving outcomes for citizens. This has contributed to our success in supporting over 70% of people to receive adult social care in their home. The number of people placed permanently in care homes rose against the Directorates overall direction of travel due to Covid-19. There was an impact on shared lives carer recruitment and slower progress on increasing Direct Payment uptake, though the Directorate remains in Top Quartile performance for this measure. As we move into the recovery phase, performance has started to improve and come back into line with the overall desired direction of travel.
- 5.1.22. Work is progressing to bring together social care, community nursing, therapy services, GP practices and mental health services into multi-disciplinary teams by April 2022. Similarly, the joint working between children's and adults' services continues, supporting young people in transition to achieve outcomes around employment, housing, health, relationships. The development of the preparation for adulthood services has already received more than 250 connection requests, demonstrating the benefits of more joined up ways of working.
- 5.1.23. Many staff continue to work from home due to the ongoing closure of Central Administrative Buildings. The Directorate are fully engaging in the 'New Ways of Working' programme to ensure that we maximise the organisational and personal benefits that this approach offers. Work continues to support staff and managers to adjust to the change and ensure that service outcomes continue to improve.

Financial position

- 5.1.24. The final outturn for ASC in 2020/21 was very close to the position we have been forecasting all year. All savings have been delivered and additional Covid-19 spend managed effectively, with the use of external grant funding maximised where possible.

- 5.1.25. For the current financial year, it is currently forecast that ASC will deliver in year “step up” savings included in the approved budget of just under £9m. The service has a fully funded budget for 2021/22 but risks remain regarding the residual impact of Covid-19, as well as any unmet need in the Community which could impact on the service as lockdown eases. These will continue to be closely monitored through the financial year.
- 5.1.26. Looking forward, 2021/22 is the final year of the current 4-year Adults Transformation Programme. Officers are now developing business cases which will form the basis of the next stage of Service Transformation, linked to the ongoing development of system-wide partnership-working with health.

Integrated Care Systems

- 5.1.27. National Government has published a White Paper proposing changes to the way the NHS operates at a local level from 2022. A key part of this change will be the development of Integrated Care Systems (ICSs). ICSs are new partnerships between health and social organisations within an area, working together to coordinate services and to plan in a way that improves population health and reduces inequalities between different groups. They are a key part of the NHS Long-Term Plan and are intended to bring about major changes in how health and care services are planned, paid for and delivered. They are likely to become statutory bodies that bring together providers, commissioners and other local partners, to collectively plan and integrate care to meet the needs of their population.
- 5.1.28. The Council is engaging both nationally and locally with regards to the planned introductions of ICSs, and has advocated strongly for adult social care organisations to have parity with NHS bodies. With regards to Birmingham, the Council is calling for the continuation of a clear line of accountability between the ICS, the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Health Overview and Scrutiny committee. It has proposed that ICSs need to create an ambitious vision for health and wellbeing which is co-produced with citizens, so that any ICS has at its heart the priorities of citizens and reflects the diversity of the city. To achieve this, the Council is proposing that ICSs must be centred around personalisation and support people to take responsibility for and control of their care and health.
- 5.1.29. The Directorate supports the concept of devolution of resources and capacity to Birmingham as a single place, with the recognition that some functions are better done at an ICS or regional level. For this to be successful it is recognised that there needs to be alignment of local authority and NHS commissioning budgets for community health and wellbeing, and a lead role for the Council in commissioning these at the Place level.

5.2. **Public Health**

Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) Strategy Development

- 5.2.1. Public Health are supporting the refresh of the Health and Wellbeing Board's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy – Creating a Healthier City.
- 5.2.2. This strategy, which sets out the key health and wellbeing priorities for the City for 2022-2030, has selected areas for action based upon the latest data from a range of sources, including: public consultation on the Public Health Green Paper; the commissioned Covid-19 impact ethnographic study; Covid-19 insight surveys, and findings from local 'seldom heard voices' engagement. The strategy ensures that Covid-19 recovery is a cross-cutting element throughout.
- 5.2.3. It sets out ten themes for action and SMART ambitions across the life course and wider determinants of health. These include a theme setting out areas for action across the health and care system to mitigate the legacy of Covid-19.

Food

- 5.2.4. A wide range of work is underway on the Food agenda, and the Council is currently recruiting to a dedicated food team within Public Health to accelerate this work.
- 5.2.5. The Creating a Healthy Food City Forum is in the process of developing a Food Strategy for the city. Alongside this, it is also creating an Emergency Food Plan as an interim measure during the ongoing Covid-19 response; this is a live document that ensures that areas of assistance to the response can be strategically shaped and implemented.
- 5.2.6. Birmingham's Food Poverty Core Group has been re-established to ensure a robust and coordinated response to the various issues around food. The April 2021 meeting of this group focused on crisis management.
- 5.2.7. Birmingham has been elected to one of two seats representing European cities in the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Secretariat. Through our presence in this forum, we will be helping to lead pan-city thinking on cultural dimensions of the food system and the political narrative around food justice.
- 5.2.8. The Childhood Obesity Trailblazer Programme is continuing to develop following a pause on activity during Covid-19, and partners are being commissioned to accelerate the apprenticeship health and wellbeing curriculum and the Birmingham data basket.

Physical activity

- 5.2.9. The Creating a Physically Active City (CPAC) forum, alongside Public Health, have a range of activities underway to address the impact of Covid-19 on activity levels in the city.

- 5.2.10. One initiative, Tola Time, launched at the end of May 2021, with campaigns through June, July and August. This is specifically aimed to increase awareness of and participation in active mobility, with a focus on walking and cycling. The initiative is aimed at BAME communities and wards, and will tie in with the end of Ramadan and the easing of lockdown. The campaign is funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies of which Birmingham is part of the Healthy Cities Network.
- 5.2.11. CPAC has supported WMCA and our colleagues in the travel demand team to ensure timely commissioning of the 'exercise on prescription' model, to increase walking and cycling again in areas of greatest need. This is funded through Tranche 2 funding from the Emergency Active Travel Fund. CPAC is also in the process of developing a Creating a Physically Active City action plan for Birmingham, underpinned by the need to tackle inequalities in physical activity in the city and assist in work to close the gap.
- 5.2.12. Officers from within Public Health are supporting the Healthy Happy Holidays Steering Group that will ensure the provision of food and physical activity to children on free school meals in Birmingham during school holidays (specifically Easter, the summer holidays and Christmas).

Mental health and wellbeing

- 5.2.13. Public Health has undertaken a range of research activities to enhance our understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on mental health and wellbeing in the community. Activities include a YouGov survey, impact questionnaire, ethnographic study, and 'seldom heard voices' engagement work.
- 5.2.14. In direct response to the pandemic, Public Health launched BHealthy, a programme that offered a range of support, webinars, literature, training and social media content to support health and wellbeing throughout the pandemic.
- 5.2.15. In May 2022, Birmingham bid for just under £800,000 of non-recurrent funding for use on mental health and wellbeing interventions, to reduce the impact of Covid-19. Funding was only available to areas with high levels of deprivation.
- 5.2.16. Due to the short-term nature of the funding, which must be spent by 31st March 2022, officers focussed the bid on interventions likely to have a legacy beyond the delivery end date. These include training, peer support and the development of tailored resources for different communities. The range of proposed interventions covers the life course (children, adults, older people) and offers universal as well as some interventions targeted at specific communities with identified mental health needs.
- 5.2.17. **Profiling the wellbeing of communities**
- 5.2.18. In addition to Covid-19 specific community engagement, the Public Health Division Communities Team has developed a framework for profiling the health

and wellbeing of Birmingham's communities. This will start with a profile of the City's Sikh population, due to be published in summer 2021.. The detailed analysis and narrative will be used to inform need and service delivery in the post-Covid recovery phase.

Tackling inequalities

- 5.2.19. Addressing inequalities remains high on the Public Health agenda. Working alongside the Creating a City Without Inequality Forum, Public Health is currently undertaking a joint review of the health and wellbeing inequalities experienced by Black African and Black Caribbean populations in Lewisham and Birmingham. This review, BLACHIR, will take an in-depth look at both the evidence and lived experience of inequality across the life course, with the impact and effects of Covid-19 woven in throughout.
- 5.2.20. Again working alongside the Creating a City Without Inequality Forum, Public Health is supporting the Birmingham Poverty Truth Commission. This study, taking place over two years, will include a detailed study of poverty linked to housing, exploring the lived experience and legacy of Covid-19 on deprived populations across Birmingham.
- 5.2.21. **Locality Health Needs Assessments**
- 5.2.22. Five locality Health Needs Assessments have just been completed, supporting locality working between the Council, the NHS and other partners.
- 5.2.23. HNAs examined issues across the life course within each locality, including: infant mortality, child obesity, teenage pregnancy, loneliness, hospital admissions, and falls. Disease prevalence and deaths were also profiled within each locality, including Covid-19.
- 5.2.24. Recommendations and discussion points were agreed for each locality.

Infant Mortality Taskforce

- 5.2.25. Work continues on the establishment of an Infant Mortality Taskforce. Meetings are taking place with key stakeholders to ensure the correct level of representation across the local ICS partnership, as well as clinicians, commissioners, and representations from the local voluntary sector organisations that advocate on behalf of ethnic minority communities.
- 5.2.26. It has been agreed to appoint an Independent Chair to oversee the activity of the Taskforce; this post will shortly be advertised. The recruitment panel for this role will include representatives from across the ICS, local CCGs, local government, and the voluntary sector.
- 5.2.27. Two working groups are being established; the first of these will focus on clinical and genetic factors within infant mortality, while the second considers wider determinants and health inequalities. The activity of both groups will be underpinned by the latest research and clinical evidence.

5.2.28. **Contract recovery**

5.2.29. Officers are working with providers to support them with the implementation of their recovery plans.

5.2.30. Sexual Health Services have provided an in-depth recovery plan with timelines and this is regularly updated at the contract management meetings.

5.2.31. Work is underway with GP practices to ensure the resumption of the Health Checks programme, targeting efforts at those who are at highest risk due to other health factors, as well as those most likely to be impacted by Covid-19. This includes patients from across Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

5.2.32. Smoking cessation programmes are currently being delivered at full capacity through pharmacies; work is underway, however, to increase engagement and activity in GP practices. Other services and means of delivery are being considered. An app support option is now available, which has resulted in more people quitting smoking than pre-Covid.

5.2.33. **Triple Zero Drug and Alcohol Strategy**

5.2.34. The Triple Zero drug and alcohol strategy for Birmingham was drafted in early 2020 but the planned public consultation was delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The consultation was rescheduled for spring/summer 2021 and will run for 12 weeks from 10th May to the 1st August.

5.2.35. Due to the ongoing restrictions, there will be virtual engagement sessions to support the consultation, alongside face-to-face engagement activities where possible.

5.2.36. The consultation will be hosted on the Birmingham BeHeard platform, and promoted by email, social media, and targeted engagement.

5.2.37. Responses will be analysed during the consultation period and if there are communities, groups, or geographical areas not represented, officers will look at running specific targeted approaches or focus groups.

5.2.38. **Health protection (non-Covid)**

5.2.39. Health protection work has stepped up on a range of non-Covid issues, subject to capacity of key partners such as PHE (Public Health England) and the NHS system.

5.2.40. On tuberculosis control there has been a successful partnership response to specific protracted situations from which lessons will be learnt. Local recovery of the national screening and immunisation programmes is underway to ensure that uptake and individual protection returns to pre-Covid levels in the first instance.

- 5.2.41. The multi-agency Health Protection Forum has been refreshed and reoriented to ensure progress on a wide range of health protection issues as well as Covid response (Test & Trace), and to provide the necessary assurance to the Health and Wellbeing Board.
- 5.2.42. On the wider Covid-19 recovery, officers have conducted an evidence review with Birmingham University to identify the likely economic impacts of Covid within the city. Work is taking place to distil the evidence base and costs for a range of interventions.
- 5.2.43. **Future Parks Accelerator Programme**
- 5.2.44. 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. Over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, the programme has continued to highlight the benefits of green spaces within the city.
- 5.2.45. Improvements have already been seen in how residents engage with green spaces across three pilot sites. A successful Crowdfunding initiative led by the Birmingham & Black Country Wildlife Trust on behalf of FPA led to £2,000.00 being raised for the Slow Worms (a rare native legless lizard) present on Dawberry Fields, our children's pilot site. The money will pay for habitat enhancement and a nature trails to help bring this local wildlife to life.
- 5.2.46. A Health and Wellbeing pilot in Witton Lakes, in the north of the city, has gone from strength to strength, demonstrating that citizens can benefit from connecting to nature both virtually and physically. Our virtual skills showcase has been well received, highlighting the range of jobs young people can access for a career in the environmental sector. Work in Dawberry Fields has shown the positive impact that activating a park – through nature trails, family activities and volunteering opportunities – has on children and families in the area.
- 5.2.47. Work is underway on developing our 25-year City of Nature Vision to ensure that the benefits of the green space and the wider environment are protected throughout the city.
- 5.2.48. Strong links have also been made between the FPA and the Route to Zero (R20) taskforce, with the evolving vision for the FPA programme now becoming 'Birmingham: A City of Nature'. This will be one of the five city priorities under its climate emergency and represent the mainstay of the city's climate change adaptation ambitions.
- 5.2.49. The programme has successfully led on the construction of a new Environmental Justice map for Birmingham. This combined data relating to

climate change, including flood risk and urban heat islands, with data on excess years of life lost in the city and data on access to green spaces. The map colours each ward according to a traffic light system. The FPA ambition in the 25-year plan will be to turn at least five 'red' wards 'green' during the first five years.

- 5.2.50. The FPA programme was due to end in May 2021, but due to the impact of Covid-19 a successful application to secure an extension has been made. The programme will now finish in March 2022, and the Council has received an extra £204,000 to support the continuation of the work.

Older People Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)

- 5.2.51. An Older Peoples JSNA began in 2020 and is now near completion.

- 5.2.52. The JSNA covers a range of areas, including:

- Issues affecting life expectancy
- Issues affecting independence, such as hip fractures, housing and social isolation
- Wider determinants of independence, such as transport access, mobility, and being part of a community
- End of life care
- Visual impairment and hearing loss

Population Health Management

- 5.2.53. Work is in progress to scope the population health needs and system wide assets that pertain to Population Health Management (PHM) implementation for the Birmingham and Solihull ICS population. This includes an assessment of the available digital and data infrastructure, and capacity and capability (for statistical modelling and forecasting). These are being evaluated against the national guidance on the requirements for PHM and the learning from early adopters. In addition, interviews with leaders in partner organizations across BSOL ICS have been conducted to ascertain their PHM ambitions and their preferred models for delivery and governance.
- 5.2.54. The output of the scoping and the interviews will inform the development of BSOL ICSs PHM during a meeting with stakeholders which will be held in early May 2021.
- 5.2.55. The Knowledge team have continued to support the wider Public Health department and Birmingham City Council with detailed analysis on a number of public health topics pertaining to the work of the Council. These include: infant mortality, child neglect, self-harm, obesity, population analysis (including ethnicity analysis), and some work on Covid-19.

Fast Track City

- 5.2.56. There is currently a Community Engagement and Needs Assessment being carried out by Enigma Consultancy. At present we are in the early stages of the Needs Assessment and the varying partners, community organisations and services users are being mapped, alongside the development of appropriate engagement activity. This should be finalised over the next couple of weeks.
- 5.2.57. Once the data is gathered, alongside other regional and national data, the analysis of findings will be developed by the provider with a final report submitted by mid-August 2021. This report will inform local needs around Test and Pathway realignments for HIV, TB and Viral Hepatitis Services.
- 5.2.58. In the meantime, the steering group for the Fast-Track Cities+ initiative meet on a regular basis to scope what are felt to be the key needs. These will be matched against the needs assessment once finalised. All findings will lead to us seeking appropriate funding streams and then commissioning appropriate initiatives.

Health protection response to Covid-19

- 5.2.59. As Covid-19 incidence, morbidity, and mortality rates continue to decrease, the Public Health team is gradually moving away from the emergency cell structure established in March 2020 and towards mainstreaming the acute health protection response to the pandemic.
- 5.2.60. Cell meetings are being replaced by regular meetings reviewing the incidence of Covid-19, particularly Variants Of Concern (VOC), testing, hospitalisation and morbidity, situation rates, common areas of exposure, vaccination rates and inequalities.
- 5.2.61. The City's dedicated Test and Trace unit, first established in the summer of 2020, continues to provide specialist public health advice to care homes, schools, workplaces, public venues and other settings where there are outbreaks and clusters of cases. We work to ensure there is a sufficient response to manage current situations and prevent future ones.
- 5.2.62. As restrictions continue to be lifted, we are working with event organisers to ensure thorough risk assessments are completed and sufficient precautions are in place to reduce the risk of spreading COVID. A contact tracing team has been created to make initial telephone contact with cases that were identified by the national contact tracing system. Both teams operate seven days a week, with consultant cover. Additional support is provided by the Environmental Health team who will visit those who cannot be contacted by phone and also help to enforce coronavirus regulations where necessary.

- 5.2.63. In the past month the team have responded to an average of 71 cases and 32 situations each week. These require detailed follow up and support to help contain the spread of the pandemic in Birmingham. The burden of work locally is increasing as national and regional bodies devolve more work and responsibilities to the local teams.
- 5.2.64. Working alongside PHE, we are closely monitoring, following-up and managing cases which involved VOCs. In some cases, this requires deploying very targeted surge testing (covered in more detail in later sections of this report).
- 5.2.65. The lifting of restrictions, combined with new VOCs entering the UK, and third waves of the virus occurring internationally, means that having a highly vigilant and highly responsive workforce is crucial. The Test and Trace team are scenario and contingency planning for the following three scenarios.
- Enduring transmission, where the incidence rates remain higher than the national average for long periods of time.
 - Multiple ongoing outbreaks (many of which are VOCs).
 - A third wave of the virus, with a very large increase in incidence rates.
- 5.2.66. We are responding to these scenarios by ensuring there is sufficient contingency funding within the Public Health budget to actively recruit new staff and engage in new initiatives to control the spread. We also make sure that staff in the wider Public Health team are constantly being updated and trained in responding to Covid-19 cases, contacts and situations, to ensure they can be quickly mobilised and ready to provide support immediately to the Test and Trace team if needed

Covid-19 Isolation Pilot

- 5.2.67. As the number of residents who have been vaccinated against Covid-19 increases, and restrictions are gradually lifted, there is a need to ensure that cases or contacts that have been asked to self-isolate are supported to do so as much as possible.
- 5.2.68. For those who are compliant with self-isolation, particularly for those who live alone, there is also a need to ensure that the Council supports their welfare and mental health as much as possible.
- 5.2.69. Typically, Covid-19 cases or close contacts have to self-isolate for 10 full days; however, they might need to self-isolate for longer if the contacts get symptoms or the symptoms do not go away. The traditional approach which CTAS (the national contact centre team) take when they have been notified about a case or contact is that the cases and contacts receive at least three phone calls, three SMS messages and three emails during the period of isolation. Although some signposting of support is provided by the national

team, the main focus is to ensure that the case and contacts are informed of what isolation involves and how long they isolate.

