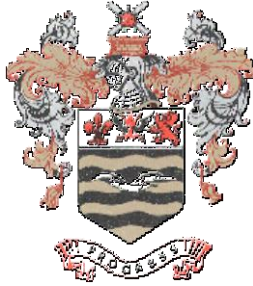


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BLACKPOOL COUNCIL

Thursday 30 April 2020

To: The Members of Blackpool Council

Lady Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen

You are hereby summoned to attend a meeting of **Blackpool Council** to be held in the Council Chamber at the Town Hall, Blackpool on Monday, 11 May 2020 commencing at 2.00 pm for the transaction of the business specified below.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Lewis'.

Director of Governance and Partnerships

Business

1 CHANGES TO MEETINGS PROCEDURES (Pages 1 - 4)

To consider a report on changes to meeting procedures resulting from recent legislation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members are asked to declare any interests in the items under consideration and in doing so state:

(1) the type of interest concerned either a

- (a) personal interest
- (b) prejudicial interest
- (c) disclosable pecuniary interest (DPI)

and

(2) the nature of the interest concerned

If any member requires advice on declarations of interests, they are advised to contact the Head of Democratic Governance in advance of the meeting.

3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 9 MARCH 2020 (Pages 5 - 10)

To agree the minutes of the last meeting held on 9 March 2020 as a true and correct record.

4 ANNOUNCEMENTS

To receive official announcements from the Mayor.

5 ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING AND ITS BUSINESS (Pages 11 - 14)

The Council will be asked to endorse the cancellation of the Annual Council meeting (as permitted under the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020). Subject to the decisions below, to allow all other appointments to remain in place until the date of the Annual Council meeting 2020/2021, given the current situation with COVID-19 pandemic.

6 PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 2020/2021 (Pages 15 - 26)

The Council will be asked to consider for approval a programme of meetings for 2020/2021 and to note provisional meeting dates from May to December 2021.

7 COVID-19 - UPDATE REPORT AND DECISIONS (Pages 27 - 56)

To receive a report of the current situation for Blackpool regarding COVID-19 and the decisions taken by the Chief Executive since the Executive delegation to him on 23 March 2020.

Other information:

For queries regarding this agenda please contact Yvonne Burnett, Democratic Governance Senior Adviser, Tel: (01253) 477034, e-mail yvonne.burnett@blackpool.gov.uk

Copies of agendas and minutes of Council and committee meetings are available on the Council's website at www.blackpool.gov.uk.

Report to:	COUNCIL
Relevant Officer:	Mark Towers, Director of Governance and Partnerships
Relevant Cabinet Member:	Councillor Blackburn, Leader of the Council
Date of Meeting:	11 May 2020

CHANGES TO MEETING PROCEDURES

1.0 Purpose of the report:

- 1.1 The Council will be asked to endorse changes to meeting procedures following recent legislation in relation to the holding of meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

- 2.1 To endorse the approach that where necessary, full Council meetings and committee meetings will be held remotely while restrictions relating to the COVID-19 pandemic are in place.
- 2.2 To note that the provisions for timing of speeches, voting and public representations will remain unchanged with public representations being made remotely.
- 2.3 To endorse the arrangements for declarations of interest and considering exempt items.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

- 3.1 To enable Council and committee business to be transacted by alternative arrangements where necessary while restrictions are in force.
- 3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No
- 3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes
- 3.3 Other alternative options to be considered:

None – measures on social distancing mean that there is no provision for a meeting to be currently held that can adhere to current restrictions.

4.0 Council Priority:

- 4.1 The proposed changes will help the Council achieve all its priorities.

5.0 Background Information

- 5.1 Since March 2020, social distancing measures and restrictions limiting unnecessary travel have been placed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 5.2 In order to allow local authority meetings to continue where necessary, regulations came into force on 4 April 2020 allowing meetings to be held virtually without the need for members to be physically present. The following requirements apply.

Notice of meetings

- 5.3 The proper officer will give the requisite notice to the public of the time of the meeting and the agenda, together with details of how to join the meeting which will be available by a link on the Council's website.

