



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services OSC

22 February 2022

Report of: Councillor Kelham Cooke
The Leader of the Council

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COVID-19 Response, Recovery and Impact on SKDC Services

The report sets out an overview of the impact of Covid-19 on South Kesteven District Council and various services and approaches. It also highlights ongoing issues and identifies key lessons learnt to date from Covid-19.

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Report Author

Ken Lyon (Assistant Chief Executive)



01476 406080



Ken.Lyon@southkesteven.gov.uk

Corporate Priority:	Decision type:	Wards:
Administrative	Non-Key	All Wards

Reviewed by:	Alan Robinson (Deputy Chief Executive)	9 February 2022
Approved by:	Karen Bradford (Chief Executive)	9 February 2022
Signed off by:	Councillor Kelham Cooke (The Leader of the Council)	11 February 2022

Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s)

1. Notes the impact of Covid-19 and related restrictions on SKDC services and the ongoing changes to the service delivery landscape for the District
2. Endorses the key lessons learnt from Covid-19 and asks the Chief Executive to ensure that these are embedded in the future operations of the Council
3. Thanks all those involved in the response and recovery from Covid-19, with particular thanks to communities and the voluntary sector who have played a vital role in supporting the most vulnerable during the pandemic

1 The Background to the Report

- 1.1 Following an outbreak in early 2020 the World Health Organisation declared that COVID-19 was a global pandemic on 11 March 2020. The ongoing spread of the disease across Europe initiated a response from Government and local authorities across the United Kingdom.
- 1.2 To date the pandemic has had many phases, with both the prevalence of the virus and associated national and regional measures varying significantly over the period. Each phase has had different impacts on the services of the Council and on our communities and businesses. The Prime Minister announced a return to 'Plan A' on 27 January 2022, meaning that there are currently no legal restrictions on public life in England beyond isolation for those who have tested positive for Covid-19.
- 1.3 However, to protect the health and safety of our communities, staff and Members of SKDC are still utilising a number of measures to reduce the potential for transmission of the virus.
- 1.4 A position statement was taken to Cabinet in June 2020 setting out the SKDC response (which is attached as a background paper) and this report provides an update from that position and also a focus on key lessons learnt to date.

2 Initial Response and Setting Priorities

- 2.1 As a public authority South Kesteven played a key role in supporting businesses and communities throughout Covid-19 and at the Cabinet meeting on 17 March 2020 the Leader of the Council set out that South Kesteven District Council's three priorities, in responding to the pandemic, were:
 1. To protect the health of our staff, Members and residents
 2. To maintain our critical services; and
 3. To support our local businesses.
- 2.2 Throughout the various phases of the pandemic SKDC has continued to be driven by these three priorities and Members should refer to the June 2020 report for a detailed appraisal of the initial 'response' phase.

3 Health impact of Covid-19

- 3.1 Covid-19 has, very sadly, had a significant impact on the health of our communities both through the direct and in-direct impact of Covid-19. In South Kesteven as of 1 February 2022 we have had:
 - 34,958 cases of Covid-19
 - 318 deaths within 28 days of a positive Covid-19 test
 - Vaccinations given in SK 319,974 (age 12 and over)
 - o 116,488 first dose (90% of cohort)
 - o 110,401 second dose (85% of cohort)
 - o 93,085 third/booster dose (72% of cohort)
- 3.2 The Council has also supported the mobilisation of various testing sites at Council owned assets, including
 - Walk-in PCR test site at Queen Elizabeth Park car park (Grantham) established and continues

- Mobile Testing Units sites set up at Grantham Meres and St Martins Park (Stamford) to support PCR testing regime
- Lateral flow testing station set up at Grantham Meres, initially staffed by LeisureSK staff for SK staff and Local Resilience Forum partners, alongside a site at Earlesfield Community Centre

3.3 The impact on our communities has been partly mitigated by the excellent vaccination programme in the District, with Grantham Meres Leisure Centre being the most used vaccination centre in Lincolnshire celebrating it's 250,000 vaccination on 17 December 2021, and to date there have been:

- 116,488 First Doses, 90% of over 12s
- 110,401 Second Doses, 85% of over 12s
- 93,085 Booster Doses, 72% of over 12s

3.4 In addition to the direct health impact of Covid-19 there has been a number of other indirect impact on mental and physical health, which have been exacerbated by isolation issues and lack of access to facilities – both caused by closure of facilities. SKDC is committed to working with a variety of partners to address the long-term impact of the indirect issues. Examples of the mitigations are the development of the Mental Health Working Party to work with public and private sector partners and community groups to promote better mental wellbeing and developed the Sport and Physical Activity strategy.