- 5.2.70. The purpose of the proposed isolation pilot is to a) ensure and support the welfare and mental health of those isolating, and b) remove any barriers to isolating (thus reducing the risk of spreading the virus). It is proposed to run three pilots in parallel which would finish by the end of August 2021. The locations identified would be based on the wards with the highest incidence rates over the past 30 days with each pilot site consisting of two wards
- 5.2.71. The success of each pilot would be determined by a number of factors, including impact on the incident rates for each ward and rates of non-engagement.
- 5.2.72. **Testing**
- 5.2.73. Public Health continues to lead the development and implementation of a testing strategy for Birmingham. Initially, this focused on testing site development for symptomatic testing through the (Polymerase Chain Reaction) PCR testing programme, with the identification and delivery of two mobile testing units, two drive-through and ten walk-through facilities across the city. In December 2020 the Council began the roll-out of a testing strategy for asymptomatic testing using the new rapid result lateral flow testing kits (LFDs). This had been developed on a hub-and-spoke model, with a focus on case and contact finding, early isolation of infectious cases and their contacts.
- 5.2.74. Currently there are four to five times more lateral flow tests being undertaken in Birmingham compared to PCR testing. LFDs have the advantage of being much quicker and cheaper than PCR testing, with the ability to get a test result within 30 minutes without needing to send the sample to a lab. The downside is the sensitivity, in that there is a 23% false negative rate meaning that those who are given a negative result have a 23% chance that they could still have the virus and be infectious despite having no symptoms. The false positive rates are circa 0.03% however the current guidance is that any self-administered positive lateral flow tests should be confirmed with a confirmatory PCR test which is more accurate
- 5.2.75. The ease of access and use, combined with the increase in speed before seeing a result, has meant a proportionally greater increase in self-administered lateral flow testing. Nationally there has been a move away from the model of lateral flow testing by providers in fixed sites, to a model where residents collect tests from community sites and pharmacies to bring home for testing, in addition to ordering these tests online for home delivery. As a result of the move to home testing, all testing sites closed by 14th May 2021. All residents are now being advised to test regularly and upload their results online through the national government website.

- 5.2.76. The Council is also piloting home testing kit collection pop-ups in supermarkets and other high footfall areas at weekends to increase the reach of distribution. These have been very well received and extended at some sites into weekday pop-ups. Where possible, we are alerting elected Members the day before to help promotion of temporary sites.

Variants of Concern/Operation Eagle

- 5.2.77. Currently BCC is engaging in active surveillance of all VOCs. The one which is most prevalent is the UK Kent variant. In response to cases of the South African variant we have engaged in 4 Operation Eagle (OpE) responses. More recently, concerns centre on the Indian variant (B1.617) as many Birmingham residents travelled back from India recently before it became identified as a red travel zone and therefore did not require the travellers to quarantine in hotels for 10 days before returning home. There are three types of this variant, of which the B1.617.2 is the one causing the most concern. It is 1.6 times more transmissible. No information on its susceptibility to vaccination or impact on morbidity and mortality is available. The fourth priority VOC is the Brazilian variant which is being monitored carefully.
- 5.2.78. In February 2021, in response to a confirmed South African VOC in Birmingham a targeted surge response testing campaign (Operation Eagle 1) was launched which focussed on the Frankly Great Park and Northfield wards. This involved drop and collect home testing where providers would drop off a PCR test to all households in the areas and then return at a later time/date to pick up the test and bring to the lab. This was combined with a collect and drop service as well as a business and school drop and collect. Further cases of the variant were not identified.
- 5.2.79. In April and May three additional Operation Eagle surge responses were rolled out focussing on Soho and Jewellery Quarter (OpE 2), Alum Rock, Glebe Farm and Tile Cross (OpE 3) and Bordesley Green and Ladywood (OpE 4).
- 5.2.80. Overall, the engagement rate was 62% (OpE 1), 55% (OpE 2), 69% (OpE 3) and 65% (OpE 4). Anecdotally there has been a sense that more and more people are reluctant to agree to testing and the refusal rates were 27% (OpE 2), 49% (OpE 3) and 36% (OpE 4).

Local Outbreak Management Plan

- 5.2.81. In 2020, the Council produced a Local Outbreak Management Plan (LOMP), setting out all of its current activities in managing the pandemic locally as well as indicating plans for further management for the rest of the year/early 2021.
- 5.2.82. Over March and April 2021, officers worked with PHE on a refresh of the LOMP. The refresh is more detailed and includes sections on the legal and policy context, learning to date, surveillance and data, governance, testing, self-isolation, case/contact tracing, outbreak management, targeting high risk

populations, communications and engagement, vaccination, evaluation and monitoring, resourcing, enforcement and inequalities.

5.2.83. It also includes annexes on the response to recovery roadmap, how BCC will coordinate closely with PHE to manage cases and outbreaks, surge capacity, Test and Trace structure and staffing, enforcement powers and plans, supporting non-pharmaceutical interventions, scenario planning, contact tracing, finances and a delivery plan.

5.2.84. Updates on the delivery of the LOMP will be provided regularly at the Local Covid Engagement Outbreak Board

Planning for recovery

5.2.85. On the basis of Covid-19 incidence rates reducing, or at least remaining stable at acceptably low rates, the Council will continue to transition away from residual emergency cell structures and processes into 'business as usual' Council decision-making processes. Aligned with this, the frequency of meetings focussed on BCC's Covid-19 response will reduce while still ensuring that all staff are keep abreast of the current Covid-19 status.

5.2.86. As part of this move, the Test and Trace team will reduce the time spent focussing on Covid-19 only matters. This is contingent on the national team contact tracing team continuing to provide their current level of response to cases and clusters. Tight surveillance will be crucial during this time.

5.2.87. In order to ensure we have sufficient capacity in the event of a resurgence of the virus it is envisaged that the team will be partnered with colleagues in the main Public Health division to support non-Covid work alongside their Covid-19 responsibilities. This will ensure their spare capacity is utilised appropriately, whilst providing a flexible workforce that could relinquish their non-Covid work should the need arise.

Community Engagement Response

5.2.88. The Council has been leading on engagement across the city to support communities to adhere to the changing guidance and address any challenges faced during the pandemic. Public Health has engaged with a wide range of communities, working closely with the Corporate Communications team and other key stakeholders to ensure that citizens have access to accurate information about Covid-19 and to provide appropriate answers to queries and concerns raised.

5.2.89. Some of the activities undertaken so far include:

- Commissioning 18 community partner organisations to undertake targeted communications and deeper engagement with specific groups in the community, including people from ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, LGBT+ communities, and faith-based communities.

- Commissioning partnerships with 6 local community radio stations focusing on local ethnic groups, as well as communities for whom English is not a first language.
- Media work across over 25 different media outlets, conducting more than 100 interviews on topics including the latest government guidance, local implications, COVID-19 variants and the impact of COVID-19 on different communities.
- Community engagement meetings, including interfaith meetings, over 200 ward meetings, and dedicated fortnightly engagement sessions with Birmingham masjids and ministers/pastors from black churches.

5.2.90. Building on learning from Newham Council, Public Health has developed and launched the Covid Community Champions programme. Over 800 Champions have been recruited and supported through fortnightly live Q&A sessions with the DPH, Public Health Consultants and other guest speakers to discuss relevant topics including mental health. Champions receive weekly emails and text messages for cascade through their networks and over 23,000 emails and 5000 text messages have been shared with communities through this route.

5.2.91. The Youth COVID Champions group has been established and hold fortnightly meetings to share information on a range of topics raised by young people, including: vaccination, LFD testing and adherence to safety measures.

5.2.92. Officers 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, social media engagement figures for HealthyBrum accounts stand at over 5,200 hits for Twitter, over 2,200 hits for Facebook, and over 2,900 hits for Instagram. One campaign, focused on increasing people's awareness of the NHS Covid-19 App, reached over 51,000 people through Facebook advertising targeted at the highest prevalence areas of the city.

5.2.93. Social media channels have also been used to increase engagement with the BCC website for further information on Covid-19.

Wellbeing Service

5.2.94. The Council's directly managed Wellbeing Centres and Hubs were closed to the public from 23 March 2020 on the instruction of the Government at the beginning of the first national lockdown. Since that date they have only been able to operate on a restricted basis for limited periods as a further two national lockdowns followed, interspersed with various different regimes of local restrictions.

5.2.95. The Council's Wellbeing Centres are, by design, located in the areas of highest deprivation where communities have the greatest health needs. Given the correlation between physical activity, health, and the impact of Covid-19 on

individuals, it was imperative that the service was made available whenever we were permitted to open, although the rules have generally limited access to individual swim and gym sessions and activities for children.

- 5.2.96. In order to open at all, the service has had to make extensive changes to normal operating procedures to ensure sites are adhering to Government and industry guidance in relation to Covid-19, including setting up a pre-booking system, achieving enhanced ventilation standards, and implementing social distancing. All of these changes have severely limited the capacity of our facilities.
- 5.2.97. The consequent impact on income and expenditure has been captured in financial returns and formed the basis of claims for financial support from national funding schemes. However, the income support is only available until the end of June 2021 and unless social distancing requirements are relaxed it is expected that there will be an on-going financial pressure on the service.
- 5.2.98. During the lockdown periods, Be Active Plus Advisors have maintained contact with their clients, who were referred through their GP because they have chronic health conditions such as asthma, obesity and diabetes that might be helped by increased physical activity. These conditions meant that many clients were categorised as clinically vulnerable and had to shield at home. Feedback confirms that contact from Advisors was source of valuable support to these individuals, many of whom were otherwise socially isolated.
- 5.2.99. Other sites have variously hosted food and welfare services, and lateral flow testing “spokes” until 17th May 2021 when operating restrictions on leisure services further eased, although a PCR testing station remains at Saltley pending an alternative location being identified.
- 5.2.100. As of the 17th May 2021, all usual activities at Wellbeing Centres have resumed. Capacity remains limited by social distancing, and programmes are restricted due to the time needed to undertake enhanced cleaning between sessions. The service is seeking to support Covid-19 recovery generally, but also by working with Public Health to develop a specific offer for people suffering from long-Covid.

6. Education, Skills and Children’s Wellbeing

6.1. Birmingham Children’s Trust

- 6.1.1. Birmingham Children’s Trust (BCT) has continued to deliver all of its services to the city’s most vulnerable children and families, including maintaining high levels of face-to-face contact with vulnerable children and families. The vast majority of children have resumed school, an important protective factor, and the Trust continues its system leader role, supporting and galvanising the

wider children's partnership to ensure a strong multi-agency response is in place in the community.

Performance

- 6.1.2. Performance against the 15 contractual Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) has remained strong throughout the year. At year end, 11 of the 15 KPIs were at or better than target, three were within tolerance, and one was outside tolerance.
- 6.1.3. The KPI outside tolerance relates to use of agency staff. This has been within tolerance all year but moved outside in March 2021 as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic which has seen a reduction in the mobility and supply of suitable permanent social workers. This is not a Birmingham issue but a national one.
- 6.1.4. The West Midlands Directors of Children's Services network has put in place a regional recruitment campaign to attract staff into the region from elsewhere, as one means of support. The Trust has invested in an HR specialist to provide expert advice and support to improve our marketing campaigns and recruitment processes. We are also in the midst of refining and enhancing our support offer to students, front-line practitioners and managers. Our aim is to become a centre of excellence and the best employer in the region.
- 6.1.5. We have seen a recent increase in the numbers of permanent social workers recruited or interested in joining the Trust. As restrictions start to ease, aligned to our social media and marketing campaigns and additions to the value proposition, we anticipate increases to the numbers of social workers we attract and retain. This means we should be able to start to stand down the additional agency resource that has been necessary during the pandemic
- 6.1.6. During the year the target for adoptions was at risk due to reduced activity in the family courts rather than something in the control of the Trust. However, the Trust has recovered that position and has met the target.
- 6.1.7. 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 year, compared with the national and statistical neighbour average of 11%. This is testament to the work of our social workers and the commitment of our foster carers.
- 6.1.8. The Ofsted Monitoring of the Trust Fostering Services took place between 15-16 December 2020 and evaluated the extent to which:
- children are well cared for,
 - children are safe,
 - leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

- 6.1.9. The Inspectors were assured on all 3 counts; five statutory requirements and two recommendations were made. All things considered, this report is an important milestone in acknowledging the significant progress the service has made.

Other developments

- 6.1.10. Good progress continues in relation to the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), with Cabinet granting approval for the outline business case in December 2020. A procurement process is underway for a delivery partner and the RAA is set for launch in October 2021. The Department for Education (DfE) remain content with progress.
- 6.1.11. In relation to the longstanding block contracts for residential children's homes, the Priory contract formally ended on 9th January 2021. The Meadows contract is set to reach its natural cessation on 20th May 2021 and a staged transition out of the current contract was agreed at the beginning of February.
- 6.1.12. With new investment from the Council, the Trust is now recruiting to the remaining Early Help Workforce to further strengthen the Early Help and Prevention Offer as we enter into the recovery stage of the pandemic. The Trust continues to chair the Partnership Operational Group where work continues to build a stronger prevention offer. This investment, through the Birmingham Children's Partnership, is a crucial limb of a strategy to maintain a care population lower than statistical neighbours and core cities, keeping more children in their families through effective early help and family support. This is good for children and families and a good use of scarce resources.
- 6.1.13. Challenges include ensuring a strong focus on contractual dependencies such as corporate parenting, education and housing and an accommodation strategy that is flexible and responsive to local need.
- 6.1.14. The Trust has continued to operate with its workforce largely working from home but maintaining face-to-face work with those using our services. We experienced increased Covid-related sickness, with as many as 35 social workers off sick at its peak, as well as managing some difficult outbreaks in our short breaks care homes. Contact for children in care and families has been maintained wherever possible, as have child protection conferences, offering a 'hybrid' model of face-to-face and virtual meetings. As we move into the next phases of 'opening up', we will continue to work with the Council to ensure we can develop an office footprint that supports the right balance of agile working: from home, from different sites, and enabling collaboration to happen (team sessions, one-to-one meetings etc). We are currently mapping short term and longer-term accommodation needs. The principles of family friendly spaces within local communities underpin this planning. We are reopening venues to enable family time/contact for children in care and their parents and looking to expand the number of venues from which our social

workers and family support workers can operate safely. Our respite services for children with disabilities remain open, and we are conducting child protection conferences on a hybrid basis, with parents, conference chair and social worker physically co-located.

- 6.1.15. We are working within the Birmingham Children's Partnership (BCP) to develop effective multi-agency responses to the agreed Recovery Priorities, which are:
- Returning to school, language development and children 'out of sight';
 - Safeguarding and wellbeing;
 - Emotional and mental health;
 - Exploitation and youth violence.
- 6.1.16. Our contribution to partnership improvements in relation to children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) will also be significant during this period of recovery
- 6.1.17. The Trust continues to play a key role in many of the city's partnerships including the Safeguarding Children Partnership, the Community Safety Partnership and the Children's Partnership. We instigated the Partnership Operational Group that has galvanised the city's Covid-19 response and we have supported the partnership planning for the post-pandemic recovery period.
- 6.1.18. Serious youth violence is an important and pressing concern for the city. The Trust is working with the Community Safety Partnership, the Violence Reduction Unit and West Midlands Police, to develop an effective strategic and operational response.
- 6.1.19. The Trust has reviewed its services for disabled children, through the Children First project, in order to modernise and improve our offer and the effectiveness of our responses, as well as position us to support improvements in the area of SEND.
- 6.1.20. Friends of Birmingham Children's Trust was launched on 29th April 2021. This is a new organisation established to become a charity that adds value to our offer to young people through mentoring, work experience, new opportunities and support. We have great partners from across Birmingham's corporate and sport sectors (including Barclays, Fortem, Jacobs, Aston Villa Foundation) and their commitment to making a difference, with us, for our children and young people, is really impressive.

Finance

- 6.1.21. 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 significantly less than the £7m initially forecast, with actual Covid-specific costs for 2020/21 of £2.1m which are eligible for the Government Covid grant. The Council has confirmed the Covid-related funding will be available into 2021/22 and the Trust will continue to manage and minimise these costs.

- 6.1.22. In relation to its core budget, the Trust's year-end position is a balanced outturn position for 2020/21. This is a significant achievement in that the Trust has driven down an anticipated £7m deficit earlier in the year by delivering savings from block contracts and other efficiencies. There are still pressures in placement costs which for 2020/21 were offset by one-off underspends in staffing due to recruitment difficulties. This demand pressure was recognised in the Council's 2021/22 budget, with an increase of £5.3m in the core contract.
- 6.1.23. The Trust has completed a review of its financial management by CIPFA (with a creditable rating of 3/5) and undertaken an independent review of its strategic financial position commissioned with the Council. A joint action plan is being prepared to ensure the Trust is operating as efficiently as it can, and that it has the resources it requires to deliver appropriate service levels.

6.2. **Schools**

- 6.2.1. In preparation for the full reopening of schools to pupils in March 2021, we updated our comprehensive risk assessment document. This risk assessment has been a crucial support for Birmingham schools throughout the pandemic and has ensured schools have been able to remain open to as many pupils as possible, even when case levels were high in the city.
- 6.2.2. Since the full reopening, officers have continued to closely monitor DfE attendance data on a daily basis. The data shows attendance in Birmingham has been at least in line with Core Cities and elsewhere in the region and the country, and in many cases performing better. This has also been the case for the attendance of vulnerable groups.
- 6.2.3. The Education Legal Intervention team have updated their guidance and policies for attendance enforcement, including guidance for schools on pupils who are abroad. Additional support has been made available to schools regarding Children Missing Education, including a well-attended webinar that set out processes and procedures. The team is working with schools ahead of the new academic year to address any issues or concerns with attendance and will be continuing to provide additional support as the recovery continues.
- 6.2.4. In areas where surge testing has taken place due to cases of Covid-19 variants of concern we are working with Public Health to provide comprehensive support to schools and settings in the affected postcodes.
- 6.2.5. A robust partner taskforce is continuing to work to provide joint responses to Covid-19 that prioritise vulnerable children and ensures that their needs are

met more effectively. This taskforce will be a key part of the recovery, and includes representatives from the Council, the city's schools' for a, Birmingham Children's Trust, the Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP), West Midlands Police (WMP), and other sectors including health.

- 6.2.6. In response to growing concerns about domestic abuse, school representatives attended a webinar led by the Head of Education Safeguarding about Operation Encompass. This programme will directly connect the police with schools and early years settings to secure better outcomes for children who are subject or witness to police-attended incidents of domestic abuse. Operation Encompass will be launched for the start of the 2021/22 academic year.
- 6.2.7. Officers have continued to provide 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.
- 6.2.8. As part of the government's Holiday Activities Fund, a programme of virtual activities was provided for families across Birmingham during the Easter holidays. Work is underway on a comprehensive programme for the summer holidays which will include face-to-face activities and the provision of food.
- 6.2.9. To support families with food costs incurred during the Easter and half-term holidays, we have used government funding to continue to provide supermarket vouchers to families eligible for free school meals. These have been distributed to families through schools.
- 6.2.10. To fully understand the impact of potential changes to the employment practices of parents in terms of sufficiency of early years places, the council will shortly be undertaking an Annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment. This will provide clarity on the demand for early years places and out of school wraparound places in the short/medium/long term post pandemic.
- 6.3. **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)**
 - 6.3.1. A SEND local area revisit took place from 24th to 27th of May 2021, to review the progress we have made against our Written Statement of Action (WSOA) since its publication in January 2019.
 - 6.3.2. The purpose of the revisit was to determine whether the local area has made sufficient progress in addressing the 13 areas of significant weakness detailed in the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) and to demonstrate that the local area, during the COVID19 response, has:
 - understood the experience and needs of children and young people with SEND, and their families, during the pandemic

- involved children and young people with SEND and their families in co- producing decisions about how best to support them
- worked collaboratively to prioritise, adapt and provide the services and support that children and young people with SEND and their families need

Responding to the Written Statement of Action (WSOA)

- 6.3.3. In September 2018 , the local area (Birmingham) accepted the Written Statement Of Action (WSOA) and a SEND Improvement Board was established.
- 6.3.4. By the beginning of 2020, we had seen progress being made across a number of areas; however, the impact of Covid-19 on Birmingham was significant. While the pandemic has galvanised partnership working across the partnership, progress against the WSOA was interrupted during this period.
- 6.3.5. In responding to the WSOA, the Council has undertaken a number of strategic transformation and improvement activities:
- Development and publication of the BCC Send Strategy in 2019.
 - Sufficiency reviews across education, health, and social care.
 - Focused support on inter-agency working and the quality of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).
 - Agreement of the Transitions Strategy, to ensure well-managed transitions from Children's to Adults' services.
 - Creation of the Joint Commissioning Framework, as a stepping stone for Section 75 Agreement work.
 - Establishment of a Youth Forum.
 - Enhanced engagement with parent carers through various means, including surveys, the Health SEND Parent Carer Forum, Be Empowered Workshops, Link Advisers, SENDIASS, and training.
 - Redesign and improvement of the Local Offer website.
 - Delegation of £7m from the High Needs Block to Direct Local Provision school-led project to improve the outcomes for SEND across partnerships of primary and secondary mainstream schools.
 - Introduction of Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and Local Authority Link meetings to develop bi-directional dialogue, inform future SEMH Strategy and improve current graduated response.
 - Establishment of an integrated transitions team with over £1m investment, holding employment as a core priority.