Remote attendance - members

- 5.4 Members' attendance at the meeting should preferably be through video conferencing or if this is not possible, through an audio link or by electronic means.
- 5.5 Any Member participating in a meeting remotely must, when they are speaking, be able to be heard (and ideally seen) by all other Members in attendance, by members of the public who are attending to speak at the meeting, by the public and any others viewing the meeting.
- 5.6 Other than remote participation, the Council's current meeting procedure rules will still apply including quorum, timing of speeches, only speaking once on each item etc.

Remote attendance and viewing the meeting - others

- 5.7 Members of the public, press and others must be able to view the meeting through webcasting, live audio streaming, or others means, unless the meeting moves into or is wholly considering exempt items.
- 5.8 The arrangements for public speakers/others making representations must be the same as for members - i.e. when they are speaking, they must be able to be heard (and ideally seen) by all Members in attendance, be able to hear (and ideally see) all committee members and where practicable be seen by members of the public who are viewing the meeting.

Voting at meetings

- 5.9 For clarity, the procedural rules on voting on items remain unchanged and therefore unless a recorded vote is called for (Council meetings only), the method of voting will be at the Chair's discretion and will be by one of the following methods:
- general assent of the meeting
 - a show of hands or a 'roll call' (to ask each member how he/she wishes to vote)
 - vote by electronic means (if this becomes possible).

Declarations of interest

- 5.10 Any Member participating in a remote meeting who declares a disclosable pecuniary interest, or a prejudicial interest, in any item of business that would normally require them to leave the room, must also leave the remote meeting. Their departure will be confirmed by the Democratic Governance Officer (or meeting facilitator), who will invite the relevant Member by link, email or telephone, to re-join the meeting at the appropriate time.

Exclusion of the press and the public

- 5.11 There are times when meetings are not open to the public, when confidential, or 'exempt' issues (as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972) are under consideration. The Democratic Governance Officer (or meeting facilitator) will ensure that there are no members of the public in remote attendance or remotely accessing the meeting are able to hear or see the proceedings once the exclusion has been agreed by the meeting.
- 5.12 Each Member in remote attendance must ensure and verbally declare that there are no other persons present (eg at their home) who are not entitled to be (either hearing or seeing) consideration of such items, and/or recording the proceedings. The Council's Code of Conduct would apply at all times in relation to disclosure of exempt information.

List of Appendices:

None

6.0 Legal considerations:

- 6.1 The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 No 392 allows for meetings to be held in the manner proposed above.

7.0 Human Resources considerations:

7.1 None

8.0 Equalities considerations:

8.1 Any meetings held will be promoted on the Council's website and social media channels to increase public awareness.

9.0 Financial considerations:

9.1 There may be some minimal costs relating to licensing costs and adaptations of current devices for attendees to participate in the meetings.

10.0 Risk management considerations:

10.1 The proposals will allow the authority to continue to hold meetings where this is essential.

11.0 Ethical considerations:

11.1 None.

12.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

12.1 Consultation has taken place with the four political group leaders who have indicated their support for the proposals.

13.0 Background papers:

13.1 There are no additional background papers to this report.

Present:

Councillor Cross (in the Chair)

Councillors

Benson	G Coleman	Jackson	R Scott
Blackburn	Collett	Kirkland	Smith
Brookes	Critchley	Matthews	Stansfield
Burdess	Farrell	Mitchell	I Taylor
Cain	Galley	O'Hara	L Williams
Callow	Hobson	Owen	T Williams
Mrs Callow JP	Hugo	Robertson BEM	Wilshaw
Campbell	Hunter	D Scott	Wing
Clapham	Hutton	Mrs Scott	

In Attendance:

Neil Jack, Chief Executive

John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services

Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration

Antony Lockley, Director of Strategy and Assistant Chief Executive

Steve Thompson, Director of Resources

Mark Towers, Director of Governance and Partnerships / Monitoring Officer

Lorraine Hurst, Head of Democratic Governance

Yvonne Burnett, Democratic Governance Senior Adviser

Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications

Phil Redmond, Chief Accountant

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In relation to agenda item 6 'Council Tax 2020/2021':

- Councillors Hutton, Kirkland and Stansfield declared prejudicial interests in relation to income from Blackpool Waste Services Limited as Council-appointed non-executive directors.
- Councillors Blackburn, Jackson and T Williams declared personal interests as Council-appointed representatives on Lancashire Combined Fire Authority.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 12 FEBRUARY 2020

Resolved: That the minutes of the Council meeting held on 12 February 2020 be signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

3 CAPITAL STRATEGY 2020/2021 TO 2022/2023

The Council considered the recommendations from the Executive meeting of 10 February 2020 on the proposed capital strategy which integrated with the Council's Capital

MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING - MONDAY, 9 MARCH 2020

Programme and Treasury Management Strategy and outlined how capital expenditure and investment decisions were taken in line with service objectives and took account of stewardship, value for money, prudence, sustainability and affordability.