4 Impact on Services and Activities

4.1 There has been a wider ranging impact on our services at SKDC and Appendix 1 sets out the position for many of the most effected services and assets. Practically all services had an initial impact, but many have seen changes that will have a lasting impact on service delivery.

4.2 Some of the key short-term impact on services that are highlighted in Appendix 1 are:

- The immediate realignment of resources in InvestSK Ltd and the Council's finance teams to focus on distributing over £50m of grants to 3,000 businesses
- The set up of the SK Community Hub to provide a resource for vulnerable residents and the mobilisation of over 1,500 volunteers within our communities to support more than 2,000 requests for support
- The move to 'urgent only' repairs in the housing service to minimise social contact at the early stage of the pandemic, creating an enormous repairs backlog when normal service resumed
- The delivery of the 'Everyone In' scheme to ensure that all rough sleepers were offered accommodation and the emergency redeployment of general use Council Homes to temporary accommodation to facilitate this
- Implementing new operating practices to minimise potential exposure to the Covid-19, for example 'working bubbles' in the Waste and Street Scene service
- Rapid mobilisation of technology and working practices to enable over 400 people to work from home every day (a 13-fold increase on pre-pandemic levels)
- Responding to changes in legislation in guidance for public and business behaviour and working with businesses to support them in complying with the prevailing legislation at that time, enabling businesses to re-open and operate safely

- Adopting virtual meeting practices between April 2020 and May 2021 and then embedding social distancing within formal meetings of the Council while maintaining public access, enabled by live streaming technology
- Closure of Leisure facilities and Arts Centres for a large period of time and the introduction of many health and safety measures when they were able to reopen.

4.3 Although many of these changes were short-term or related to a particular phase of restrictions, there are many changes that are likely to lead to ongoing changes to service delivery, including:

- The establishment of LeisureSK Ltd to support the ongoing delivery of leisure services in the District and mitigate the impact of issues within the leisure market
- Ongoing issues with the recruitment and retention of staff, caused by national and local workforce shortages (although Covid-19 is likely to be only a partial cause of this). There is also a knock-on impact on the price of many services (directly and indirectly delivered) that have increased due to increases in labour and materials
- Ongoing adoption of a 'hybrid' working approach providing opportunities for greater flexibility in the workforce, supporting being an employer of choice
- Strengthened relationships between the Council, public sector partners and the Community and Voluntary sector, providing a platform for increased partnership working to better meet the mental and physical health needs of residents
- Anticipated ongoing requirement for testing and vaccination capacity within the Councils asset portfolio
- Reduction in demand for key services, including Leisure Memberships and demand for Arts performances
- Change in enquiries to InvestSK Ltd, including a significant reduction in demand for office space and increased demand for retail space, particularly from start ups
- Ongoing availability of public meetings online via YouTube, increasing the opportunities for individuals to engage with democratic decision making

5 Financial Impact of Covid-19

- 5.1 There is an overview of the financial impact of Covid-19 in Appendix 2, which sets out the summary information relating to additional costs, significant income losses and the receipt of additional Government support for Councils (e.g. the income replacement scheme).
- 5.2 The Council approved a revised budget framework in September 2020, as the budget approved in March was no longer fit for purpose as there had been very significant changes to the assumptions that underpin it.
- 5.3 In the financial year 2020/21 the additional costs to the Council and income losses were approximately £3m (which included £2m in lost income), however these were largely mitigate by £2.997m in Government grants, which included an un-ringfenced support for Councils, the leisure and cultural recovery grants and also the income losses grant.
- 5.4 In 2021/22 the impact of Covid on the Councils finances is estimated at approximately £1.346m, however the net effect is greater as Government support grants total only £0.230m.
- 5.5 It should be noted that there are a number of areas, particularly related to income where there is likely to have been a long term impact on behaviours which will have a long term

negative effect on the income received. These assumptions have been included as part of the 2022/23 budget setting process.