SEND during the Covid-19 period

- 6.3.6. In response to Covid-19, we worked in partnership with community and voluntary organisations across Birmingham to establish an Early Help Offer across ten localities, providing vital subsistence and support to over 14,000 children and families.
- 6.3.7. We also established a £1m resilience fund to support families in hardship, alongside a £700,000 community grant scheme supporting 162 community organisations to respond to local need.

Challenges

- 6.3.8. Despite the improvement and transformation work that has taken place, we recognise that the experiences of our children and young people with SEND, and their families, are not always good enough.
- 6.3.9. We are in the process of making structural and process changes in our Special Education Needs Assessment and Review Service (SENAR) to address entrenched weak performance, including the establishment of a Locality Model. These improvements are not yet embedded, and will take time to have a positive impact on the experiences of all children, families and schools involved in the system.
- 6.3.10. We have established processes for the quality assurance and audit of EHCPs, but improvements are recent and their impact is yet to be fully realised.
- 6.3.11. The way that we are managing and using data is not sufficiently robust and needs to be strengthened. In particular, processes for sharing and using data across partners need further development.
- 6.3.12. We have invested in our therapies provision, but waiting times to access therapies (speech and language, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and neurodevelopmental services) are still too long.
- 6.3.13. Our Parent Carer Forum tells us that because they have experienced poor performance over many years, trust in embedding improvements is low. Our strategy is also not sufficiently well-understood across the city.
- 6.3.14. Senior leadership within this area has been subject to churn since the last inspection. This has meant that vital time has been lost, especially in the immediate period after the WSOA was agreed.

SEND improvements

- 6.3.15. In order to address the number of challenges that we have in this service area, we have invested significant additional resources over the past nine months. These include:
- Stepping up the frequency of partnership meetings to take place fortnightly, to drive the required change forward at pace.

- Recruitment of additional SEND specialist and project improvement capacity to support delivery of the next phase of system reform.
- Commitment to invest additional investment in key areas, and to taking bold steps to reform and improve services to ensure that children and families are well served.
- Initiation of a city-wide Strategy Next Steps conversation about the strategic direction we are taking, to ensure it is understood and co-produced.
- Agreement to use this Strategy Next Steps process to identify clear outcomes and success criteria that the SEND Improvement Board will jointly own and hold each other to account for progress and impact.

Outcome of SEND revisit

6.3.16. Usually, the local area will receive a draft feedback letter ten working days after the revisit has finished. The local area will then have 10 working days to check the letter for accuracy. The final letter is usually shared 28 working days after the revisit has finished.

6.3.17. The letter will include:

- The decision about whether the local area has made sufficient progress in relation to each of the serious weaknesses identified at the initial inspection;
- A clear and brief summary of the effectiveness of leaders' actions against each serious weakness identified in the WSOA;
- Where relevant, information about how the pandemic has impacted on children and young people with SEND in the area, their families and the local SEND system, and how local area leaders have adapted their plans;
- Reference to any other serious concerns, along with evidence, identified during the re-visit, and clarification that these will be communicated to the DfE and NHS England and will be used to determine the timing of the next inspection (under any future area SEND framework).

6.4. Home to School Transport Service

6.4.1. Our Home to School Transport service has been on a significant improvement journey over the past nine months.

6.4.2. There is a need to acknowledge and thank our Parent Carer Forum, and all the parents, carers, and families that have been in touch and participated in engagement sessions. We have made significant investment over the past

nine months to improve our Home to School Transport service. While we still have a way to go, we are confident that we are heading in the right direction.

6.4.3. Some key areas of activity include:

- Ensuring that all our safeguarding cases are monitored through weekly situation reports, for resolution in a timely manner.
- Monitoring the performance of routes on a daily basis through a triangulation of parent/carer, school and operator feedback. This has led to between 99 and 100% of routes being successfully delivered since 10th March 2021. Routes are also monitored for timeliness – routes operating more than ten minutes after the target arrival time are recorded as ‘late’. Over 99% of routes were operated to time in April 2021.
- The establishment of a Compliance team in Autumn 2020, which has now been enhanced with Contract Managers to further improve safety and performance of routes.
- The enhancement of our training offer, with 247 of our Guides (just under half of the total) now Passenger Assistant Training Scheme (PATS) trained. The team is aiming to train all available guides in the foundation stage in advance of the new academic year in September 2021.
- Our Home to School Transport and Commissioning team have engaged with the market prior to tendering NEAT routes for September to be clear on our expectations of our operators.
- New routes tendered for September will be evaluated with the support of a representative of our special schools.
- A mobilisation team has been established to oversee the successful mobilisation of new routes for September, managing the critical path to successful delivery of these routes with in-depth indicators around operators’ communication with schools and families, operational readiness in relation to vehicles and staff and safeguarding/ regulatory requirements.
- Home to School Transport are working with the Clean Air Zone (CAZ) team, schools and families to capture any impact on journey times during the rollout and over September when traffic volumes traditionally increase.
- The pilot of the 365 scheme is continuing with all operators mandated to sign up to use the system from September 2021. The launch is

planned to be phased once full testing is completed and signed off successfully. This is likely to be around Autumn 2021 onwards.

- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for families have been compiled from feedback from families, the Parent Carer Forum, and SENDIASS colleagues. This has been launched on our Local Offer page and is a great example of the kind of co-production which we look forward to continuing.
- The establishment of a monthly Task and Finish Group chaired by the Leader of the Council, which brings together key stakeholders including parent and school representatives and SENDIASS to discuss progress in an open forum. Performance data is reviewed, and attendees hold officers to account for progress against key actions and are offered the chance to shape work as it is developed. A document encapsulating the Vision and Strategic Priorities for the service has also been discussed and agreed by this group.

Key Performance Indicators

- 6.4.4. Performance data has been improved and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are now measured, monitored and managed weekly by the Head of Service. KPIs are also reported weekly to the Assistant Director, Inclusion, SEND and Wellbeing through a SitRep Report. In addition, performance in delivering core KPIs is reported to the monthly Leaders Home to School Task and Finish Group where robust conversations about progress against KPIs are held.

Service Improvement Plan Priorities

- 6.4.5. A Service Improvement Plan was put in place to continue the service's improvement journey once the Immediate Fixes Plan had been delivered. Performance in delivering the plan is monitored at monthly Management Team meetings, in supervision and performance reviews that are regularly held with staff, and at Home to School Project Board meetings, where the improvement impacts upon project deliverables.

Communication

- 6.4.6. Communication has been raised continually as a major issue, with parents repeatedly raising the frustration they experienced on an ongoing basis when attempting to contact the service. This is obviously especially stressful for parents with vulnerable children, who need to be assured of their safety at all times.
- 6.4.7. The service has identified improving communication as a key priority and managers are working with all members of staff to embed an open and responsive culture. Responsiveness is monitored on a regular basis, with weekly meetings held where performance data is monitored for telephone calls

and any issues are discussed and resolved. In line with Birmingham City Council Service standards, the service aims to answer 90% of calls within a reasonable time. In April 2021, the average response across the month was 87%, with some weeks falling short of the desired service level. Data therefore shows that there is still more work to do and this is a key area of focus for the service. Potential ways to improve responsiveness are being explored currently.

- 6.4.8. The service has committed to rolling out an IT solution - 365 Response - which has the capability to provide real time information to parents (and schools) on the location of their child's transport. This would be a national first in rolling out a Home to School Transport system which links multiple service providers in a real time information scenario.
- 6.4.9. It is important to ensure that this launch is successful. The project is currently in an extended pilot phase and a review of the pilot is due to take place shortly so that officers can learn from this before rolling out more widely. The Council is very keen to have 365 Response operational to form an integral part of its longer-term improvements for Home to School Transport.
- 6.4.10. A key success driver for real time information is the full engagement of every operator so that all operator staff are fully compliant. The Council has therefore amended its terms and conditions to require all operators to be compliant with the system and have the appropriate ICT kit to facilitate this. These changes to terms and conditions are due to take effect from the start of the 2021/22 academic year.
- 6.4.11. It is likely that the pilot will be extended to recognise that changes to the terms and conditions of contract with contractors need to take effect to enable the most robust test of the system. It is essential that the system is thoroughly tested prior to rollout and project managers are reviewing timescales, with the likelihood that rollout will be phased over the autumn of 2021. Communication with parents about this will be prioritised from the start of term so they are clear what to expect.
- 6.4.12. In terms of more immediate fixes relating to call answering, the service has reviewed the structure of its operational team on an interim basis to allow the team to flex staff resources to respond to increased call and email volumes. Additional staffing resource has also been invested in this area on a temporary basis.
- 6.4.13. The service has transferred to the Cirrus system, allowing calls waiting to be monitored to allow staff resources to be flexed accordingly, and providing management information to support the performance in this area. For example, call volumes increase on Mondays and following a school holiday, so the service now ensures there is additional staff capacity on these days.

- 6.4.14. The service is also reviewing the root cause of increased call volumes to allow a more proactive approach. For example, when correspondence is sent to a group of parents, a well written letter should provide enough information to answer most queries without the need for a follow-on phone call or email. Parents will soon also be able to access a Frequently Asked Questions document available through the Local Offer which should also help reduce phone traffic.

Safety and suitability of vehicles

- 6.4.15. A compliance team was established in autumn 2020, which has a well-established programme of checks and audits on operators providing home to school transport on behalf of the City Council. In addition, the Council has commissioned an external contractor to provide additional mechanical checks on the Council's behalf. Three contract managers have also recently been recruited to work alongside colleagues in Commissioning to provide robust contract management.

Suitability of guides and drivers

- 6.4.16. The rollout of the Passenger Assistant Training Scheme (PATs) ensures guides are trained to a national standard in their field. This includes some training on managing health issues on transport. As at the start of May 2021, 247 Pupil Guides have successfully completed PATs training.
- 6.4.17. Other training, including emergency aid and epilepsy training, is also being explored to be rolled out across a similar timescale. Guides are now being provided in some cases by service providers, as well as by the Council. In these cases, the advantage is that the service is less likely to be interrupted by guide shortages. The same training is provided to guides whether they are employed by BCC or a transport provider.
- 6.4.18. The Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) places a clear expectation on the providers that all members of their staff working on transport (including drivers) are trained and monitored to a high standard. The expectation of the drivers is in line with what is being required by the service and the policy. Additional guide capacity has also been put in place to increase capacity for covering sickness absence.

Safeguarding

- 6.4.19. As well as the training improvements already referenced in this report, management information in relation to driver and DBS checks is included in weekly situation reports on the service's overall operation. There is a revised process in place involving a HR led DBS weekly panel to review any more complex cases, and this has required a deed of variation with the Council's Legal team providing the relevant support. This management information

provides reassurance on DBS checks being in place for all staff transporting pupils on home to school transport.

Transport reliability and the impact on families

- 6.4.20. Whilst 365 Response is not fully rolled out, routes are currently reviewed daily to identify any issues and get to the root of those issues to prevent repetition. Where a route is operating at ten minutes either side of its scheduled school drop off time, it is recorded as 'on time'. Feedback from transport operators is triangulated with schools and parent information to identify and challenge any discrepancies. As a result, improvements have meant since 8th March that between 97 and 100% of routes are operating, and 'on time' as classified under the definition above.
- 6.4.21. The re-opening of schools following the second lockdown was a key test for the Home to School Transport Service which needed to mobilise an additional ten routes for this to happen successfully. The service also tendered for up to 30 contingency vehicles that could be used if there were problems with any of the routes. 12 of these were utilised. Except for issues with NEAT routes on Monday 8th March, all routes ran effectively with these routes being covered with the contingency vehicles.

Parent Carer Forum, Parental Engagement and Co-Production

- 6.4.22. We have worked closely with the Parent Carer Forum to engage them in specific areas, and their input has been much appreciated by Home to School Transport. A co-produced 'Frequently Asked Questions' document is due to be published for parents and the Head of Service will continue to attend regular meetings with the Parent Carer Forum and other professionals. The Parent Carer Forum also attend the regular monthly Task and Finish Group chaired by the Leader of the Council where progress is examined.
- 6.4.23. A Parent Engagement Event chaired by the Leader of the Council is planned for next half-term, where parents will be given the opportunity to comment on service improvements and to hear about plans for next year and how these will impact on them.
- 6.4.24. The Education and Skills Transformation Director is working closely with the Parent Carer Forum to support them with recruitment to two key roles that will provide more capacity and enable the PCF to promote the Forum more widely and attract greater membership. Interviews are taking place next week for a Co-Production Officer and discussions are underway to support the recruitment of an Administrative Officer.

Integrated Passenger Transport Unit

- 6.4.25. The independent inquiry into the SEND Home to School Transport service recommended that the Council should consider implementing an Integrated

Transport Unit (ITU). An Integrated Transport Unit is a service where different transport functions are brought together from across an organisation, or brought together from multiple organisations, and integrated to improve outcomes, efficiency and effectiveness.

- 6.4.26. ITUs can bring significant benefits, most importantly improved outcomes and more efficient, accessible and easy to navigate services for the people they serve and their families.
- 6.4.27. A project has been initiated to develop an outline business case for an Integrated Transport Unit, which will provide the basis on which a decision can be taken whether this is the preferred way forward and how this could operate. This project brings together officers from across the council and is being overseen by the Director of Neighbourhoods.
- 6.4.28. Co-design is being built into this from the beginning and the Leader's Home to School Task and Finish Group has already taken part in a discussion about the scope of the project, the benefits that it should deliver and the risks that need to be managed. As a result of this co-design, the scope and timescales of the project are being reviewed and, subject to this detailed review, it is anticipated that the outline business case will be completed by September and will then be considered by the Executive.

Key Challenges

- 6.4.29. Our Home to School Transport service has been a challenging area of work, in which there has been a combination of immediate improvements and improvements which are being delivered over a longer period.
- 6.4.30. Staff capacity has been a challenge and additional capacity has therefore been agreed on a temporary basis to continue to roll out service improvements between now and Autumn 2021 to ensure standards remain consistent and continue to improve. Additional permanent capacity will be required to sustain those improvements, and this will be reflected in a permanent structure to be proposed beyond this period.
- 6.4.31. The impact of the Clean Air Zone (CAZ) will undoubtedly bring significant benefits to the health of the city's residents. However, there is a risk of traffic displacement both during the initial roll-out and at the start of September when traffic levels traditionally rise. As a result, operators will be looking at impact on route times through trialling a dry run at the start of the scheme, starting routes early and communicating daily with the Council on any issues. In addition, parents will be receiving communications advising of the actions the Council is taking to monitor the impact. Plans are in place to ensure that parents, providers and schools are all prepared for potential impact and the Service has put in place all possible mitigations. A review of the impact of the CAZ on Home to School Transport will be conducted at the end of June.

- 6.4.32. The Covid-19 pandemic has obviously brought a new level of challenge in providing a safe service for children. Increased spend has been incurred due to the need to make transport Covid-safe and provide extra capacity where required due to staff absence. Officers have prioritised the safety of children during this period and taken all possible measures to ensure that travel is as Covid-safe as possible. Routes have been increased from around 600 to around 900 to ensure bubbles and social distancing can be maintained, as well as employing contingency operators.
- 6.4.33. The Council has been in receipt of additional Covid-19 funding from the Department for Education (DfE), confirmed on a half term basis since September 2020. It is likely that this funding will end between June and September 2021 leading to a potentially significant reduction of routes. A project has been set up to manage this transition and to communicate any changes in good time to operators and families.
- 6.4.34. Around 40% of existing routes are provided by National Express Accessible Transport, and all are out to tender this year. This is a large-scale project and is being overseen by the Assistant Director of Commissioning with regular reporting arrangements in place to ensure the project is on track. Any changes of operator will need careful planning and communicating to pupils and families. A mobilisation team has been set up to carry out this work.
- 6.4.35. Guide capacity continues to be a challenge due to staff needing to self-isolate and agency staff have been put in place to support. A deed of variation has been enacted to increase supply via the transport providers and continued support from agencies is available as required.
- 6.4.36. Issues with the transition process this year have meant that a small number of pupils have still not had school places confirmed for September 2021. In some cases, places have been confirmed but confirmation letters were delayed. This has a knock-on impact on Home to School Transport as staff cannot begin to put in place plans for travel arrangements until placements are confirmed and parents have been notified and requested travel. The risk of this impacting on a successful start to the Autumn Term is being managed as closely as possible and Home to School Transport Service is working closely with SENAR to address any issues and find solutions.

Key priorities for the next six months

- 6.4.37. KPIs will continue to be monitored and delivered to identify the overall performance of the service.
- 6.4.38. Schools have been briefed on the plan for recommissioning of routes for September and will be invited to be involved in evaluation of bids from potential suppliers (with particular focus on quality). Schools will also play a key role in

managing any risk areas surrounding pupil groupings of these new routes and will be involved in route planning.

- 6.4.39. The 365 Response pilot will extend to allow terms and conditions changes to take effect, with a view to rolling out the system following robust testing, on a phased approach towards the end of 2021.
- 6.4.40. The contract management and compliance function will continue to work closely with operators to monitor quality and performance of routes.
- 6.4.41. The service will continue to work closely with the Parent Carer Forum through regular meetings to update and where possible work jointly on specific areas of work, as jointly agreed.

6.5. **Careers and Skills**

Birmingham Careers Services (BCS)

- 6.5.1. Careers Service staff have continued to deliver services on a virtual and agile basis throughout the pandemic, with face to face provision and in person support gradually being reintroduced as restrictions ease.
- 6.5.2. The service offers careers information, advice and guidance services to NEET (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training) 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.
- 6.5.3. Identification of those at risk of NEET is taking place earlier this year due to the pandemic and extra external funding has been secured.
- 6.5.4. During lockdown, careers advice and guidance 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. There will be a continuation of this service leading to a hybrid approach in relation to face to face delivery, on-line and virtual support plus the review of staff admin base location.
- 6.5.5. The service has maintained contact with all schools, encouraging the referral of all Year 11, 12 and 13 pupils for 2021 leavers who are at risk of becoming NEET.

- 6.5.6. A small increase in staffing resource (for a limited period) is 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.
- 6.5.7. The increase in demand of the service will need to be closely monitored as we emerge from the pandemic and reach the statutory school leaving date, to see the true impact on young people in relation to their career's aspirations and possibilities.

14-19 Full Participation and Skills Team

- 6.5.8. Currently, post-16 providers are mandated to remain open in line with Government restrictions.
- 6.5.9. The Full Participation team continues to support the Public Health Test and Trace Team, remaining on duty for part of the May half-term 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.
- 6.5.10. The 14-19 team worked with all eligible post-16 settings to make sure that ten days' worth of retrospective payments were provided for all young people eligible for free school meals, covering the Christmas, Easter and now May Half term holiday period.
- 6.5.11. Officers have shifted the delivery of '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

Employment and Skills Service

6.5.12. The series of national lockdowns has had a huge impact on local businesses and employers. April 2021 reports show us that:

- Unemployment in the city increased by 780 to 84,435 in from February to March 2021. Unemployment is now 35,875 higher than it was in February 2020 prior to the lockdown; an increase of 74% in claimant numbers.
- These figures mean that Birmingham's unemployment rate stands at 15.4%, above both the West Midlands (9.3%) and the UK (7.9%) rates.
- Unemployment increased in 44 of the city's 69 wards in March 2021.
- Youth (18-24) unemployment in the city rose by 305 in March 2021 to stand at 16,390. The youth claimant rate rose to 19.6%.