Motion: Councillor Blackburn proposed (and Councillor Campbell seconded):

‘To approve the Capital Strategy 2020/2021 to 2022/2023 incorporating the Property Investment Strategy 2020/2021’.

Motion carried: The motion was submitted to the Council and carried.

4 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2020/2021 TO 2022/2023

Members considered the recommendations of the Executive in relation to the Capital Programme for 2020/2021 to 2022/2023 and noted that the programme ran concurrently with the 2020/2021 General Fund Revenue Budget and projected forward indicative spending for three years.

Members also noted that the programmes had been drawn up based upon individual allocations and current proposals and would be reviewed as part of the budget processes for those years in light of changing priorities.

Motion: Councillor Blackburn proposed (and Councillor Campbell seconded):

- ‘1. To approve the Capital Programme for 2020/2021 as set out at Appendices A and B to the Executive report.
2. To adopt the Single Capital Pot approach as outlined in Section 4 of the Capital Programme report as circulated with the agenda for that meeting with a top slice of 12.5% to allow for investment in key priority areas and overspends that are not otherwise fundable.
3. To approve the Capital Prudential Indicators as identified in Appendix C to the Executive report.
4. To agree that Executive approval will continue to be required for all Prudential borrowing schemes (reference paragraph 3.1 of the Executive report)’.

Motion carried: The motion was submitted to the Council and carried.

5 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2020/2021

The Council considered the recommendations of the Executive in relation to the proposed Treasury Management Strategy 2020/ 2021, which incorporated an Investment Strategy and set out how the Council would manage its investments and cashflows over the forthcoming financial year.

Motion: Councillor Blackburn proposed (and Councillor Campbell seconded):

MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING - MONDAY, 9 MARCH 2020

- ‘1. To approve the Treasury Management Strategy 2020/ 2021 including both the Borrowing and Investment Strategies set out in Annex C and Annex D to the Executive report.
2. To adopt the Treasury Management Policy Statement, the three key principles and four clauses taken from CIPFA’s Treasury Management in Public Services Code of Practice and Cross Sectoral Guidance Notes (2017 Edition) and set out in Annex B to the Executive report.
3. To approve the revised Prudential Indicators and limits for 2019/2020 and the new Prudential Indicators and limits for 2020/2021 – 2022/2023 which are set out in Annex E to the Executive report.
4. To approve the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement for 2020/ 2021, which will ensure a prudent Minimum Revenue Provision charge in the annual statement of accounts. The policy is set out within Annex D to the report to the Executive’.

Motion carried: The motion was submitted to the Council and carried.

6 COUNCIL TAX 2020/2021

The Council considered the recommendations from the Executive at its meetings on 10 February and 4 March 2020 in relation to the draft General Fund Revenue Budget and setting of Council Tax for 2020/2021.

Members firstly considered the proposed budget saving of as a result of the income from Blackpool Waste Services Limited (trading as Enveco) in the sum of £200,000 in respect of joint working.

Motion 1: Councillor Blackburn proposed (and Councillor Campbell seconded):

‘To approve the income generation of £200,000 in respect of joint working with Blackpool Waste Services Limited trading as Enveco (recommendation 2a of Appendix 6c to the Council report)’.

Recorded vote: The Council noted that under the Local Authorities (Standing Order) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, there was a requirement for a recorded vote on setting the Council tax and budget. The voting was as follows:

For the motion:

Councillors Benson, Blackburn, Brookes, Burdess, Cain, Campbell, G Coleman, Collett, Critchley, Cross, Farrell, Hobson, Hugo, Hunter, Jackson, Matthews, Mitchell, O’Hara, Owen, Smith, Taylor, L Williams - Total 22.

Against the motion:

Councillors Mrs Callow, Callow, Clapham, Galley, Robertson, D Scott, M Scott, R Scott, T Williams, Wilshaw, Wing – Total 11.

MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING - MONDAY, 9 MARCH 2020

Abstentions: None

Motion 1 carried: The motion was therefore carried.

Note: Having declared prejudicial interests, Councillors Hutton, Kirkland and Stansfield left the meeting during consideration of the above part of the item.

Motion 2: Councillor Blackburn proposed (and Councillor Campbell seconded):

‘To agree the remaining recommendations 2b to 2k as outlined in Appendix 6(c) of the Council report, bringing together the recommendations from the Executive meetings on 10 February 2020 and 4 March 2020 into a summary document, set out in accordance with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011.

1. To agree a level of budget savings of £19.45m (£19.65m excluding £200,000 approved above)
2. That the £5,922,000 Social Care Grant is allocated in full to Children’s Social Care.
3. To agree the level of net expenditure for the draft General Fund Revenue Budget 2020/21 of £142,084,000.
4. That the Chief Executive be authorised to take any necessary steps to ensure all staffing savings are achieved.
5. That the target level of working balances remains at £6m.
6. To adopt the formal Council Tax Resolutions set out at Appendix 6 (c) (Annex 1) of the Council report, in so doing agree a Council Tax Requirement of £60,134,500 and a Council Tax Base of 37,157.
7. To note the calculation of Aggregate Amounts as directed by Section 31A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as set out at Appendix 6 (c) (Annex 1 and 2) of the Council report.
8. To approve a level of Council Tax for the financial year 2020/21 of £1,618.39 at valuation Band D equivalent (a 3.99% increase including the 2% Adult Social Care Precept but excluding the precepts for the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire and the Lancashire Combined Fire Authority).
9. To note that the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire’s precept for the financial year 2020/21 is £211.45 (a £10.00 increase, equivalent to 4.96%) for a Band D Tax equivalent and the Lancashire Combined Fire Authority precept for the financial year 2020/21 is £70.86 for a Band D Tax equivalent (a 1.99% increase).

MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING - MONDAY, 9 MARCH 2020

10. To confirm that the aggregate levels of Council Tax for Valuation Bands A to H will be as below:

VALUATION BAND	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	6/9	7/9	8/9	9/9	11/9	13/9	15/9	18/9
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
BLACKPOOL	985.09	1,149.28	1,313.45	1,477.64	1,806.00	2,134.37	2,462.73	2,955.28
ADULT SOCIAL CARE PRECEPT	93.83	109.47	125.11	140.75	172.03	203.31	234.58	281.50
BLACKPOOL TOTAL CTAX	1,078.92	1,258.75	1,438.56	1,618.39	1,978.03	2,337.68	2,697.31	3,236.78
POLICE	140.97	164.46	187.96	211.45	258.44	305.43	352.42	422.90
FIRE	47.24	55.11	62.99	70.86	86.61	102.35	118.10	141.72
COUNCIL TAX 2020/21	1,267.13	1,478.32	1,689.51	1,900.70	2,323.08	2,745.46	3,167.83	3,801.40

Recorded vote: The Council noted that under the Local Authorities (Standing Order) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, there was a requirement for a recorded vote on setting the Council tax and budget. The voting was as follows:

For the motion: Councillors Benson, Blackburn, Brookes, Burdess, Cain, Campbell, Collett, Critchley, Cross, Farrell, Hobson, Hugo, Hunter, Hutton, Jackson, Kirkland, Matthews, Mitchell, O'Hara, Owen, Smith, Taylor, L Williams - Total 23.

Against the motion: Councillors Mrs Callow, Callow, Clapham, G Coleman, Galley, Robertson, D Scott, M Scott, R Scott, Stansfield, T Williams, Wilshaw, Wing – Total 13.

Abstentions: None.

Motion 2 carried: The motion was therefore carried.