6 Lessons Learned

6.1 The document in Appendix 1 outlines a number of lessons learnt across the service areas that it is recommended are embedded within the ongoing operations as a Council, these lessons include:

- The Council has a key role as a 'partner' both with other public sector bodies and in relation to the Voluntary and Community Sector and play a role in enabling the different parties to 'play to their strengths' to deliver the intended outcome. Therefore it is often appropriate for the Council to take a contributor or enabler role, rather than assuming it is the lead organisation in delivering projects and interventions.
- The pandemic response also highlighted that the Council could play a stronger role in Community Leadership, particularly through locally elected Members. Therefore the Council should consider investing in the skills of officers and Members to support this.
- Prioritising the development of robust business continuity plans (including a hierarchy of services) and ensuring ongoing engagement with the Local Resilience Forum and Emergency Planning service is critical. Business continuity plans should be updated on a regular (at least annual) basis to ensure they are robust and reflect the current operating environment. These plans should be supported by a skills database to support the Council in rapid redeployment of staff to the most essential services when required.
- Developing a culture where the Council and any wholly owned companies or assets work closely together and avoid silos supports an effective, joined up response to key issues.
- The pandemic has provided a stimulus to invest in technology to enable members of the public to have greater access to decision making meetings and local democracy, opportunities to embed and promote this should be explored to support greater community engagement.
- During the past two years we have seen many phases of restrictions related to Covid-19, which have significantly impacted on the delivery of many events and activities. While planning events every effort should be taken to ensuring they can be adapted to meet the conditions of the time and thresholds established for reducing or postponing events.
- The importance of utilising effective data and business intelligence has been particularly key for services relying on income generation, or who operate in volatile market conditions. This data and intelligence is critical to informing business decisions, including redeployment of staff, furlough and other key investment decisions.
- Covid-19 provided a reminder of the importance of ensuring the support the mental and physical wellbeing of Members and officers. The Council has strengthened it's approach since the beginning of Covid-19 with the extension of the Employee Assistance Programme to Members and the focus of the Mental Health Working Party (including expanding the number of Mental Health First Aiders in the organisation). It is essential that the health and wellbeing of all continues to be prioritised.
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7 Available Options Considered

- 7.1 As the report is not asking for any specific decisions there are no other alternative options considered.

8 Preferred Option

- 8.1 The preferred option for the report is to note the findings and apply the lessons learnt.

9 Reasons for the Recommendation (s)

- 9.1 The purpose of the report is primarily to note the impact of Covid-19 and the response by SKDC. It is good practice to identify, capture and apply lessons learnt.

10 Next Steps – Communication and Implementation of the Decision

- 10.1 The next steps are set out in the paper “COVID-19 – SKDC Recovery Plan” appearing separately on this agenda.

11 Financial Implications

- 11.1 The financial impact of the pandemic for the Council has been significant and varied and is still impacting during the current financial year. The specific funding streams that have either been applied for specific services (Arts and Culture) or received as general support and is summarised in the table at Appendix 2. The financial implication will continue to be monitored and the Committee will continue to be updated as part of the Budget monitoring report.

Financial Implications reviewed by: Richard Wyles, Assistant Director of Finance

12 Legal and Governance Implications

- 12.1 As this report is for noting there are no legal implications associated with this report

Legal Implications reviewed by: Alan Robinson, Deputy Chief Executive

13 Equality and Safeguarding Implications

- 13.1 As this report is for noting there are no equality and safeguarding implications associated with this report. However equality and safeguarding implications will be fully considered while implementing the lessons learnt.

14 Risk and Mitigation

- 14.1 To mitigate future risks it is essential that the lessons learnt outlined in this report are applied. This will be led by the Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team.

15 Community Safety Implications

- 15.1 There are no specific Community Safety implications of this report, which is a review of activity to date. However, all the actions contained within have been carried out specifically with Community Safety at the forefront of those decisions.

16 How will the recommendations support South Kesteven District Council’s declaration of a climate emergency?

- 16.1 There are no direct climate change or carbon impacts as a result of this report and the recommendations. However all implications will be considered where relevant while implementing the lessons learnt.

17 Other Implications (where significant)

17.1 None

18 Background Papers

18.1 [Covid-19 Response – Position Statement](#) (Report to Cabinet 16 June 2020)

19 Appendices

19.1 Appendix 1 – Covid Impact and Responses

19.2 Appendix 2 – Financial Impact of Covid-19