6.5.13. The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ('Furlough' scheme) has supported workers, and the range of loans and grants for employers, which the Council has been instrumental in delivering, have helped many businesses to survive. However, we now need to look to the ending of these schemes and making the most of the support that is going to follow. Officers have worked with partners to develop a joined up offer for redundancy and unemployment advice, and have bid for further EU funds (the last of which runs up to December 2023) to continue to support unemployed young people and adults into jobs and training, especially where these opportunities are linked to our own Council delivery, capital build programmes and supply chains. In May 2021, the Council submitted a bid for the new national Community Renewal Fund to support innovative responses to the economic and community challenges we face. This bid focusses on working with local organisation to support access to Public Sector jobs and contracts, with the pilot focus area being in East Birmingham.

6.5.14. The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) has created a Covid-19 recovery 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. Officers are supporting this strong collaborative work, working with partners including the DWP and JCP, neighbouring Local Authorities, the voluntary sector and local colleges and providers to develop a West Midlands Youth Offer delivered through JCP's Youth Hubs. This enables new Youth Work Coaches to be based at community locations, including our own Youth Centres, and with a flagship new Youth Hub at Library of Birmingham, which

along with one other hub in Merseyside, will be a national demonstrator of youth hub delivery. WMCA has co-ordinated an online resource as part of the Youth Employment UK website that sets out training, education and support services available regionally, and at a city level.

Proposed approach to city-level employment and economic recovery

- 6.5.15. On 26th May 2021, the Council convened the first city level partnership event towards delivery of the Birmingham Covid-19 Economic Recovery Strategy, with over 60 participants attending.
- 6.5.16. The strategy, approved in March 2021 by Cabinet, sets out the City Council's contribution to supporting the economy of Birmingham as it recovers from the Covid-19 crisis and adapts to changing conditions, including the challenges of leaving the European Union. It sits alongside the plans set out by the Combined Authority and the Local Enterprise Partnership. The immediate focus is in the short term (0-2-year timescale) although we will also be setting out longer term economic opportunities to deliver inclusive growth in contributing to wider goals such as improving health outcomes and supporting stronger communities.
- 6.5.17. It is important to build on our work with our partners and key stakeholders, such as the West Midlands Combined Authority, GBSLEP, Chamber of Commerce, the Core Cities network and Department for Work and Pensions, to complement/add value to their work. The purpose of the event is to set up a framework for working in a more integrated way in responding to the short-term unemployment crisis facing the people of Birmingham and also address the underlying long-term barriers facing them in pursuing or securing good jobs.
- 6.5.18. The objectives for the event are set out below:
- Launch the City Council COVID-19 Economic Recovery Strategy – working together to 'better bridge' the short/long term skills programmes and recruitment strategies between employers and those seeking job opportunities or navigating career routes.
 - Bring together a strategic picture of current and planned activity for skills development and good jobs – outlining short/long term economic challenges and opportunities.
 - Improve the connection between strategic dialogue and operational delivery at a local level for Birmingham - build on our ability to respond flexibly with required delivery and at pace/scale to local issues and learn from good practice in designing local interventions.
 - Bring together skills activity with economic development and business support – further align skills with job creation and employment

opportunities, enhancing visibility of progression routes in line with growth sectors and new sectors.

Planning, procurement and social responsibility

- 6.5.19. Officers 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. This includes Commonwealth Games related sites such as Alexander Stadium, Perry Barr Regeneration Scheme and major regeneration projects such as Peddimore, Smithfield, and Langley. These projects result in hundreds of jobs per year being targeted at local residents.
- 6.5.20. This provision is delivered through the Employment Access Team (EAT) which is also delivering the World of Work (WoW) job brokerage project funded by the European Social Fund (ESF).
- 6.5.21. 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. Officers are currently bidding to extend this project to October 2023 to support ongoing recovery response.

Addressing youth unemployment

- 6.5.22. Through the EU- funded Youth Promise Plus (YPP) project there is currently capacity to support around 1,500 young people per annum with one to one support for as long as needed (often 9-12 months).
- 6.5.23. The project also funds specialist support for young people who are care leavers or referred due to complex situations. BCC receives 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.
- 6.5.24. YPP provides good equality of access to jobs and skills opportunities, with young people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities representing 56% of those supported, and young people with disabilities and/or long-term health conditions representing 19%. The project currently has an overall success rate of 34% which is on par with the usual level for similar projects.
- 6.5.25. Working with GBSLEP and Solihull Council, the team has created a Kickstart Gateway to support businesses to be able to employ young people aged 16–24 for 6-month paid placements under the Government's Kickstart scheme. This has started successfully, with young people joining a bespoke Birmingham Adult Education Service PREP training course to help them apply for digital Marketing and Business Administration jobs. In the first instance, the

Council is aiming to support at least 200 local jobs via our Kickstart Gateway, and we hope to extend and exceed this volume in support of employers and young people in the city.

- 6.5.26. The Council will be creating 50 Kickstart jobs within its own service and uplifting the pay for these jobs from minimum wage to Living Wage to support young people. The aim is for 30% of these jobs to be successfully gained by our Care Leavers and extra staffing resource has been funded to support this.

Developing our Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Strategy

- 6.5.27. In partnership with GBSLEP, a programme is being developed to launch a fund this summer worth an estimated £650k per annum to support Birmingham's SMEs to pay apprenticeship fees. It's proposed that the fund will be open to all business sectors to aid recovery, and we will work with employers to focus the promotion of opportunities to unemployed residents.

Providing a rapid response to redundancy

- 6.5.28. Together with DWP, GBSLEP, National Careers Service, Solihull MBC and WMCA, support is being provided to 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 for entrepreneurship

- 6.5.29. Officers are working with National Careers Service (NCS), whom the government has funded to provide furlough support, and through BAES we provide skills development opportunities for those looking to become self-employed.
- 6.5.30. The Library of Birmingham provides a comprehensive free business start-up service including legal and Intellectual Property advice provided pro-bono by city businesses.
- 6.5.31. During 2021 it is proposed to 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.

6.6. Birmingham Youth Service

- 6.6.1. 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. The service is currently delivering youth provision both inside and outside to all young people and not just the vulnerable, albeit in small groups with social distancing.
- 6.6.2. The Council's priority is providing continued support to young people through the following agendas:

- Supporting NEET young people aged 16 – 25 years old to overcome barriers preventing them from accessing training, education and employment opportunities.
- Addressing youth violence and anti-social behaviour through our detached presence, partnership work with the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), CSP and EMPOWER U.
- Providing safe spaces for all young people to engage with professionally trained youth workers to address contextual safeguarding through place based approaches and increase their emotional and social intelligence.
- Improving the voice of young people through the Youth City Board to ensure they can engage in decision making processes. Examples of this include the Education in the Pandemic Survey, the Mental Health Survey, Youth Covid Champions, and working with Public Health to link young people into their theme groups.

6.6.3. The Youth Service is continuing to help with tackling the wider pandemic. Youth centres have been used as rapid testing centres with some continuing to be a collection point for tests.

6.7. **Birmingham Adult Education Services (BAES)**

6.7.1. Despite the challenges experienced throughout this academic year, learner engagement through Birmingham Adult Education Services (BAES) continues to be very strong:

- Attendance in Term 1 and 2 was at an all-time high of 91.7%.
- Retention is at 98% compared to 94.5% in the same period last year, representing a 3.5% increase.
- Participation from learners living in the 30% most deprived areas in the city has increased by 8.2%. This is currently at 81.5%, compared to 73.3% in 19-20.

6.7.2. Our strong attendance and retention rates are a direct result of the support provided by tutors and learner services staff, as well as other key inclusion strategies that include:

- The laptop loan scheme with more than 200 laptops lent to learners
- Daily 1:1 support on the phone available till 7 pm to solve online/IT issues
- Online homework workshops

6.7.3. 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 had 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.

- 6.7.4. Following the end of the second lockdown period during which all provision moved to online delivery, 211 courses were moved back to onsite delivery. This represents about 20% of total course provision.
- 6.7.5. Due to the effectiveness of online delivery, a significant number of groups were formed with learners who live across many diverse areas of the city. This makes it impossible to transition the course back on-site as it is not possible for all learners to attend the same centre.
- 6.7.6. On the whole we have found that learners are still uneasy about going back to centres. A survey carried out by BAES showed that the vast majority of learners who are in online courses prefer to remain online. Learners from ethnic minority groups, particularly those from Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, are reluctant to take up vaccination– and reluctant to be take part in classroom delivery. Lateral flow testing is taking place at centres, but many learners are reluctant or refusing to take the test.
- 6.7.7. BAES continues to support residents and learners by tackling 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.
- 6.7.8. In Term 3 (2020/21 Summer Term), it is anticipated the percentage of onsite provision will increase slightly and by the end of May, it is expected that around 40% of the provision will be back to onsite delivery. However, the courses running onsite have very low numbers to allow for social distancing restrictions (around 6 learners per course). Appropriate safe spaces are available to support the most disadvantaged learners to study at the centres.
- 6.7.9. To date, we have completed circa 16,000 enrolments across all provision, of which 6,581 are Adult Skills (accredited courses), 8574 are in Community Learning courses and 1516 are in non-funded courses. Across the provision, enrolment of working age adults has increased.
- 6.7.10. Participation in Adult Skills courses is lower than last year. In Functional Skills, 77% of the funding has been achieved against the delivery plan. This area is

projected to achieve between 91% and 87% by the end of the year. In ESOL, 75% of our funding has been achieved against the delivery plan, however this figure will increase as Term 3 programmes finish enrolling and it is likely to reach 90%. Digital provision has reached 87% against the delivery plan and it is likely to over-achieve against what was set in the delivery plan.

6.7.11. The decrease in enrolments in comparison to previous years are believed to stem from the following factors:

- Learner fear of infection and uncertainty about their safety;
- Mental health/depression;
- Increased family commitments looking after children;
- The need to cover the most basic needs;
- The requirement for social distancing.

6.7.12. However, the positive impact of our provision is clearly shown in our Audits of Learning Progress, which show that:

- Learners are overwhelmingly positive and motivated about their learning.
- Learners are benefiting from calm and productive learning environments.
- Learners are benefiting from high expectations for classroom behaviour and most are able to use the functions of Zoom to engage well in lessons.
- Courses are well sequenced to build on what learners know, and can do and build in revision to ensure learners transfer knowledge to their long-term memory.
- Summative assessment is challenging and used to extend learning, as learners are provided with feedback about what they have done well and what they need to do to further improve.

6.7.13. In the Autumn Term, the Route to Work scheme was launched, which utilises a systematic approach to identifying the skills that unemployed learners require and leads to a package of tailored support. To date, there have been over 600 learners who have benefited from the programme.

6.7.14. From 21st June 2021, in line with Public Health, DfE and BCC guidelines, BAES aim to return to pre-Covid service provision level as far as is possible. Face to face delivery will continue to be increased to support the needs of the most disadvantaged communities in the city along with maintaining the current online offer.

6.7.15. The Learner Services Team continues to offer monthly online sessions to learners, focusing on Safeguarding, Prevent, internet safety and well-being. Learners now have live access to Safeguarding Tile via Moodle. This not only empowers learners to seek support and to self-help, but also provides direct routes to the Safeguarding Team and external agencies such as The Waiting Room, West Midlands Police, and Every Mind Matters (NHS). A new online safeguarding referral form is about to be launched. This will provide another route for learners to either contact the safeguarding team or an external agency for support.

6.7.16. There will be another virtual 'Choices Event' taking place this term for those learners considering their next steps. The focus for this will be progression routes and raising aspirations for Level 1, 2 and 3 learners beyond their current course. Employers and Volunteer Organisations will be providing information, advice and guidance to support learners with some form of work-related activity.

6.8. Libraries

6.8.1. Following the announcement of a third national lockdown, in line with BCC and industry (Libraries Connected) guidance, the Order and Collect Service was suspended. All library buildings were temporarily closed to allow the service offer to be revised considering new restrictions.

6.8.2. Following the easing of the third lockdown restrictions and in line with the government's roadmap to recovery, libraries have been working on a recovery plan. As part of this and along with BCC and industry (Libraries Connected) guidance, libraries in Birmingham returned to limited browsing, book borrowing and public PC usage from 12th April 2021.

6.8.3. From 17th May additional services were added such as story-times, family sessions, access to study space, archives and employment advice by appointment.

6.8.4. From 21st June it is planned that libraries will return to pre-Covid services as far as possible. This will be subject to local circumstances and government guidelines. The enhanced online services provided by the library service since lockdown will continue to be provided.

7. Communities (Including Housing, Bereavement, and Community Safety)

7.1. Housing

7.1.1. Birmingham City Council has continued to work with its partners during the pandemic to reduce the number of rough sleepers in the city.

7.1.2. The official annual count of people sleeping rough in Birmingham took place in November 2020 and the figure was announced, along with those for the rest

of England, in February 2021. On a single night 17 people were found bedded down in Birmingham, this was a 67% reduction on the previous year (52), and an even more significant reduction from the 91 found the year before that. The count took place at a time when Birmingham was in Tier 3 Covid-19 restrictions and during a year of intense activity.

- 7.1.3. In March 2021, Government announced the Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP) Bid, a combined capital and revenue programme aimed at move-on accommodation for rough sleepers accommodated under 'everyone-in' and current people who sleep rough. Birmingham has submitted a bid, via the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), for £680,000 revenue to provide support through to March 2024 to 40 x 1-bedroom flats in Birmingham. Citizen Housing (RSL) will purchase off the open market 15 of these units to be made available as new social housing for former rough sleepers, and BCC will provide 25 units as additional value to the programme. If successful, this provision will address some of the loss anticipated with the end of the Housing First pilot in June 2021. Further detail will be provided at July's Cabinet.
- 7.1.4. Birmingham has secured £1,635,782 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) for 2020-21 under the Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI). This is the main government programme for funding work with people who sleep rough. In 2020-21 Birmingham received £788,000 so this represents a significant increase which should maintain existing interventions (including those commenced under Covid-19 conditions), as well as new interventions. The funds reflect a bid to MHCLG for £1,288,157 about which more details will be provided at June's Cabinet; as well as guaranteed funding rolled forwards from 2020-21, and additional grant for the transition into Q1 of 2021-22.
- 7.1.5. Birmingham's response to homelessness and rough sleeping throughout the pandemic continues to be recognised nationally. Cllr Sharon Thompson, Cabinet Member for Homes & Neighbourhoods is currently representing Birmingham and the WMCA region on the Kerslake Independent Commission on Rough Sleeping and Learning from Covid-19. Convened by St Mungo's, the Commission includes representatives of government, public bodies, the voluntary and charitable sectors. Birmingham and the region have shared learning on a range of factors including the impact of Housing First on young people, concerns for people with 'no recourse to public funds' and the impact the lockdowns had upon street-based activity.

Temporary accommodation

- 7.1.6. Our partnership with the Early Intervention Team, which includes representatives from Birmingham Children's Trust, health, education and

others, has seen every household in temporary accommodation receiving a letter offering bespoke support.

- 7.1.7. We have moved a significant number of our families into better quality Bed and Breakfasts such as the Park Regis Hotel, who provided over 10,000 lunches free of charge to families. This also included providing key working areas which provide wrap around support to families, delivered by statutory partners.
- 7.1.8. We have also reduced B&B overall costs by negotiating better value for money across the City.
- 7.1.9. Through the Homelessness Reduction New Burdens funding in May, Birmingham received £2.5 million from central Government to be utilised on front line prevention services, such as rent deposits, mediation, prevention fund and the sanctuary scheme to prevent homelessness. In April 2021 we prevented homelessness in 56.86% of cases accessing the service. We have seen steady and real success in driving forward the prevention agenda. Of the cases closed in prevention this month, a significant percentage have been closed with a positive outcome. This has been because the homelessness prevention fund has been used to either secure deposits or reduce arrears; redirecting single vulnerable people to suitable housing providers or negotiations with families to prevent exclusion.
- 7.1.10. The Eviction Panel is now back in operation and Housing Options is working with colleagues across the rents and benefits service to prevent evictions even at the last stage.

Evictions

- 7.1.11. The pandemic has led to ongoing Government action to prevent people being evicted from their homes since March 2020. The third national lockdown was effective from 6th January 2021 and resulted in all other key dates being reviewed and extended including:
- The stay of possession proceedings extended from 21st February 2021 to 31st May 2021, except in certain circumstances.
 - The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ('furlough scheme') extended until September 2021.
 - The Universal Credit uplift of £20 per week extended until October 2021.
 - Notice Seeking possession 6-month notice extended to 31st May 2021.
 - Court interim arrangements extended until 31st July 2021.
- 7.1.12. Therefore, the service has had to continue to suspend enforcement action and review priority areas where enforcement action should and could commence. Government guidelines state that evictions can proceed if the tenant has over

6 months of arrears and the case is at the warrant stage. For these exempt cases, the service has implemented another stage to the normal eviction process. This means that following the Eviction Prevention Panel, a further review takes place (including the Assistant Director, Revenues, Benefits and Rents) before the cases are signed off. There are currently 13 evictions identified that all fall under the exempt guidelines. Court restrictions come to an end on 1st June 2021 and their interim arrangements are set to be reviewed in July 2021.

- 7.1.13. The Council continues to strongly urge all its own tenants who have concerns, or have found themselves struggling financially to pay their bills, to contact the council directly. As a landlord to over 60,000 households, we have found that rent arrears have increased significantly since lockdown first began. In response, the council has attempted to contact 22,899 tenants and successfully engaged with 8,812 tenants to try and understand what further help can be given to prevent them from falling any further into debt. Of those who responded 3,235 tenants state they have been affected by Covid-19.
- 7.1.14. With the eviction ban lifting, a leaflet has been produced with key messaging aimed at tenants of all tenures across the city. This gives details of the advice and support that is available, as well as some helpful tips on how to manage finances. For council tenants this is being inserted and sent out with the Rent Service quarterly rent statements.
- 7.1.15. The Service continues to work with our tenants to provide the following services:
- Debt Advice and support (including Government Financial Support);
 - UC help and advice working closely with our Job Centres;
 - Homeless prevention fund payments;
 - Discretionary Housing Payments;
 - Support to those affected by C-19 ensuring benefits reflect their circumstances and any gaps identified and paid;
 - 'Think Family' support.
- 7.1.16. We continue to work with national organisations and other local authorities across the UK to ensure a consistent and reliable approach is taken as the eviction ban is removed.
- 7.1.17. We will continue to be mindful of any new Covid-19 related measures and subsequent bans should further lockdown or restrictions be introduced.

Private Rented Services (PRS)

- 7.1.18. The Help 2 Rent scheme, launched in October 2020, continues to provide support for homeless families renting a home in the private-rented sector.

Since the launch we have built a portfolio of over 140 landlords have joined the scheme and over 100 households have been accommodated. The scheme provides incentives to landlords who offer 12-month fixed tenancies to those on the council's homeless and housing registers and will enable landlords to select from a range of assurances such as landlord insurance, rental deposits or rental guarantees, that are often barriers to accepting those who are either on benefits, the council's housing register or low-income families as tenants.

- 7.1.19. The council is progressing work on supported exempt accommodation which has seen a sharp increase in Birmingham over the last 12 months, with over 21,000 in payment in April 2021 compared with 14,000 in November 2019. This accommodation is trapping some of the most vulnerable people in some of the poorest accommodation with inadequate support. They are often unable to take up employment and are without any pathway to move on.
- 7.1.20. Birmingham was successful in securing £1.04m in October 2020 to support a pilot which looked in more depth into the supported exempt housing sector in the city. Due to Covid-19 impacts on delivery MHCLG followed up with a second phase of funding and Cabinet approved a further bid in April 2021, taking pilot activity to September 2021. A strong governance structure and project delivery plan is in place to drive this project for the remainder of this financial year. This includes a Cabinet Member Sponsor Board identifying key areas for lobbying and legislative and regulatory change.
- 7.1.21. The inspection element of the pilot was impacted by Covid-19 lockdown measures and we have been focusing on urgent responsive inspections as part of Phase 1. Looking ahead to Phase 2, we will be moving to more proactive inspections as lockdown measures are lifted; this will, however, need to be kept under constant review in regard to any local outbreaks/measures etc.
- 7.1.22. 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. This was formally launched in March 2021.
 - Rolling out a Quality Standard for providers of exempt accommodation so that the service they provide meets a high standard. This was also formally launched in March 2021.
 - 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.