Mayor

(The meeting ended at 7.01 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
Lorraine Hurst, Head of Democratic Governance
Tel: 01253 477127
E-mail: lorraine.hurst@blackpool.gov.uk

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Report to:	COUNCIL
Relevant Officer:	Mark Towers, Director of Governance and Partnerships
Relevant Cabinet Member:	Councillor Blackburn, Leader of the Council
Date of Meeting:	11 May 2020

ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING AND ITS BUSINESS

1.0 Purpose of the report:

- 1.1 The Council will be asked to endorse the cancellation of the Annual Council meeting (as permitted under the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020). Subject to the decisions below, to allow all other appointments to remain in place until the date of the Annual Council meeting 2020/2021, given the current situation with COVID-19 pandemic.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

- 2.1 To confirm that the Annual Council for 2020 be cancelled and not held in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.
- 2.2 To note that consequently there will be no changes be made to the appointments of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.
- 2.3 To note that the committees of the Council appointed at the Annual Meeting in 2019 and their political balance will continue in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.
- 2.4 To agree to the current memberships of the committees of the Council and their Chairs and Vice Chairs, subject to any changes set out in Appendix 5(a) and that delegated authority is given to the committees themselves to determine changes to Chairs and Vice Chairs these should the need arise for change during the year.
- 2.5 To agree that any membership changes to committees or sub-committees during the course of the Municipal Year be reported to the Director of Governance and Partnerships by the relevant Group Leader for implementation.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 The Coronavirus pandemic has necessitated changes in legislation to allow a certain level of Council business to continue. However, at present it is not possible to have physically present meetings. The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 permit Councils to cancel their Annual Council meeting, allowing appointments previously made to continue until the date of the Annual Meeting 2021.

3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

3.3 Other alternative options to be considered:

To hold an Annual Council meeting, however with the current social distancing requirements a wholly physically present meeting is not permissible.

4.0 Council Priority:

4.1 The continuing of Council business in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 will help the Council achieve all its priorities.

5.0 Background Information

5.1 Normally, the Annual Council meeting appoints the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, the committees of the Council in terms of functions, membership and Chairs/Vice-Chairs. Given the current COVID-19 pandemic and the effect of the new regulations, this means the following:

5.1.1 **Proposed committees** – the Council's current committees, the Public-Protection Sub-Committee and Health and Wellbeing Board to continue with the current functions and responsibilities.

5.1.2 **Membership** - the current membership (which has already been based on political balance rules) to continue until the next Municipal Year, subject to any changes identified at Appendix 5(a). The usual delegation to the Director of Governance and Partnerships to implement any membership changes notified by the relevant Group Leader during the course of the Municipal Year is also proposed.

- 5.1.3 **Chairs of committees** – subject to any changes identified at Appendix 5 (a), the current Chairs and Vice-Chairs of committees, the Public Protection Sub-Committee and the Health and Wellbeing Board to continue although the committees be given delegated authority to determine these where changes are necessary during the course of the Municipal Year.

List of Appendices:

Appendix 5(a) - Current membership of the Council's committees, sub-committee and the Health and Wellbeing Board – with changes identified on the Appendix by a strikethrough with the replacement underlined. To be circulated separately.

6.0 Legal considerations:

- 6.1 Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the law has changed and the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 have been made. These bring in flexibilities to allow Annual Council business to continue without holding an Annual Council and for Council, committee, sub committee and Executive meetings to be held virtually.

7.0 Human Resources considerations:

- 7.1 There are no Human Resources considerations.

8.0 Equalities considerations:

- 8.1 There are no equalities considerations.

9.0 Financial considerations:

- 9.1 There are no financial implication to matters considered in tis report.

10.0 Risk management considerations:

- 10.1 An Annual Council meeting is usually a meeting where councillors and invited guests are physically present. That is not permissible in the current situation.

11.0 Ethical considerations:

- 11.1 There are no ethical considerations.

12.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

- 12.1 The Group Leaders have been asked if they wish to make any changes to the Chairs, Vice Chairs and membership of committees at this meeting and these are set out in Appendix 5(a) The Mayor, the Mayor Elect and the four Group Leaders have all been consulted about the cancellation of the Annual Meeting and all support the decision.

13.0 Background papers:

- 13.1 There are no additional background papers to this report.

Report to:	COUNCIL
Relevant Officer:	Mark Towers, Director of Governance and Partnerships
Relevant Cabinet Member:	Councillor Blackburn, Leader of the Council
Date of Meeting:	11 May 2020

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 2020/2021

1.0 Purpose of the report:

- 1.1 The Council will be asked to consider for approval a programme of meetings for 2020/2021 and to note provisional meeting dates from May to December 2021.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

- 2.1 To approve the calendar of meetings for 2020/2021 as attached at Appendix 6(a).
- 2.2 To agree that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the start times of meetings prior to 1 September 2020 which would previously have started at 6pm, be delegated to the Chair to determine. Following that date then these meetings commence at 6pm as usual (set out at the end of the calendar of meetings at Appendix 6(a)).
- 2.3 To agree that if a plan or strategy, which is normally approved by Council, is due to expire before the next Council meeting is held, then the Chief Executive be authorised to extend the end date following consultation with the four Group Leaders.
- 2.4 To approve the extension of the dispensation of the six-month consecutive period for Councillor Mrs Henderson with regard to her non-attendance at a Council related meeting, up to and including the Annual Council meeting in 2021. This dispensation also to apply to all other Councillors up to the Annual Meeting 2021, on the basis that there has since the pandemic started and will be in the immediate future fewer formal Council related meetings to attend as a result of the pandemic, or an effects of it and members may inadvertently breach the non-attendance rule.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

- 3.1 To have in place scheduled meeting dates to enable the Council's committees to transact their business during the municipal year. With regard to the non-attendance at meetings in a six-month period, a decision is required at this Council meeting, as retrospective approval cannot be given when the six-month period has expired.

3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

3.3 Other alternative options to be considered:

To not schedule meeting dates, although this will not allow Council and its committees to plan their business and meeting dates for the municipal year ahead. To not grant a dispensation from the 6 month rule for members. However, due to the restricted opportunities to attend meetings and other implications of the pandemic, there is a possibility that members could not fulfil this obligation and their non-attendance would create a causal vacancy, which would not be permitted to be filled until May 2021.

4.0 Council priority:

4.1 The programming of formal Council, committee and Executive meetings will help the Council achieve all its priorities.

5.0 Background information

5.1 Normally, the Annual Council meeting determines the programme of ordinary meetings of the Council. However, the Annual Council meeting is not taking place this year but new regulations allow for meetings of the Council, its committees, sub committees and the Executive to continue. This item sets down a proposed schedule, taking into account the immediate months ahead and the continuing influence of the pandemic.

5.2 A proposed programme of meetings is set out at Appendix 6(a) with the start times for all committees up to September 2020 be for the Chair to determine. Following that date they be as listed at the end of the Appendix.

5.3 Given the unusual circumstances with the current COVID-19 pandemic, Members are as asked to note the following:

- that meetings before the recess period have been limited to those where statutory requirements exist or where it may be necessary to hold a meeting for business continuity.
- it is proposed scrutiny work is undertaken by the Scrutiny Leadership Board before the recess period and reviewed at that point, commencing with an informal meeting to consider this proposal further (see paras 5.6 and 5.7 below).

- that due to the differing positions of the councils wholly owned companies as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, that an informal Shareholder's Advisory Board be held initially to consider how their future programme of work may look and when to hold subsequent meetings.
 - a meeting of the Council has been proposed for 20 July although the four Group Leaders and the Mayor to be consulted on whether to proceed nearer that date.
- 5.4 There may be plans or strategies which are usually approved by Council which have an expiration date in the coming months. However, due to the pandemic then the normal review and consultation on these documents may not have taken place. If one is due to be expire before the next Council meeting is held then it is proposed that the Chief Executive be authorised to extend the end date following consultation with the four Group Leaders. The document would only be updated in terms of any factual or time related changes.
- 5.5 It is for the Leader of the Council to schedule Executive meetings, but proposed dates have been listed in the programme for completeness.
- 5.6 Meeting dates for the joint Economic Prosperity Board, with Wyre and Fylde Borough Council, have also been added to the programme.
- 5.7 The Centre for Public Scrutiny has issued guidance on the role of scrutiny during the pandemic. It has reiterated the need for scrutiny to continue during this time albeit in a reduced and more direct way. Scrutiny remains a statutory function and an important element of the governance structure at the Council. The guidance suggests that the existing Committees and workplans be temporarily consolidated into one Committee which has a substantive focus on oversight of the system response to Covid-19, use of the social care powers set out in the Coronavirus Act, the work to protect vulnerable children and the work of Public Health. It is suggested that at Blackpool these issues be expanded to include Children's Services Improvement to ensure continued scrutiny of progress following the Ofsted Inspection even at this time. It would also be right for scrutiny to have a role in oversight of the recovery plan at the appropriate time.
- 5.8 It is proposed that the most suitable body at this time to undertake the duties described at 5.7 above, is the Scrutiny Leadership Board, which is formed of the Scrutiny Lead Member, Councillor Mrs Callow, the Chairs and Vice Chairs of all three Scrutiny Committees and the Chair of the Audit Committee. The Board also has the option to meet informally as well as formally. It is proposed that the Scrutiny Leadership Board will meet informally on 21 May 2020 to determine the items it would like to consider, the regularity and timings of meetings and how it will manage the scrutiny function going forward.