- Developing a training module for providers and referring agencies to achieve higher quality provision.
- Completing a strategic needs assessment and subsequent support housing strategy.

7.1.23. Several mini conferences have taken place across the city to provide an opportunity for MPs, councillors and residents to have their say. Discussion was focused around what action 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. This has now developed into a group of resident reps from across the city to meet and share experiences and issues.

7.1.24. In May 2021 Cabinet approved the commencement of consultation where conditions for selective licensing based on deprivation and crime have been met for 25 wards across the city following a further of review of data, to allow a more refined assessment and comparison of wards against the Birmingham average for Deprivation and Crime.

Housing Repairs and Maintenance

7.1.25. Since Government lifted Covid-19 restrictions following the first national lockdown, the service has resumed routine repairs in customers' homes, maintaining social distancing and safe working practices. Contract Works Officers are targeting cases of disrepair and litigation, void inspections, mutual exchanges, complaints and customer service visits.

7.1.26. The gas servicing backlog (due to restricted access) has been addressed and 100% of our dwellings held a valid Landlord Gas Safety record at the end of 2020/21.

7.1.27. The programme to install sprinkler systems to over 200 of the Council's high rise blocks has continued, and is due to be completed in September 2021.

7.1.28. Following the decision at Cabinet in March 2021 not to extend the South Area repairs and maintenance contract for the final two years (of the contract), a procurement process has been launched for a provider for this service from April 2022 to March 2024. It is planned to complete this process in November 2021 to enable award of the contract in mid-December. Mobilisation can then be completed early in the new year for a start on 1st April 2022.

Housing Management

7.1.29. As national and local restrictions are reviewed, we have updated risk assessments to reflect the situation and worked flexibly to ensure services are maintained and can function as normally as possible.

- 7.1.30. Visiting services continue to be undertaken virtually wherever possible. However, services will now start to take place face-to-face if required for health and safety reasons or safeguarding concerns. In-person visits will only take place following completed risk assessments.
- 7.1.31. Increases in domestic abuse have been experienced throughout the course of the pandemic and we have increased public messaging and appointed additional officers in response.
- 7.1.32. 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.
- 7.1.33. Estate Services teams have returned to business as usual. Additional resources will be required to ensure our standards within the blocks and estates are improved.
- 7.1.34. We continue to conduct weekly telephone contact with all sheltered scheme tenants, particularly focussing on the lonely and most vulnerable. Only critical face-to-face visits and health and safety checks are taking place, and common rooms remain closed.
- 7.1.35. Lettings are continuing and being conducted on a virtual basis which is proving to be very successful. There is a review taking place to consider returning to a face-to-face service; this will be done based on the needs and requirements of the customer, and it is envisaged that a mixture of face to face and virtual lettings will take place.
- 7.1.36. The Careline Service which provides support to vulnerable residents remains fully operational, including repairs and new installations.

Housing Development/Birmingham Municipal Housing Trust (BMHT)

- 7.1.37. We have a number of new developments due to start on site, notably Farnborough Road site in Castle Vale which is due to commence in Spring 2021. BMHT have worked on this scheme jointly with The Pioneer Housing Group, and will deliver 123 new homes.
- 7.1.38. Seven schemes are due to be completed over the coming months to deliver 55 new homes. These are: Primrose Kings Norton, Longley Avenue Sutton Coldfield, Alum Drive Bordesley Green, Kestrel Avenue Yardley, Lenton Croft South Yardley, The Fordrough, Northfield and Ward End Park Road, Alum Rock developments.
- 7.1.39. The first phase of development at Bromford is now on site, which will deliver 53 new homes for social rent. It is anticipated that planning applications will be made on further 10 sites on Bromford which could deliver a further 181 new homes.

- 7.1.40. Work has started on Monmouth Road, Bartley Green where 68 new homes for sale and rent will be built. Work continues at Gladstone street, Aston where 9 houses and 23 flats will be delivered. In addition, construction on the final phases at Birchfield, Perry Barr & Abbeyfields, Erdington have commenced delivering 39 new homes across the two sites.
- 7.1.41. Our contractors continue to operate at 80% efficiency against pre-Covid activity, resulting in some forecast slippage in the BMHT 2020/21 budget. While this is improving there are new problems with shortages of materials causing some delays. Our contractors continue to work on site, adhering to all Covid-19 safe working protocols and we continuously monitor for any emerging impacts on resources, suppliers and services, as a matter of course.
- 7.1.42. A further five schemes are currently being procured at Gressel Lane Hodge Hill, Clements Street Yardley, Lowden Drive Hodge Hill, Primrose Phase 2 and Pool Farm in Kings Norton, which will deliver a total of 391 new homes with 263 for rent and 128 for sale.
- 7.1.43. The Property Purchase Programme is an approved acquisitions process of obtaining properties from the open market in areas where there is existing/new council housing stock, to support the provision of much needed affordable homes. The Covid-19 pandemic and related operational factors have delayed the programme previously and as such relevant amendments have been made to the process, which will enable a spend of the £2m budget to be met this financial year.

7.2. Register Office and Bereavement Services

- 7.2.1. Following successful transition to Stage 3 of the national recovery roadmap, a fully operational service is now in place. Covid-19 secure measures have been reviewed and improved where necessary.
- 7.2.2. The working arrangements in the Register Office have been reviewed and new arrangements have been made in the light of changing Government guidance and additional knowledge about Variants Of Concern (VOC) This ensures greater safety for staff and the public in doing face-to-face registrations as required under the legislation. The changes are designed to minimise the risk of spread of Covid-19. The change in requirements for face coverings was changed with effect from August 2020, whereby people accessing the Register Office must wear a face covering unless they have an exemption under the legislation. Staff are also encouraged to wear face coverings, if moving about the office or in situations where social distancing is potentially unachievable.

Birth registrations

- 7.2.3. When the birth registration service recommenced in June 2020 following the first national lockdown, there was a backlog of approximately 6,200 births to be registered. As at 20th May 2021 there were 1,819 applications in the system.

Recovery arrangements are to be in place to provide a service to both reduce this backlog and deal with new births. Registrations are generally prioritised by chronological order, with urgent circumstances considered on a case by case basis, including the need for passports.

Citizenship Ceremonies

- 7.2.4. The Birmingham Registration Service is undertaking virtual ceremonies, avoiding any need for new citizens to attend a citizenship ceremony at the Register Office.

Marriage/Civil Partnerships

- 7.2.5. Marriage and civil partnership ceremonies were recommenced from 2nd December 2020, as indicated in national policy with the relaxation of the national lockdown measures.
- 7.2.6. Attendance at ceremonies has been controlled at all stages, in accordance with current national guidance. With effect from 17th May 2021, 30 guests are allowed to attend ceremonies.
- 7.2.7. Notices of Marriage and Civil Partnership were suspended in the lockdown from January to March 2021, but the service has now recommenced.
- 7.2.8. Registrar General Licence requests for marriage/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.
- 7.2.9. Applications to reduce the waiting period for marriages or civil partnerships are now being processed. Any notices of marriage or civil partnership cancelled due to lockdown have been refunded or rebooked.
- 7.2.10. Approved premise licences cannot be suspended during this period. However, Birmingham City Council's Registrar Service is considering extensions to existing licences where appropriate and if it is allowable legally.

Deaths/Still-Births

- 7.2.11. The Coronavirus Act 2020 changed the death registration process, with electronic or telephone registration permissible. Demand was high and changes were made to the initial process, which increased operational efficiency. This, along with the additional resources allocated, has reduced waiting times for the registration of deaths. These are generally now down to less than half a day for completed applications, provided there are no complications.
- 7.2.12. The service introduced revised methods of working which helped to improve the administration of the death registration process. This improvement has been maintained through the second wave, and additional staff are allocated

to death registration work from birth registrations wherever possible. While there has been an increase in demands on the service throughout the pandemic, there are minimal backlogs to the process at present.

Bereavement Services (Burials and Cremations)

- 7.2.13. Bereavement services are working to revised service plans in accordance with national guidance. This necessitates changes to the way that funeral services are conducted. For this emergency period, and in line with requirements for social distancing, attendance at funerals is now limited in crematoria. The number of people at funeral services varies according to the size of the chapel, but is being actively managed in conjunction with funeral directors and families to ensure the risk of spread of Covid-19 is minimised.
- 7.2.14. Services will normally be a maximum of 30 minutes at this time and funeral directors have been asked to assist with the rules about social distancing and the numbers of attendees since lockdown. The number of services provided each week is varied in line with the demand, but there are no delays at present with burial slots widely available.
- 7.2.15. The requirement for persons attending funerals inside crematorium chapels to wear face coverings continues. There are certain circumstances when these can be removed. This came into effect in August 2020. Ministers wear face coverings going into and leaving the building while funeral director staff are encouraged to wear coverings.
- 7.2.16. People attending burials are encouraged to wear face coverings.
- 7.2.17. Cemeteries are now fully open to the public even while a funeral is being held.

7.3. Communities

Community Centres

- 7.3.1. Following the Government announcement of a national lockdown on 20 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 Active Wellbeing Society (TAWS)/Fare Share food operation at Ladywood Health.
- 7.3.2. As the year progressed, the regulations clarifying what activities were permitted at any given time changed repeatedly with successive national lockdowns, interspersed with limited re-opening, the application of the “rule of six”, and the introduction of Tier 2 and 3 restrictions.
- 7.3.3. At each stage, the operation of approximately 160 groups was assessed and, where possible and permitted, groups were received back, limited by the following factors:

- Social distancing requirements, which significantly reduced the capacity of rooms and halls.
- Type of activity, with some groups not permitted due to the high risk presented by their activities e.g. group singing.
- Financial viability, with some groups no longer viable with reduced numbers.
- Risk levels of participants, with some groups choosing not to return because they catered for people at higher risk e.g. the elderly.
- Ventilation requirements, which meant we could not use a number of spaces or could only use them by leaving doors and windows open to ensure a sufficient flow of fresh air.

7.3.4. In order to re-open as periodically permitted, the service undertook extensive work to amend normal operating procedures and introduce new Covid-19 secure arrangements to allow centres to safely reopen to the public. This included supporting user groups and tenants to develop risk assessments for their specific activities in accordance with the relevant guidance.

7.3.5. As winter 2020 approached it became necessary to find alternative solutions to leaving doors and windows open. The service worked collaboratively with other front line services, Birmingham Property Services and ACIVICO to develop a Winter Ventilation Strategy, and in the first instance adopted CO2 monitors to check the flow of fresh air was sufficient to provide reassurance to customers and staff alike. This also assisted with the identification of any particular problem areas where more permanent solutions were required.

7.3.6. From early 2021, the service supported C19 Lateral Flow testing sites based at Mere Green, Sheldon and Oddingley Community Centres. These operations are now being withdrawn in order that the Centres can re-open fully from 17th May 2021, although the site at Summerfield remains in situ at present.

7.3.7. From 12th April 2021 nurseries and children's activities were allowed, and as of 17th May, all activities can resume subject to the ongoing maintenance of social distancing, track and test recording, ventilation, wearing of face coverings in common areas, and enhanced cleaning regimes on site.

7.3.8. If social distancing requirements are not eased there will be an on-going impact on income generation which is expected to create a financial pressure on the service.

Localisation/Neighbourhood Development

7.3.9. A Localisation Star Chamber has been established to drive forward the localisation agenda across the organisation and with partners across the city. It will provide a continuing process of challenge and monitoring to ensure

localisation is coordinated, championed, and embedded across council policies, services, work programmes, and ways of working.

- 7.3.10. A Localisation Delivery Plan setting out the actions to be progressed in the next 18 months has been developed. The Neighbourhood Development and Support Unit (NDSU) is being expanded to support the ongoing Localisation priorities and will be undertaking the next phase of Member Development, working with Cllr Karen McCarthy, Cabinet Advisor- Localisation to provide training and support for councillors from this month.
- 7.3.11. Since the beginning of the pandemic, NDSU have worked to develop virtual ward forums on the Teams Event Live platform across the city, in order to maintain local community governance and engagement. The virtual options for Members were subsequently expanded to include Teams Live, Teams and Zoom.
- 7.3.12. Since 2nd December 2020, all recorded virtual ward forum meetings have been uploaded to YouTube to the NDSU Channel and notifications have been sent to all councillors and all ward contacts. The link to the YouTube Channel has also been added to the City Council website to enable meetings to be viewed after the event.
- 7.3.13. Between June 2020 and the end of March 2021 there were 109 virtual ward meetings. 12 of these were joint meetings, gaining a total attendance of 2,462 (an average of 23 participants per meeting) in addition to 2,752 viewings on YouTube. In general, the numbers have been higher than previous face-to-face meetings. Going forward, the Council will be looking to see what options will be available for future ward meetings dependent on being Covid-19 restrictions and the risk assessments of community buildings.
- 7.3.14. As of 11th May 2021, there are 52 completed ward plans. In April 2021 NDSU produced an interim Priorities Template 2021-22 for those wards without a full ward plan (in line with CWG – Celebrating Communities grants requirement)
- 7.3.15. Since lockdown the Pioneer Places get togethers have continued virtually on a monthly basis providing opportunities to share good practice, enabling peer to peer sharing and learning. Further activity has included:
- Four training opportunities, held with the national organisation Economy, and Birmingham Community Matters.
 - Three 'Speak Truth to Power' sessions with the Acting Director of Inclusive Growth, the Interim Chief Executive, the Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods, and the Director of Neighbourhoods. A further session is being arranged around Street Scene and Parks.
 - 20 small grants issued to support the Covid-19 neighbourhood emergency support work by Pioneer Places.

- Continued support from Locality following the purchased 30 memberships (3 per Pioneer Place) in Jan 2020. In 2021-22, 4 Pioneer Place members accessed £52,000 from the Locality Covid-19 Emergency Trading Income Support Service.
- Pioneer Places acted as critical friend on new pieces of localisation work i.e. Parishing, ward data and the development of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) process.
- Production of a series of short films highlighting good practice.

- 7.3.16. Weekly External Grants Information continues to be produced and circulated to staff, councillors, MPs and community and voluntary organisations. NDSU partnered with West Midlands Funders Network and ran a Virtual Funding Fair, targeted at community groups within Central and East Birmingham, in February 2021. Individual team members have supported community organisations to access over £100,000 in external funding over the last year.
- 7.3.17. We have provided support to community groups city-wide during lockdown, as well as the co-ordination of Emergency Assistance grants and Covid-19 NNS small grants for the Selly Oak and Perry Barr Constituencies. We will also have membership on the corporate Community Recovery Board – shaping the interventions going forward in 2021.
- 7.3.18. The team continues to support two very successful Neighbourhood Network Schemes in Selly Oak and Perry Barr Constituencies – particularly supporting the Covid emergency support for neighbourhoods and community groups, capacity building support, networking sessions etc.
- 7.3.19. NDSU are co-ordinating the Commonwealth Games (CWG) Celebrating Communities grants fund, launched in April 2021 for all wards. There is also a commissioned Capacity Building and Support Programme being run by Locality and Birmingham Community Matters - plus additional funding for community anchors to support the ward participative decision-making processes for ward grants is in place.
- 7.3.20. In May 2021 Cabinet approved a City Council process to respond to and support those areas of the city considering establishing new parish/neighbourhood councils. Birmingham now has one of the largest parish councils in the country in the Town Council for Royal Sutton Coldfield, established in 2016. Its only other parish council is at Frankley in Birmingham, which was established in Worcestershire and continued when the area was absorbed into Birmingham.
- 7.3.21. Currently there are three areas of the city actively pursuing this agenda and the policy brings clarity to items such as the process around petitions, governance reviews, ballots and voter turnout etc.

- 7.3.22. The team has given small grant support to those community organisations currently looking at forming Neighbourhood Councils.
- 7.3.23. NDSU is also working with Locality on their national Community Assets Ownership and Advocacy Programme 2020-21 which included a series of information workshops for community organisations and key decision makers during September and October 2020. The Locality Report is expected this month which will assist in the re-setting of the City Council's Community Asset Transfer policy. The team have also taken over the co-ordination of the Assets of Community Value (ACV) process in the Council. ACV is one of the original community rights in the Localism Act 2011 and fits in with Birmingham's current drive around localism and communities having more of a say within their neighbourhoods.
- 7.3.24. The team is also currently working in partnership with Inclusive Growth Planning colleagues to submit a funding bid to Government, to support more neighbourhood planning in under-represented areas of the city.

7.4. Community Safety and Equalities

Community Safety

- 7.4.1. Birmingham City Council Community Safety and Prevent Teams have resumed as much business as usual activity as possible, whilst working remotely and continuing to support the Council's response to Covid-19.
- 7.4.2. A Community Safety Team transition plan is now in place, with priorities identified and team capacity adjusted accordingly. Further work is ongoing to build on the capacity within the team to offer a wider community safety response. Working with West Midlands Police (WMP), there is now a new partnership consequence management meeting in place, which is called when we have a serious incident with community safety implications. Joint working arrangements are also in place with Housing and Regulation and Enforcement colleagues with regards to domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour processes.
- 7.4.3. Work continues collaboratively with all partners to ensure safety in our communities. This ranges from pre-planning and monitoring arrangements in response to protests held in the city, to supporting WMP and other enforcement partners to manage more complex incidents of anti-social behaviour.
- 7.4.4. The Birmingham Community Safety Partnership (BCSP) adopted a Gold/Silver/Bronze operating model to ensure a clear focus on key priorities during the pandemic. The transition plan ensures this focus now includes the moves back towards business as usual activities as lockdown restrictions are gradually lifted. The BCSP Operations and Local Partnership Delivery Groups (LPDGs) will continue to work on a business as usual basis, whilst the BCSP

Core group meeting will continue for the next quarter, after which arrangements set up for the pandemic will be further reviewed.

BCSP Core Group

- 7.4.5. A Core Group of the Community Safety Partnership continues to meet fortnightly and oversee key priorities set during the pandemic. These include domestic abuse, domestic homicide reviews, hate crime, modern slavery, serious organised crime, tension monitoring and reducing anti-social behaviour. Work has begun on developing a Reducing Violence Strategy, which will look at serious youth violence, violence during a transitional age and adult violence with a focus on early intervention, supporting vulnerable individuals, as well place-based vulnerabilities and solutions and offender management. It has been agreed to keep the Core Group running as we move into business as usual and wider recovery from the pandemic.

Silver – Community Safety Partnership Operations Group

- 7.4.6. The Operations Group now meets fortnightly. The BCSP Operations group identifies and acts upon community safety concerns that impact on the city as a whole. Recent work has included the introduction of a fortnightly Street Community Tasking Group and an appeal panel for the Community Trigger process. The Operations Group also continues to review and support the work of the LPDGs.
- 7.4.7. 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 (LPDGs)

- 7.4.8. All six LPDGs are now working on a business as usual basis, whilst continuing to respond to Covid-related concerns. This has included supporting the production of local recovery plans for schools and businesses emerging from lockdown.

Prevent

- 7.4.9. Birmingham City Council's Prevent Team has continued to work closely with the West Midlands Counter Terrorism Unit to ensure that effective processes are in place for Prevent, and that Home Office supported programmes continue to run effectively with little disruption. The Prevent Team has transitioned well into the online space, ensuring support can now also be offered online as well as in-person.
- 7.4.10. The Prevent Executive Board continues to oversee an Independent Review of Prevent Delivery in Birmingham which is due to report its findings to the Birmingham Contest Board in June 2021.

Domestic Abuse

- 7.4.11. Birmingham City Council continues 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, has secured extra funding through the emergency Covid-19 fund to support the additional capacity needed to deal with increases in domestic abuse enquiries.
- 7.4.12. Work progresses within the Community Safety Team to support the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) process. We have also introduced a Domestic Abuse and Criminal Justice working group, which is working with victims of domestic abuse to assess and understand their journey and experience through the criminal justice system. This work will identify why some victims do not continue with their complaints and why positive outcomes are low in comparison to the number of reports made. The team are also working with Birmingham Children's Trust, WM Police and local schools to support joint working around support to families impacted by domestic abuse.
- 7.4.13. The Domestic Abuse Hub has remained open during the pandemic, providing support and advice over the telephone via its helpline. The helpline is run by BSWAID, who have also introduced a webchat facility. Our commissioned services also continue to provide support to victims of domestic abuse in refuge, dispersed accommodation or through our lead worker service.
- 7.4.14. On 29th April 2021 the Domestic Abuse Bill received Royal Assent, putting into place protection for victims of domestic abuse, explicitly recognising children as victims, establishing in law the office of Domestic Abuse Commissioner and placing a duty on local authorities in England to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation.
- 7.4.15. The Bill places requirements on Birmingham City Council as a Tier One authority, to appoint a local partnership board (which we have already established well in advance of the Act coming into effect), prepare and publish strategies based on robust needs assessments and give effect to these strategies. In April 2021 the Council received £3.2m for 2021/22 to discharge this new duty.

Exempt Accommodation

- 7.4.16. Birmingham's Exempt Accommodation pilot, which includes a specific community safety focus, continues to make positive progress. The community safety work started in January 2021 and a small team is now in place. To date the team has taken part in 226 joint visits with internal and external partners within the pilot – Housing, Adult Social Care, Planning, WM Police and West Midlands Fire Service.

7.4.17. The team has undertaken a number of investigations, which have resulted in the identification of individuals vulnerable to exploitation by organised crime groups. Referrals have subsequently been made into the appropriate support agencies, as well as engagement with landlords, to help support individuals move into more suitable accommodation.

7.4.18. We are now working with the West Midlands Probation Service to further tighten the processes linked to referrals into accommodation of individuals from outside of Birmingham. Following a joint operation with WMP there is now a closure order in place against Saif Lodge, an exempt accommodation in Edgbaston. We are now looking to increase capacity in the team, with three ASB officers working to tackle potential links between serious organised crime and associated activities within parts of the sector, together with general anti-social behaviour.

Places of Worship

7.4.19. Birmingham City Council and faith communities have continued to work together throughout the pandemic, ensuring that religious events are held in compliance with the Government's roadmap out of lockdown and both families and communities are protected.

7.4.20. The national guidance for the safe use of places of worship was updated in spring, with the following key changes:

- Most other significant life events can resume, limited to no more than 30 people. This will include events such as bar/bat mitzvahs and private baptisms, and naming ceremonies. Limits at weddings, wedding receptions, wakes and other commemorative events will be increased to 30 people.
- Funerals will have no legal cap on the number of people who can attend. The number of attendees will be determined by how many people the venue can safely accommodate with social distancing measures in place.
- Outdoors, most legal restrictions on meeting others will be lifted - although gatherings of over 30 people will remain illegal unless otherwise exempt.

7.4.21. At Step 4, which will take place no earlier than 21st June, the government aims to remove all limits on life cycle events and other gatherings.

7.4.22. The City Council will continue to engage with faith communities to ensure any further changes in guidance is communicated. We are grateful to the support and understanding that has been shown by faith groups across the city during this difficult and challenging time and look forward to working together face to face as restrictions are lifted.

7.5. **Equalities**

- 7.5.1. Over 4,000 Birmingham residents, council staff, grassroots community organisations, faith-based organisations, practitioners and public sector policy makers have shared their views on the Council's proposals to address and tackle inequalities that affect communities across the city.
- 7.5.2. The resulting report, Everyone's Battle, Everyone's Business: Together We Will Tackle Inequalities was approved at Cabinet on 18th May. The report focuses on three areas:
- To lead by example, not just as an employer: Our Workforce Race Equity Review shows we need to do much more to really represent the communities we serve. We're working to ensure shortlists and interview panels include female and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic representation. We're working with our workforce, trade unions and independent experts to become a beacon for equal opportunities.
 - Making Birmingham a Living Wage City: Tackling the scandal of poverty pay is essential, which is why we're working with city partners to make Birmingham a Living Wage City and build an inclusive economy. We're also putting 'experts by experience' at the heart of our decision making, through our new Poverty Truth Commission;
 - Celebrating and sharing stories of Birmingham's diversity: We all have a different story, heritage, or journey that brought us to this city. These need to be explored and celebrated as part of the wider 'Birmingham Story'. We're working with schools on including this in the curriculum, so children learn about the city's diverse heritage.
- 7.5.3. In response to key pledges identified through public consultation relating to improving citizen's economic chances, activity is now taking place to make Birmingham a Living Wage City, establish a new Poverty Truth Commission and support staff progression within the council.
- 7.5.4. Following the launch of the RACE Equality Code 2020, Birmingham City Council has 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.
- 7.5.5. We are now one of a handful of local authorities to publish our Race Pay Gap Review, and we are now looking at how age, disability and gender may impact the economic wellbeing of our staff.
- 7.5.6. In responding to the lack of diversity within our senior leadership and management teams we worked with Operation Black Vote on a new leadership programme to help nurture a future generation of leaders that will truly represent the city they serve. The initial cohort of leaders was oversubscribed,

and we are therefore developing a second phase to bring this opportunity to as many staff as possible.

- 7.5.7. We are working with colleagues in the London Borough of Lewisham on an in-depth review of health inequalities affecting African and Caribbean communities. This will ensure we fully understand what we need to do to support those who have been among the hardest hit by Covid-19.
- 7.5.8. To support increased activity across this agenda, the Equalities and Cohesion team is expanding. Five people are currently in post including the Head of Service, Service Lead (Equalities), two Equalities and Cohesion Apprentices, and a Project Officer. It is anticipated that the remaining positions in the team will be recruited during Q2 of 2021/22, with recruitment completed by Q3.

Armed Forces Covenant

- 7.5.9. During the pandemic, the council's Armed Forces Partnership has continued to take forward actions to support Birmingham's Armed Forces community, including veterans and their families.
- 7.5.10. 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, through 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.
- 7.5.11. For the Fallen CIC, a social enterprise whose goal is to raise awareness and give a voice to the families left behind by military suicides, has joined the partnership to help highlight the issue of Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the support available for wider family members.
- 7.5.12. In April 2021, the council secured the Armed Forces Covenant Employer Recognition Scheme Silver Award. The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) encourages employers to support defence and inspire others to do the same. The scheme encompasses bronze, silver and gold awards for employer organisations that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support to defence and the armed forces community, and align their values with the Armed Forces Covenant.

Living Wage

- 7.5.13. 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.

- 7.5.14. Due to 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.
- 7.5.15. 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 a result of these events during Living Wage Week 2020, the Living Wage Foundation received a record level of enquiries from large Birmingham organisations seeking to become accredited Real Living Wage employers.
- 7.5.16. The Birmingham Living Wage Action Plan is currently being developed with our partners and will be launched later this year.

Commonwealth Games

- 7.5.17. Birmingham's ambition is for an inclusive Commonwealth Games where everyone can participate and benefit from the success of the Games, regardless of where they live or grow up. The Equalities and Cohesion Team are leading on the development of the CWG legacy theme for stronger communities. This recognises that the Games are not just about focussing on sport; but also present a unique opportunity to be a catalyst for bringing communities together, building civic pride, fostering community cohesion and utilising untapped community potential in arts, heritage, culture and cohesion.
- 7.5.18. Work is ongoing in partnership with BVSC to develop a framework for commissioned activities that align legacy activities linked with the Games and the Council's vision for an inclusive city, where everyone has an opportunity to contribute and benefit from its success by tackling inequalities that exist.

Migration

- 7.5.19. Birmingham City Council continues to work with the Home Office and providers, as well as with local stakeholders, to manage the additional local challenges in the asylum system. Birmingham continues to see contingency accommodation in use for destitute asylum seekers, although this has reduced from two units to one since the start of 2021. Covid-19 vaccinations have been offered at or near large asylum accommodation sites.

- 7.5.20. 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, advice and guidance pathways for newly arrived communities in Birmingham. This project is the second phase to two previous 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 and Migration Centre, Central England Law Centre, and Asirt to deliver the project.
- 7.5.21. 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 to 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.
- 7.5.22. The Refugees and 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.
- 7.5.23. The Government's resettlement programmes for refugees have now restarted and we have welcomed the first resettled refugee families to Birmingham since November 2019. All national guidance on Covid-19 and testing for international arrivals is being adhered to.
- 7.5.24. Those resettled families already resident in Birmingham continue to be supported via the Council's commissioned providers, which include arrival and orientation services, employment support services, active citizenship projects, tenancy and 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 and 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 and Migration Team hosted the first digital version of its Community Days for resettled refugee families, which was a well-attended and successful event.

- 7.5.25. Refugee Week takes place during the week 14-18 June. A number of in-person and digital events and initiatives will be taking place to celebrate the theme “We Cannot Walk Alone”.

Neighbourhood Advice and Information (NAIS)

- 7.5.26. NAIS advisors have all been working from home providing advice by telephone during 2020/21. Over the course of the year, they supported 14,061 citizens and handled 34,574 enquiries.
- 7.5.27. Over 2020/21, advisors have advised citizens to claim an additional £9.9 million, up 9% from the previous year. This was done through proactive outreach, making outgoing supportive calls to citizens receiving food parcels from TAWS as well as contacting council tenants in serious arrears to establish if such citizens are in receipt of all the benefits to which they are entitled. Advisors have not been constrained by time limited appointment slots and therefore have been able to dedicate more time to fully explore and meet the needs of a more limited number of citizens.
- 7.5.28. A timetable is now in place to allow a return to delivering face to face advice services, in a Covid-safe way, at the two NAIS advice centres at Erdington and Northfield. From 17th May 2021, closed door/pre-booked appointments were made available. Assuming that national and local conditions remain favourable, we look forward to one again offering a walk-in service to the citizens of Birmingham.

Third Sector Advice Service

- 7.5.29. Historically, the City Council has also 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 2020/21, with advice services delivered over the telephone rather than face to face. These third sector partners raised £3.6 million of additional benefit income for the clients they supported, achieving the target set for this year.
- 7.5.30. With Emergency Welfare Assistance Grant funding received from central government it was possible to increase the funding provided to the third sector to deliver advice services for the period December 2020 to March 2021. Collectively, the three partners responded to an additional 11,948 welfare benefit and debt enquiries during that challenging period.
- 7.5.31. All third sector providers are still delivering advice services primarily over the telephone but are starting to review the potential for face-to-face advice services to resume. A return to delivery via advice surgeries in community settings such as Job Centres and Libraries is a longer-term ambition.

8. Street Scene and Parks

8.1. Waste management

Activity undertaken relating to Covid-19

- 8.1.1. There has been a continued and concerted effort from all staff to maintain a regular service throughout the pandemic. All services have been maintained, including weekly residual collections, fortnightly recycling, garden and bulky waste. Staff from Street Cleansing have been working to ensure the streets are kept clean and provided additional cleaning and jet washing in preparation for the reopening of the High Streets in April 2021.
- 8.1.2. The composition of waste has changed over the course of the pandemic. As more and more people work from home the level of residual waste collected from each household has increased. We have seen an increase in kerbside recycling, with more residents separating their waste at source. Unfortunately, this has not made a significant impact on the city's overall recycling figure.
- 8.1.3. Collection performance continues to be stable, with the number of outstanding roads falling below 20 a week out of a total of 12,250. Work continues to improve on this. 74 new fleet vehicles have been delivered, are in use and will as a consequence improve reliability considerably.
- 8.1.4. Within Street Cleansing a large recruitment drive has commenced to fill over 150 posts. This should be completed by the end of June.
- 8.1.5. This level of service has only been possible with the continued dedicated commitment from our crews and close cooperation with Trades Union colleagues.
- 8.1.6. The booking system at the Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) has continued to be a great success in reducing queues, freeing up the highway and allowing the sites to maintain COVID safe operations.
- 8.1.7. Initially, and clearly demonstrating the demand, sites were reaching full capacity on a daily basis. In following weeks the number of available slots were increased and on-site capacity gradually increased.
- 8.1.8. The service has now introduced a 'live time' cancellation and booking system. This means that available slots can now be booked on the same day of a visit, subject to there being capacity and the chosen site. Slots have been increased at each stage of the route out of lockdown. At the time of writing there is availability at all HWRCs.

Business as usual activity

- 8.1.9. Nationally there has been an increase in fly-tipping, and many of the city's streets and parks have not escaped this criminal activity. Additional crews have been created to clear this illegal waste and additional Waste Enforcement

Officers have been recruited. A partnership with Keep Britain Tidy has started and a concerted effort over the next 12 months will take place to try and resolve this persistent problem.

- 8.1.10. A fleet of Mobile Household Recycling Centres (MHRCs) are set to roll out on the streets of Birmingham later this year as part of the city council's effort to achieve cleaner streets, making it as easy as possible to dispose of waste and unwanted items in a responsible way.
- 8.1.11. The four MHRCs will comprise a regular refuse collection vehicle, a van for taking away items that can be reused by charities, and a wagon with multiple compartments. This will enable people to drop off waste for recycling by material type, very similar to what is available at a conventional HRC.
- 8.1.12. The MHRCs will initially be deployed in areas that rank high in the fly-tipping league table, poorly on environmental cleanliness surveys, and low for take-up of the council's paid-for bulky waste services.
- 8.1.13. Each of the Council's 69 wards will receive at least one visit from an MHRC over the pilot year. An assessment will then be carried out to decide if the scheme should continue, be modified or other options pursued.
- 8.1.14. Other projects and initiatives set to be rolled out in the year ahead include: new mobile CCTV camera technology to detect fly-tipping; the launch of a "wall of shame" Crimewatch-style YouTube series to help the council trace waste crime culprits; the deployment of more crews to clear dumped rubbish and graffiti; and a renewed offer of support to community groups doing their bit to make Birmingham's streets cleaner and greener.
- 8.1.15. The procurement of the Waste Disposal contract continues and has now reached the more detailed bidder interaction stage. Visits have been made to our sites and a detailed submission will be received later this year.
- 8.1.16. Planning for major development at the Perry Barr site and our Energy From Waste plant has taken place. Over the next few weeks, work will start at both sites to enable the provision of more efficient and effective facilities.
- 8.1.17. Work has started on a new operations base, merging two depots into one. This will provide a new garage facility and enable a more effective and efficient use of operational teams; it is anticipated that this will be up and running by early 2023.

8.2. Parks and Grounds Maintenance

Covid-related activity

- 8.2.1. With the announcement of new lockdown restrictions commencing in January 2021, and as in previous lockdowns, volunteering was once more suspended for the entire period of spring 2021.

- 8.2.2. Community groups and volunteers were written to, thanking them for ceasing group volunteering activities and adhering to lockdown guidance. Friends and community groups generally adhered to the guidance and ceased all but individual litter picking (as part of daily walks). All events, and grass root sports also ceased.
- 8.2.3. Despite the wetter colder weather in January, February and early March there was a high level of use of the city's parks, the vast majority of this being compliant with Covid guidance.
- 8.2.4. Mid-April saw the first relaxation of lockdown rules, and with this once again volunteering and grass roots sports were able to recommence. Friends and volunteering groups were again written to thanking them for their patience and understanding and to welcome them back to their volunteer activities. A two-week extension to the grassroots football season was agreed to allow leagues to play their remaining fixtures.
- 8.2.5. Football has now ceased, and the cricket season is well under way.
- 8.2.6. New and additional signage has been erected across the City's parks and playgrounds reminding people to stay safe, socially distance, increase hand hygiene, and act responsibly with regard to their litter. Signs also reiterated that BBQs were not allowed.
- 8.2.7. The Parks Service appointed 8 mobile Covid Marshalls as part of the city's overall recruitment of 32 Marshalls funded by government grants. These additional staff patrolled our busiest parks, liaising with park visitors and promoting safe and compliant use of parks. These Covid Marshalls are still in post and will remain so until next year.
- 8.2.8. Parks, along with other divisions of the City Council, are regularly reviewing the government's Covid-19 guidance relating to events and outdoor performances that take place in our parks and civic spaces to ensure a consistent application of the new guidelines. Based on the current lockdown roadmap, the Parks Service is anticipating a busy year with a renewed interest in booking events in our parks.

Business as usual activity

- 8.2.9. The Parks Service again submitted 15 Green Flag Awards applications this year, and expects to be peer reviewed in August/September 2021. The national (and now international) award recognises parks that are well managed and have good community input and support in their day to day management.
- 8.2.10. Unfortunately Lickey Hills has had an outbreak of Phytophthora, which affects larch and rhododendron. A notice was issued by the Forestry Commission instructing the Council to remove all affected trees. Work has started and will be completed in late summer when a replanting scheme will take place.

- 8.2.11. The annual grazing at Sutton Park has commenced and is taking advantage of new technology this year. In order to control where the cattle go and graze, the local farmer has fitted each with a collar. This collar uses GPS to track the herd and by drawing a line or virtual fence on the map via the tracking App the cattle are encouraged not to go into that part of the Park. This technology is used in areas of large-scale grazing in several countries and has only just started to be introduced in the UK. The scheme will be closely monitored over the summer.
- 8.2.12. Most of the new grounds maintenance vehicles and associated equipment has been delivered and is in operation. The specification for replacement vehicles for the Ranger Service is being developed and an electric option is being considered.

9. Transport

9.1. Impact of Covid-19 on traffic levels

- 9.1.1. After the second national lockdown was lifted on 2nd December 2020, traffic returned to levels similar to pre-lockdown (around 90% of normal levels), with slightly higher increases in the city centre than elsewhere.
- 9.1.2. The third national lockdown starting in January 2021 saw traffic initially reduce to around 65% of normal levels, before gradually increasing to around 80% of normal flows by Easter. Since then flows have been broadly consistent on weekdays, at around 90% of pre-Covid levels. There has also been a significant increase in weekend traffic since Easter, from around 60% of pre-Covid levels to 84%.
- 9.1.3. While traffic levels are heading towards pre-Covid levels, journey patterns and timings have changed. Conventional AM and PM peaks are longer and less pronounced, and we are seeing peaks at other times of the day as well. Journeys are less concentrated in tidal flows into and between major centres and instead are more focussed on local areas and in a more dispersed pattern. This presents challenges for managing the network in that established practices and tools are less effective.
- 9.1.4. The Clean Air Zone commences on 1st June and this may have an additional impact on traffic levels in and around Birmingham City Centre.

9.2. Emergency Birmingham Transport Plan & Active Travel Fund

- 9.2.1. 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 (EATF).
- 9.2.2. A review of Tranche 1 schemes was undertaken concluding in February 2021. This review assessed the impact and effectiveness of schemes and made

recommendations as to whether they should be made permanent, modified or removed in the future.

- 9.2.3. The review concluded that overall, the schemes delivered under the EATF and Reopening High Streets Safely Fund provided a positive response to the Covid-19 emergency within the parameters of the funding. They also provide a step towards the vision outlined in the draft Birmingham Transport Plan.
- 9.2.4. Given the urgency of the situation and the timescales of the funding, a great deal has been delivered; albeit taking a different approach to business as usual in terms of delivery and engagement, which has at times proved controversial. Many of the issues arose as a result of the emergency nature of the situation faced and the challenging timescales for delivery and would not have arisen in the usual course of business. However, the review identified many useful lessons that will be brought forward into the second round of funding and more widely in the delivery of future transport schemes.
- 9.2.5. The past year has afforded the opportunity to trial some innovative solutions and this has resulted in radical changes in some places. It is recognised that it may take some time for members of the public to adapt their travel behaviours and choices and make use of these schemes to their full advantage, thus unlocking the potential benefits. Care needs to be taken to fully engage with the communities affected and involve them in the delivery of further changes needed to achieve the vision of a sustainable, green, inclusive, go-anywhere transport network.
- 9.2.6. Birmingham City Council was successful in its bid for £4.477 million of Active Travel Fund Tranche 2 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;
 - Further rollout of the City Centre Traffic Segments;
 - Additional Cycling and Walking Interventions; including further pop-up cycle lanes across the city.
- 9.2.7. The outcome of the Tranche 1 review is assisting in determining the final schemes delivered through Tranche 2 funding. All Tranche 2 schemes will be delivered with full public and stakeholder consultation throughout.
- 9.2.8. Focus has begun to also shift back to business as usual priorities, including bringing the final draft of the Birmingham Transport Plan forward for adoption, developing the associated delivery plan and subsequent delivery of schemes and initiatives.

9.3. **Public Transport**

9.3.1. 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.

9.3.2. Throughout the pandemic and to date, the Covid-19 Transport Recovery Cell has brought together partners to work together to plan for the government's Covid-19 Roadmap milestones, ensuring a collaborative and consistent approach is implemented across the region. The cell includes representatives from TfWM, operators, local authorities, and other critical agencies such as Highways England and West Midlands Police.

9.3.3. The partnership approach has enabled partners to monitor the impact of key recovery and reopening milestones on public transport networks, including:

- 8th March 2021 – return to educational establishments
 - National Express West Midlands bus services were operating at around 95% with patronage of approximately 47% of pre-Covid levels.
 - Metro ran a 10-minute service which was enhanced during the morning and afternoon peaks – patronage levels were around 55% pre-Covid levels.
 - Rail patronage levels were still under 20% of pre-Covid levels.
- 12th April 2021 – reopening of non-essential retail and hospitality (outdoor only)
 - Metro services returned to full service with reported patronage of 70% pre-Covid levels.
 - Rail services increased to 25% patronage.
 - Bus services were reported 60% pre-Covid patronage with National Express operating over 100% of pre-Covid bus services from 19 April once retail had opened and schools.
 - In response to demand from users wanting to travel again, Ring and Ride services recommenced normal operation.
- 17th May – reopening of indoor hospitality and leisure and household mixing allowed indoors
 - At the time of preparing this report, limited data was available to assess the impacts of the 17th May reopening milestone.
 - An increase in the use of public transport for longer periods is anticipated, as the night-time economy becomes more active. The reintroduction of large events such as concerts and sporting

events could have a significant impact on the network and measures to manage this are in place, including an Operational Order which will cover key events that will be drawing larger crowds than previously seen over the last year.

- Also, from 17th May, new guidance for social distancing on buses applies which has increased the seated capacity on buses (2m rule still applies in bus stations and at stops) – this means that more passengers can be carried and less services will be flagged as over-capacity as a result.

- 9.3.4. The messaging in terms of public transport is focussed on ‘plan ahead’ rather than the previous ‘avoid public transport if you can’ and will continue to evolve.
- 9.3.5. To support testing and vaccination sites, TfWM have created a system that has mapped each site across the region. This toolkit overlays transport infrastructure such as bus stops, service routes, rail and Metro stops, Strategic Road Network, Key Route Network and other key information. Seasonal issues such as flooding hotspots have also been incorporated into the database. This is to ensure any modal or transport issues that may impact these critical sites is appropriately managed, this includes stakeholder engagement by the Regional Transport Coordination Centre who actively engage with partners to make them aware of the impact to initiate any appropriate mitigations. This toolkit has been made available to local authorities, blue light services and other key stakeholders.
- 9.3.6. Enhanced cleaning regimes remain in place across all modes of transport as well as all transport hubs and infrastructure.
- 9.3.7. 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 made additional resource available to support passengers 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.
- 9.3.8. Rail timetable changes from 16 May saw an increase in service frequency for some services and number of additional carriages added to other Birmingham related services to increase capacity.
- 9.3.9. Building back better is everyone’s priority, and transport plays a key role in connecting communities to jobs, education, healthcare and leisure services. Public transport, active travel or car travel are essential to a strong economic and social recovery for the city and the wider West Midlands.

9.3.10. Opportunities to get more people using public transport lie in both commuters and leisure travel. As we expect commuter demand to be suppressed for some time and may well remain significantly lower than pre-covid, opportunities to encourage a switch in behaviour and attitude for leisure travel and short journeys will need a particular focus.

9.3.11. Various campaigns are being planned, in line with national guidance and messaging, to start to restore confidence in public transport and reassure people that it is safe to use. All of the programmes and initiatives to encourage more use of public transport that were being brought forward pre-Covid, including improvements and better integration of ticketing options including best value fare capping on Swift Go will be continued.

9.4. **Future public transport infrastructure**

9.4.1. The delivery of key transport infrastructure schemes has continued whilst working in a safe manner and in accordance with government guidelines. Continuing to deliver infrastructure improvements to support public transport is absolutely critical to supporting the recovery and encouraging greater use of public transport as part of a green recovery.

9.4.2. Despite the most recent lockdown, work continued on the Westside Metro extension towards Hagley Road. Tram stops have been installed on Broad Street and the final piece of track has been installed. Urban realm work has progressed very well, allowing a number of outdoor spaces for some of the businesses along Broad Street to be accommodated, when allowed, under the partial lifting of restrictions.

9.4.3. Work is also progressing on the Metro Eastside Extension. Utility diversions are underway as is the detailed design for the Bull Street Delta Junction and the Digbeth end of the route. These sections are currently programmed to be completed in advance of the Commonwealth Games. Work will start shortly on the main construction for the Delta junction with a line closure for Metro over the summer months. The Council and TfWM are continuing to engage with HS2 regarding ongoing HS2 construction planning and interface with the tram build and other projects.

9.4.4. Construction work on the A45 Sprint route commenced in January 2021 and is progressing well with completion expected in March 2022.

9.4.5. In April 2021, work began on the A34 Sprint route, alongside the wider A34 highway improvements scheme in Perry Barr. Throughout the period of these works, there will be disruptions which we will mitigate through traffic management.

9.4.6. Progress on University rail station continues with the main construction having started in March with the rail station being fit for purpose for the Commonwealth Games.

- 9.4.7. At Perry Barr rail station, main construction is now underway, with the existing station temporarily closed to passengers for a year to allow construction to take place. Planning Permission and the Full Business Case have both been approved. The adjacent Bus Interchange project is also progressing its design and deliverables to submit for its full planning application.
- 9.4.8. The Council and TfWM, together with neighbouring authorities, are working together on a number of proposed road schemes which aim to improve travelling by bus. These include; Margaret Street/Newhall Street/Bristol Street/Snow Hill and Dudley Road, Cape Hill Junction, and Alcester Road South.
- 9.4.9. The West Midlands Cycle Hire scheme will launch in Birmingham on 24th May 2021, with initially 450 bikes and 45 docking stations across the city. Over the following weeks this will be increased to 720 bikes and 80 e-bikes will be launched later in the year.
- 9.5. **Parking**
- 9.5.1. 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. Daily counts are taken at several nearby car parks to Victoria Road and demand remains low despite the reopening of retail. The situation continues to be monitored.
- 9.5.2. Millennium Point Car Park continues to be used to support the NHS COVID-19 Vaccination Programme at the Millennium Point COVID-19 Vaccination Hub.
- 9.5.3. 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.
- 9.5.4. 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.
- 9.5.5. 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 will cease on 21 June 2021.
- 9.5.6. 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.

9.6. **Road safety**

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

9.6.2. Compared to the same period in the average of the previous three years:

- All road traffic collisions during April to December 2020 were down by 38%, and all KSIs collisions were down by 26%
- Road traffic collisions involving pedestrians during April to December 2020 were down by 44%, and pedestrian KSIs were down by 35%.
- Road traffic collisions involving cyclists during April to December 2020 were down by 39%, and cyclist KSIs were down by 19%.
- Powered-two-wheeler road traffic collisions during April to December 2020 were down by 27%, and P2W KSIs were down by 23%.
- Road traffic collisions involving children (aged 0-15 years) during April to December 2020 were down by 52%, and child KSIs were down by 37%.

9.7. **e-Scooter trial**

9.7.1. The e-Scooter trial was launched in September 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.

9.7.2. As of mid-May 2021, the operator, Voi, have permission to operate a fleet of up to 1,200 e-scooters in the trial area. The trial has seen increased take-up, especially as lockdown restrictions started to get lifted. The trial has a strong focus on safety and there are continuous efforts to improve the operational aspects of the trial, especially occasions of inappropriate riding and parking.

9.8. **E-cargo bike trial**

9.8.1. 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 have been 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. Although lockdown caused a slight delay in the distribution of e-cargo bikes to partners, the majority are now in use.

9.9. Clean Air Zone (CAZ)

- 9.9.1. Birmingham Clean Air Zone is on track to be launched on 1st June 2021. Since the last update, business continuity from third parties ensured progress on project delivery remained on track throughout the third lockdown period.
- 9.9.2. Ongoing marketing, comms and engagement continues to raise awareness of the CAZ and the support available to affected and eligible groups via exemptions and mitigations funds.
- 9.9.3. April and early May 2021 have seen a marked increase in the uptake of exemptions 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. As at end of April 2021, the project has approved a total of 2,616 Exemptions applications.
- 9.9.4. To date, the Taxi Mitigation Fund has issued grants with a total value of c. £1.5m (as at end of April 2021). The distribution of grants is in line with the number of licensed hackney carriage and private hire drivers i.e. approximately 25% hackney carriage and 75% private hire.

10. Covid-19 Support Grants (Including Business Support Grants)

- 10.1. Over the last quarter, Birmingham City Council has continued to support businesses across Birmingham, both to ensure their survival through the pandemic and help them thrive in the recovery.
- 10.2. The Council has distributed over £217m in small business and retail, leisure and hospitality grants in 2020, and business rate reliefs of £185m in 2020-21. The Council has supported thousands of Birmingham businesses throughout the pandemic through the various grant schemes, with over 178,000 separate payments made.
- 10.3. **Local Restrictions Support Grants Schemes**
 - 10.3.1. As of 31st March 2021, applications for all Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSG) schemes have now closed. The deadline for processing all outstanding payments was 30th April.
 - 10.3.2. Over the lifetime of the schemes, we paid out approximately £108.2 million in 47,213 grants to businesses across Birmingham. A more detailed breakdown of payments is provided in the below table, which also demonstrates the complexity of the various schemes.

Scheme	Total applications paid	Total paid
LRSG(S) Nightclubs and Adult Entertainment Venues	51	£91,946.20
LRSG(Open)14 October to 4 November	3480	£4,284,754.32
LRSG(Closed) 5 Nov to 1 Dec	7924	£13,131,436.49
LRSG(C)Disc (ARG)	688	£1,520,853.72
Wet Pubs	222	£222,000.00
LRSG (Open) V2 2 Dec to 30 Dec	281	£362,490.00
LRSG (Closed) V2 2 Dec to 30 Dec	2762	£5,031,502.74
Tier 4 31 Dec to 4 Jan	7778	£2,295,767.87
LRSG (Closed) 5 Jan to 15 Feb	7802	£19,262,195.00
One-off payments	7849	£38,433,047.01
LRSG Closed 16.02.21 to 31.03.21	7727	£20,046,323.19
LRSG Disc (2 Dec to 31 Mar 2021)	649	£3,544,176.02
TOTAL	47213	£108,226,492.56

10.4. Restart Grants

10.4.1. Starting from 1st April 2021, the new Restart Grants scheme provides one-off grants to businesses that are predominantly reliant on delivering in-person services to the general public. This scheme has two strands:

- Grants of up to £6,000 to non-essential retail businesses premises, to help them reopen safely.
- Grants of up to £18,000 to hospitality, accommodations, leisure, personal care and gym businesses premises. These businesses will open later under the national roadmap, and are likely to be more impacted by restrictions when they do reopen.

10.4.2. The Restart Grant scheme is open for businesses with premises appearing on the local rating list only, with a rateable value. Payments must be paid to rates payers, with the amount of grants based on the rateable values of businesses. Details of payment thresholds and amounts can be found on the BCC website.

10.4.3. Applications for the Restart Grants scheme can be made up to 30th June 2021, with all payments to be completed by 31st July 2021. Where we already hold details of businesses from previous grant schemes, we have been able to

make payments automatically to businesses (following due diligence processes and pre-payment assurance checks).

10.4.4. As of 4th June 2021, we have paid out around £38.2million to 5350 businesses through the Restart Grants scheme.

10.5. **Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) discretionary scheme**

10.5.1. In addition to funding received and distributed through the Local Restrictions Support Grant and Restart Grants schemes, both of which have nationally set eligibility criteria, Birmingham City Council has received an allocation of approximately £33million through the Additional Restrictions Grant discretionary scheme (ARG). Through the ARG scheme, local authorities are able to establish their own business support grant schemes or business support programmes according to local priorities and need, with all eligibility criteria set locally.

10.5.2. Birmingham has received a total allocation of £32,979,132 to be distributed through this scheme, to support businesses who do not qualify for support through the various mandatory LRGS schemes but have been significantly impacted by lockdown or other Covid-19 restrictions.

10.6. As of 28th May 2021, the Council has paid out a total of £29,253,441 to 11,647 businesses across Birmingham using ARG funding. Further details are provided in the below table.

Scheme	Total applications paid	Total paid
ARG1	2,744	£4,529,837
ARG2	3,478	£11,113,801
Total ARG approved	6,222	£15,643,638
Hospitality Survival Fund	330	£3,300,000
Taxi Sector Support Grants	3,833	£3,833,000
DBG/SBG payments post 30/09/2020 reconciliation	N/A	£1,581,000
LRSG(Closed)Disc (ARG), as at 22/04/2021	659	£1,483,037
LRSG(Closed)Disc (ARG) payments up to 31.03.2021, as at 22/04/2021	603	£3,412,766
ARG total (including LRSG Disc)	11,647	£29,253,441
ARG total allocation		£32,979,132
Estimated underspend		£3,725,691

10.7. The ARG scheme currently has an underspend of approximately £3.7million, which will be distributed in the form of a top-up grant to those businesses that have already been supported through the ARG2 scheme.

10.8. Birmingham expects to receive an additional £7million in ARG funding in summer 2021, which will be used to fund two additional support schemes:

- A new BCC Recovery Fund, offering grants between £5k to £50k to businesses seeking to implement a recovery plan or otherwise refresh their business model. The stated priority of this scheme is to improve business confidence, stimulate activity, encourage investment, enable recovery and safeguard existing jobs in the Birmingham economy.
- A discretionary element to complement the Restart Grant scheme.

10.9. **Social Isolation Payments**

10.9.1. The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) introduced the Self Isolation Payment (SIP) scheme in September 2020. Since 28th September 2020, eligible individuals are entitled to a Test and Trace Support Payment (main scheme) or a Discretionary Support Payment (secondary scheme) of £500 to support people on low incomes who are unable to work from home, if they are told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace and, will lose income as a result.

10.9.2. Payments are designed to help ensure people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and their close contacts self-isolate for the required period to stop the onward spread of the virus. Councils had to have arrangements in place to administer payments by 12th October 2020. The scheme was initially due to end on 31st January 2021, but has been extended to the end of June 2021.

10.9.3. **Scheme extensions and modifications**

10.9.4. On 17th March 2021, DHSC announced a number of changes to the design and administration of the Self Isolation Payment scheme. These included:

- Parents and guardians extension – from 8th March 2021, parents or guardians who are not legally required to self-isolate can apply for a Test and Trace Support Payment or discretionary payment if they need to take time off work to care for a child or young person who is. Eligibility criteria for this extension of the scheme are given on the BCC website.
- Backdating – after feedback from local authorities including Birmingham City Council, the time limit for accepting backdated applications was extended to 42 days after the first day of self-isolation. This was previously 28 days. Local authorities may consider

older applications under exceptional circumstances, for example where severe Covid-19 symptoms have delayed an application.

- Outcomes of cases – a new duty on local authorities to record outcomes of all applications.

10.9.5. In response to the announced changes, and working with our IT provider Northgate, we made all required changes to our application and reporting systems. We also updated the website to reflect changes to the design of the scheme. Updated procedural documentation and guidance was issued to staff, alongside the rollout of further training and changes to our reporting and monitoring system.

Funding position

Along with changes to the design of the scheme, the 17th March announcement included a funding update which covered payments and the administration of the scheme until the end of April 2021. A further funding announcement to cover May to the end of June is still yet to be provided.

Payments to date

10.9.6. As of 2nd June 2021, the Council has processed 14,735 total claims and paid out approximately £2.5 million in claims to eligible applicants. This includes 3,369 standard payments (Social Isolation Payments) with a total value of £1,684,500, and 1,718 discretionary payments (Discretionary Social Isolation Payments) with a total value of £859,000. Further details are given in the below table.

Application status	Number
Completed	14,526 (117 in the past two weeks)
Paid – Social Isolation Payment	3,369 (71 in the past two weeks)
Paid – Discretionary Social Isolation Payment	1,718 (46 in the past two weeks)
Refused due not to meeting mandatory criteria e.g. no positive test, not isolating, no financial loss	9,439
Pending – awaiting further information from citizens	176
Pending – recently received	33
TOTAL	14,735 (89 received in the past two weeks)

10.9.7. After unexpectedly high numbers of applications at the beginning of the scheme, claims are now dropping in line with the drop in Covid-19 cases and are at their lowest level since October 2020. There is currently no backlog in cases, and citizens are receiving payments quickly where all the information is provided.

10.10. **Council Tax Hardship Scheme**

10.10.1. In 2020, national government distributed additional financial support to local authorities through a new Council Tax Hardship Fund, with Birmingham City Council receiving an allocation of £17.4m. The intention for this funding was for councils to provide all working-age recipients of Council Tax Support (CTS) in 2020/21 with a further reduction in their annual council tax bill of £150.

10.10.2. This support scheme commenced in April 2020, with all in-year/new CTS applicants receiving the discount. Residents do not have to apply for this reduction, with discounts being provided automatically. By the end of December 2020, around 64,700 households had been supported through the scheme.

10.10.3. In its Spending Review, national government announced a top-up of the scheme, in recognition of the increased costs to councils of providing council tax support and supporting vulnerable households through the pandemic. Birmingham City Council's allocation of this additional funding for 2021/22 is £14.5million, in addition to any underspend brought forward from 2020/21.

10.10.4. In March 2020, Cabinet decided to use this additional funding to further increase the level of support for households receiving CTS. All Birmingham households in receipt of CTS will receive a £275 discount on their 2021/22 council tax bill. This means that all Council Tax Support recipients will be protected from this year's Council Tax rise, with around 31,000 of these households now not needing to pay any council tax for the 2021/22 financial year.

10.10.5. 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.

11. **Council Finances and Resources (including Corporate Procurement and HR)**

11.1. **Finance**

11.1.1. Please note that this represents the financial position as at 4th June 2021, based on the decisions which are known to Finance teams.

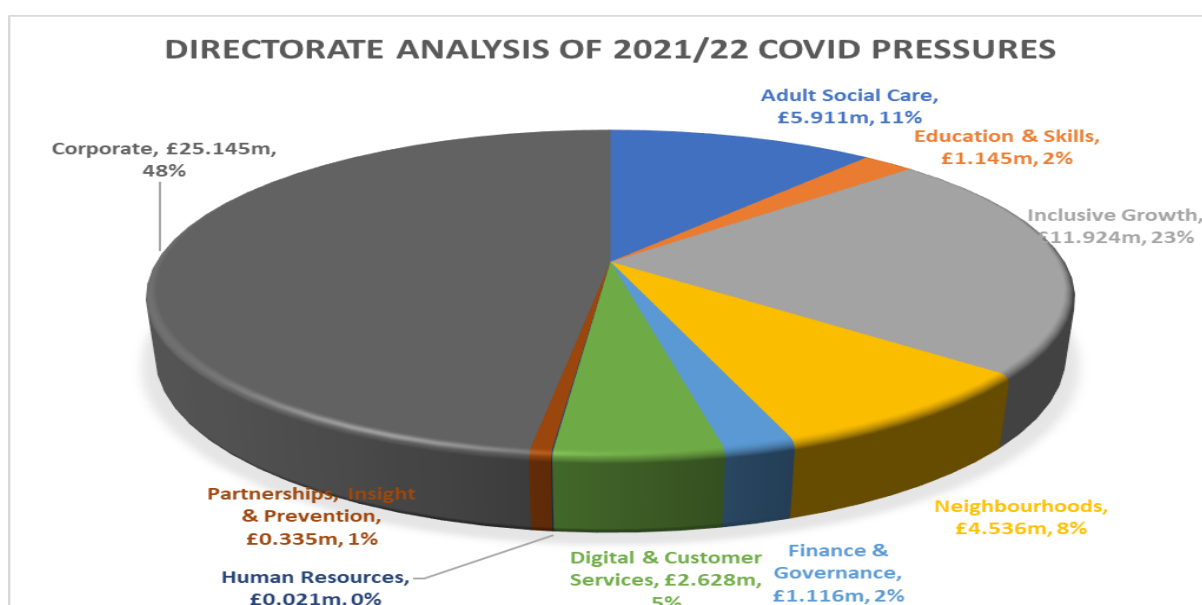
- 11.1.2. As in 2020/21, Government has provided some direct funding and other supportive financial measures to lessen the impact on local government. This includes providing Birmingham with £43.8m of un-ringfenced grant funding which was fully applied in setting the 2021/22 budget, approved by Council in February 2021. Additionally, Government has 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. Targeted funding which tends to be ringfenced has been provided to support specific activities.
- 11.1.3. Since the un-ringfenced grant was utilised in setting the budget, the Council's main funding for Covid-19 pressures in 2021/22 is from any balances in reserves and the anticipated compensation from Government for lost sales, fees and charges. The funding available can therefore be summarised as follows:

Table 1: Funding for 2021/22	
Financial Year	Value £m
Appropriation to COVID Support Grant reserve as at March 2021	17.471
Total COVID Support Grant reserve	17.471
SFC Income compensation expected (Apr-Jun 21)	4.745
Ringfenced funding (incl balances b/f)	189.343
Total Funding for 2021/22	211.559

- 11.1.4. Government has announced an education package of £1.4bn aimed at providing additional tutoring to help recover lost Covid-19 teaching. Schools will receive £1bn to support up to 6 million 15-hour tutoring courses for disadvantaged school children, in addition to the expansion of the 16-19 tuition fund to help with Maths and English teaching. The remaining £400m will be used to develop new programmes for early years teachers, as well as expanding current training courses. The education sector had anticipated a more significant investment than that announced.
- 11.1.5. There have been no additional ringfenced grant announcements.
- 11.1.6. Table 2 below 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 un-ringfenced resources. It should be noted that the 2021/22 position will be refined as the impact of the easing of restrictions become clearer. The total forecast of additional spend/loss of income to the Council on Covid-19 related general fund activities for 2021/22 is £52.8m including risks.

Table 2: Forecast Pressures on Expenditure and Income			
Financial Year	Expenditure	Income	Total
	Forecast £m	Forecast £m	Forecast £m
2021/22	10.420	42.341	52.761
Gross GF Pressures	10.420	42.341	52.761
Pressures funded during the 2021 budget process (Application of Tranche 5 funding)	N/A	N/A	(26.190)
COVID Support Grant reserve	N/A	N/A	(17.471)
SFC Income compensation expected	N/A	N/A	(4.745)
Net GF Pressures/(Surplus)	10.420	42.341	4.354

- 11.1.7. The above table indicates for 2021/22 there is forecast to be a small underspend of £0.6m on direct costs, which increases to a forecast overspend of £4.4m when risks are taken into account. It should be noted that forecasts will be refined over the coming weeks and months as more information becomes available on the impact of easing restrictions.
- 11.1.8. Services have also identified £2.3m of ongoing Covid-19 impact for 2022/23 and beyond. Any such costs will be dealt with as part of the upcoming budget process.



- 11.1.9. Covid impact across directorates is shown in the figure below. Excluding corporate pressures which were fully funded during the 2021/22 budget

process, most of the impact is anticipated to be in the Inclusive Growth Directorate (£12.5m). It is anticipated that there will be reduced demand for parking services across the entire financial year, therefore reduced income for the Council. It should be noted that Government has only committed to reimbursing local authorities for income losses up to the end of June 2021, so around £9.1m of the forecast loss remains a pressure for the Council. In addition, there is a material forecast of impact for Adults Social Care (£5.9m) arising from income losses at day centre operations, additional staffing costs, supplier relief, and cost of PPE not covered through Central Government provision.

- 11.1.10. Cost pressures have **reduced by £3.4m** since the report of 28th May 2021, as depicted in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Change in General Fund Forecast Pressures Since 28 May			
Date of Estimate	2021/22	2022/23	Total
	Forecast £m	Forecast £m	Forecast £m
28 May 2021	56.115	2.361	58.476
04 June 2021	52.761	2.361	55.122
Change	(3.354)	0.000	(3.354)

- 11.1.11. The changes above arise from improvement in the forecasts for car parking income losses of around £1.1m and reduction in the anticipated costs of IT equipment of £2.0m.

Emerging Financial Risks

- 11.1.12. The most likely impact is £18.675m for 2021/22, noting that most of this risk relates to council tax and business rates income loss which was reflected in the 2021/22 budget set by the Council.
- 11.1.13. It must be noted that the emerging and evolving financial risks will continue to be monitored and updated as there is greater visibility by Finance officers of financial decisions being made.

MHCLG Return

- 11.1.14. A return on the latest estimates of costs and losses of income due to Covid-19 was submitted to MHCLG on 28th May 2021, which was based on updated figures as at 21 May 2021. This return included forecasts up to September 2021 (quarters 1 and 2) only, in line with the MHCLG request, along with any anticipated variations in the Business Rates and Council tax income collections for the period and expenditure in relation to ringfenced grants. The

Council estimated total costs of £38.5m for the period to June 2021 and a further £21.1m for the period to September 2021. The impact of Covid-19 per the MHCLG return is summarised in Table 4 below.

Table 4: MHCLG May Return Summary		
	Quarter 1 2021/22 £m	Quarter 2 2021/22 £m
Additional costs	6.170	1.293
Income losses	7.872	10.713
Collection Fund losses after Business Rates Relief	12.650	3.017
Ringfenced grant expenditure (e.g. Contain Management Fund funding)	11.745	5.940
Total General Fund Impact	38.436	20.963
HRA Impact	0.035	0.115
Total 2020/21 impact submitted to MHCLG	38.471	21.078

Material Ringfenced Grants

Business support grants

- 11.1.15. The Council has received a £55.3m allocation for the Restart Grant designed to support businesses from 1st April 2021 with reopening. Pre-payment checks have so far been carried out by the Council and results were received on 19th April 2021. Payments of £38.1m have been processed so far leaving £20.5m to distribute. This represents support to around 5000 business within Birmingham.
- 11.1.16. During 2020, Government also provided several grants to support businesses who face restrictions during the national lockdown and during periods when restrictions were in place due to high alert levels for the area. At the end of the financial year, grants to the value of £61.7m were remaining. From this balance, £11.8m has been distributed in 2021/22. Any undistributed Local Restriction Closed and Closed Addendum will need to be returned to Government following a reconciliation process.

Local Council Tax Support (Hardship Grants)

- 11.1.17. Cabinet has taken the decision to reduce council tax bills of working age people already in receipt of Council Tax support by up to £275 funded from a Government grant of £14.5m and the unspent grant of £2.4m brought forward from the previous year. This is expected to benefit around 61,000 households within Birmingham. This means that all Council Tax Support recipients will be protected from this year's Council Tax rise, with around 31,000 of these households now not needing to pay any council tax for the 2021/22 financial

year. To date, 76,281 discounts have been applied (54,261 claims), totalling £11.0m.

Test and Trace Support Payments

- 11.1.18. From 28th September 2020, individuals on low income, who have been asked to self-isolate and who have consequently experienced economic hardship as a result may be eligible to a payment of £500. The aim of the scheme, which is expected to run until June 2021, is to help ensure that people on low incomes self-isolate when they test positive or are identified as a contact, and to encourage more people to get tested. This will help to reduce the spread of Covid-19. The number of claims to the Council have continued to fall in line with the drop in Covid-19 cases. Where all required information is provided and up to date, residents have been able to be paid quickly. Payments since April 2021 have totalled £0.6m.

Contain Outbreak Management Funds

- 11.1.19. From 12th October 2020, Local Authorities have been eligible for funding from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) which is ring-fenced for public health purposes to tackle Covid-19, including activities to:

- reduce the spread of coronavirus in their area;
- support local economies and public health.

- 11.1.20. The Council had unspent balances from 2020/21 totalling £15.7m. Combined with the 2021/22 allocation of £11.3m, the planned expenditure from this funding equals £19.2m in year and a further £7.8m for 2022/23.

Infection Control Grant

- 11.1.21. Government has provided a further £5.730m to reduce the rate of Covid-19 transmission within and between care settings through effective infection prevention and control practices and increase uptake of staff vaccination and to conduct additional rapid testing of staff and visitors in care homes, high-risk supported living and extra care settings, to enable close contact visiting where possible. Combined with the amount brought forward from 2020/21, this means that there is £6.1m of resources to support infection control and rapid testing in care facilities. Planned distribution of the grant is as follows:

- Infection Control allocation – Care homes/residential treatment services- £1.7m
- Infection Control allocation – Community care- £0.7m
- Infection Control allocation – Discretionary- £1.0m
- Rapid Testing allocation – Care homes - £1.3m
- Rapid Testing allocation – Community care- £1.0m.

11.1.22. About 88% of the above has already been distributed to care providers.

11.2. **Corporate Procurement Services**

11.2.1. There is continued collaboration with regional Heads of Procurement to co-ordinate the requirement for PPE. The Council's procurement team has led on the sourcing of approximately 8.4 million masks, 1.7 million gloves, 1 million aprons/coveralls, 36,000 goggles/visors, 8.4 million ml of sanitiser and 29,000 clinical waste sacks for the region's local authorities.

11.2.2. The team is also working with external bodies such as Warwickshire Manufacturers Alliance, Midlands Engine, WMCA and LEPs to help develop local manufacturing and supply capability to contribute to the national requirement for PPE. The outcome from these discussions is being fed into Government as part of our ongoing liaison with the LGA's national PPE Procurement group helping to shape the longer-term procurement strategy for PPE.

11.2.3. Corporate Procurement Services has supported 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. Moving forward, the team are working on standardising the approach to engagement / contracting with employer and community spokes.

11.2.4. In response to the pandemic Corporate Procurement established contracts for:

- A mobile asymptomatic testing service comprising three fully equipped & staffed vehicles.
- Asymptomatic testing in over 100 Birmingham pharmacies.
- A testing facility for Royal Mail workers in Birmingham.
- Provision of booth kits to create the testing centre at the Utilita Arena and for testing located on BCC sites.
- Operation Eagle PCR drop and collect surge testing service which was operational on site in less than 3 working days from initial instruction. (We are currently tendering a replacement to this contract that can be called off over a longer period.)

Recovery

11.2.5. The Corporate Procurement Service is represented on the Council's Community Recovery Board to ensure the new and evolving service requirements are sourced effectively and compliantly.

11.2.6. The procurement strategy for the longer-term contractual arrangements for PPE is currently being scoped in collaboration with other West Midlands local authorities.

11.2.7. Despite the economic downturn, the Council's main contractors continued to secure the social value outcomes that is part of our procurement and contracting arrangements. Other than a fall in the number of work placements and a slight reduction in social enterprise spend, all other measures have seen an increase despite the impact of Covid-19. The Council continues to develop its approach to social value with renewed focus despite the challenging economic environment.

11.3. **Human Resources**

11.3.1. Human Resources (HR) continues to undertake a large volume of work to support the Covid-19 response. This includes a consideration of how the organisation recovers from the pandemic, addressing some of the challenges within directorates and the reopening of services as restrictions begin to lift. There has also been a need to continue to deliver business as usual, whilst considering future changes to the Directorate as a part of the Target Operating Model programme.

11.3.2. The details of how each element of HR are responding to these challenges is given below. However, challenges for the directorates which HR are supporting fall into two main categories:

- The impact of the pandemic on sickness absence and mental ill health, and the contrasting way that directorates have had to switch off or continue to provide services, conforming to an array of evolving government guidelines and newly emerging statutory instruments.
- The need to embrace the changes that have been made for the benefit of the workforce and organisation, whilst considering what shape service provision will take when restrictions are further lifted and we embed new norms. These future changes also consider the health and wellbeing of the workforce and what measures need to be put in place to support the ambitions the city has.

Managers Bulletins, All Staff Bulletins and Intranet Content

11.3.3. HR continues to work with trade unions to develop Manager Bulletins and all staff emails providing advice, guidance and support which signpost existing and newly amended HR systems to enable key services to continue to be delivered. These are both specific to Covid-19 and also business as usual, and include intranet content self-service as the organisation navigates its way through changing times, considers how we return to a new normal and the physical return to service delivery and new ways of working.

Occupational Health

11.3.4. Occupational health is now experiencing double the volume of manager referrals compared to average comparable periods prior to the pandemic. The

team continue to support managers with new and ongoing health issues identified within their teams, some of which are attributable to long Covid-19 and the impact the restrictions have had on mental health. In addition, and with regards to services reopening, the team have started to conduct pre-employment assessments, mental ill health assessments, the review of medical redeployment cases, health screening, ill health retirement cases, and the further review and update of intranet guidance.

- 11.3.5. A programme of health surveillance is under development with some important site visits planned. The team also continue with the development of individual risk assessments to support those extremely clinically vulnerable and clinically vulnerable as the organisation continues to provide critical services and considers how we return to offices where necessary.
- 11.3.6. Psychological Therapies (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) for both individuals and team level interventions continue to be delivered in high risk areas and where sickness absence due to stress, anxiety or depression is elevated.
- 11.3.7. The recent developed Service Level Stress Audit has been undertaken in a number of key areas, again where data would indicate elevated levels of stress, anxiety or depression. Areas audited to date include Waste, SENAR, and the Domestic Abuse Team. Further areas are being identified and assessed. This intervention is designed to be proactive and to identify those widespread, occupational triggers of stress with arising recommendations focusing on wholesale root causes, rather than individual, palliative measures which may be recommended to address individual or personal stress triggers.

Sickness Absence / RIDDOR Reporting

- 11.3.8. The safety team continue to review reported accident and incident data, analysing reports with a view to identifying any clusters or trends which could prompt local manager interventions or the need to submit formal reports to the HSE under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrence (RIDDOR) Regulations. There has also been an additional need to verify the existence and adequacy of associated Risk Assessments in such circumstances and that monitoring of the adequacy of arrangements is taking place.
- 11.3.9. **Flu Vaccination Programme**
- 11.3.10. Influenza vaccinations for BCC employees (including those working in maintained schools) have once again been negotiated with an external provider, ready for the 2021 flu season vaccination roll-out later in the year. There will again be an online booking system so that employees have free access to the vaccine, with a view to maintaining the health of the workforce and resilience during the pandemic.

Compliance Audits

- 11.3.11. An auditing cycle has been established by the Safety Team in relation to BCC properties and assets, maintained schools and the activities that we perform in relation to the services that we provide. This has taken the form of a Be Heard Survey for managers (and considers activity related hazards and Covid-19 control measures), an annual return for those responsible for properties and assets (and covers those hazards related to facilities – Asbestos, Legionella, Fire etc.) and a series of verification audits conducted by Safety Advisers to support the submission of - and establish the accuracy of the data being returned.

Safety

- 11.3.12. A new training package and property logbook has been developed and is in the process of being delivered to those responsible for properties and assets across the estate. Corresponding intranet guidance for the responsible persons is also in the process of being created. New guidance for those using display screen equipment and other portable electrical equipment has also been created now that so many employees are working at home. The team have been supporting corporate Health & Safety committee meetings and directorate Health & Safety committee meetings. In addition, the Risk Marker System for field workers continues to be supported by the team.
- 11.3.13. Relevant sections of the Strategic Risk Register have been rewritten for consideration and monitoring at the newly created Assurance CLT Meetings. This will significantly improve senior leadership understanding of organisational risk, associated mitigations and allow contraindicators to be discussed and responded to in a proactive manner.

Taxi Medicals

- 11.3.14. Taxi Medicals resumed in April 2021 at the Occupational Health offices within Ashted Lock. Measures have been developed to ensure that medical examinations can take place safely, with a consideration of the social impact and potential risks of suspending the service on the business and citizens of Birmingham and those visiting the city. Risk Assessment has dictated a number of changes to the office layout and associated standard operating procedures. We have also recently taken on a new medical doctor and made some improvements to how the service is delivered to reduce the number of suspensions and 2nd appointments.

Employee Health and Wellbeing

- 11.3.15. Organisational Development's Culture Change Team (health and wellbeing) are continuously increasing the number of health and wellbeing communications, content and resources. Recently there was a focus on

reducing the stigma attached to mental health and domestic abuse through the power of storytelling and raising awareness through group sessions.

- 11.3.16. Intranet pages and yammer pages are constantly updated, and other channels of communication identified through the communication plan with information and promotion of all upcoming events. The health and wellbeing support guide is also updated on a monthly basis (the support guide includes all health and wellbeing support which is available to all BCC colleagues). A monthly newsletter has also been developed by the culture change team which also includes health and wellbeing updates.
- 11.3.17. There have been around 70 mental health awareness sessions including wellbeing focus groups delivered since the wider move to remote working.
- 11.3.18. Results from the second Council-Wide Health and Wellbeing Survey have been presented via a number of focus groups and directorate management team meetings. Most recently presentations were arranged for staff in housing, street scene and waste depots.
- 11.3.19. Finally, the team are considering how to reach offline staff, which has resulted in the delivery of a number of return to work awareness sessions at Handsworth Leisure Centre and a Mental Health First Aid presence in Redfern Depot, seeking to ensure that colleagues with limited internet / intranet accessibility are not overlooked.

New Ways of Working

- 11.3.20. The New Ways of Working Programme has been identified as the means to bring together, build upon, and accelerate existing work on developing agile working, a modern workplace, and the provision of locality-based working. The future is about neighbourhoods, better use of community-based assets and more services delivered in our communities.
- 11.3.21. The programme will seek to:
- Reduce workforce inequality in the workplace - for example by ensuring that those with caring responsibilities can work flexibly so that they can build their careers while balancing the needs of those at home.
 - Increase neighbourhood working - moving services into the community, stimulating economic redevelopment with the Council becoming an anchor institution in more deprived parts of the city.
 - Reduce our carbon footprint - delivering on our Route To Zero carbon commitments by reducing the need for staff to commute and reducing energy consumption within our property estate.

- Maximise property assets - creating opportunities to better utilise our property estate to the benefit of the city, thereby enabling the Council to realise savings and income.

11.3.22. New Ways of Working will empower employees to be agile, ultimately achieving higher productivity rates whilst delivering an improved experience for our customers.

11.3.23. It will contribute to the savings required and enable further rationalisation of our property estate by securing an approach to hub and locality/community-based working that is consistent across the Council and supported by new technology and workforce protocols.

HR Services

11.3.24. New processes have been set up to support the agile workforce and ensure compliance with HR policy and changing government guidance. During this period, we have been working with the 1B programme on the new HR/Payroll system that will be implemented in April 2022 and drive significant changes to the way HR works with the organisation. The HR consultancy service have worked to significantly reduce the number of formal HR cases (dealing with absence, discipline and individual employee relations matters) through a case review process agreed with Trade Unions. The Industrial Relations Unit have been consulting with trade unions on modernising policy to better support the workforce, looking ahead to a more agile way of working in future.

Business as usual

11.3.25. 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.

11.3.26. 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.

11.3.27. 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.