- 5.9 The law states that where a Council member fails throughout a period of six consecutive months from the date of their last attendance at a Council related meeting then subject to certain provisions, he/ she ceases to be a member, unless the failure was due to some reason approved before the expiry of that period. Due to the reduced number of meetings which have already been in place and the likely reduced number going forward then a dispensation is recommended to be considered at this Council meeting, as retrospective approval cannot be given when the six-month period has expired.

Does the information submitted include any exempt information?

No

List of Appendices:

Appendix 6(a) - Calendar of Meetings 2020/2021

6.0 Legal considerations:

- 6.1 The Council's Constitution provides for the Annual meeting to formulate a schedule of Council and Committee meetings for the forthcoming municipal year. However, as the Annual Meeting is due to be cancelled then it falls to this meeting to agree a schedule taking account of the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

7.0 Human Resources considerations:

- 7.1 There are no human resources considerations.

8.0 Equalities considerations:

- 8.1 There are no equalities considerations.

9.0 Financial considerations:

- 9.1 There are no additional financial considerations.

10.0 Risk management considerations:

- 10.1 Failure to put in place a schedule of meetings will put at risk the ability for the Council to transact its business efficiently.

11.0 Ethical considerations:

- 11.1 There are no ethical considerations.

12.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:

12.1 The four Group Leaders have been consulted on the proposed schedule of meetings.

13.0 Background papers:

13.1 There are no additional background papers to this report.

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Calendar of meetings – May 2020 to May 2021

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
May	4	5	6	7	8 Early May bank holiday
	11 Special Council Meeting	12	13	14	15
	18	19	20	21 Scrutiny Leadership Board (Informal)	22
	25 Spring bank holiday	26	27	28	29
June	1	2 Public Protection Sub	3 BWF Economic Prosperity Board	4 Shareholder Advisory Board (Informal)	5
	8	9	10	11	12
	15 Executive	16 Planning	17	18	19
	22	23	24	25 Audit	26
June/July	29	30 Public Protection Sub	1	2	3
July	6 Appeals	7 Planning	8	9	10
	13 Executive	14	15	16	17
	20 Council	21	22	23	24
	27	28 Public Protection Sub	29	30	31
Aug	3	4 Planning	5	6	7
	10	11	12	13	14
	17	18	19	20	21
	24	25	26	27	28
Aug/Sep	31 Summer bank holiday	1 Planning	2	3	4
Sep	7 Executive	8 Public Protection Sub	9 Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny	10 Children and Young People's Scrutiny	11
	14 Appeals	15	16 BWF Economic Prosperity Board	17 Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny	18
	21	22 Licensing	23 Health and Wellbeing Board	24 Audit	25
Sep/Oct	28	29 Planning	30 Council	1	2
Oct	5 Executive	6 Public Protection Sub	7	8	9
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday

Appendix 6(a)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Oct	12	13 Shareholder Advisory Board	14	15 Scrutiny Leadership Board	16
	19	20 Planning	21	22	23
	26	27	28	29	30
Nov	2 Executive	3 Public Protection Sub	4	5	6
	9	10	11	12	13
	16	17 Planning	18 Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny	19 Children and Young People's Scrutiny	20
	23 Appeals	24	25 Council	26 Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny	27
Nov/Dec	30 Audit	1 Licensing	2 Health and Wellbeing Board	3 Standards	4
Dec	7 Executive	8 Public Protection Sub	9	10 Scrutiny Leadership Board (Informal)	11
	14	15 Planning	16 BWF Economic Prosperity Board	17	18
	21	22	23	24	25 Christmas Day
Dec/Jan	28 Bank holiday	29	30	31	1 New Year's Day
Jan	4	5	6	7	8
	11	12	13	14	15
	18 Appeals Executive	19 Shareholder's Advisory Board Public Protection Sub	20 Planning	21	22
	25	26	27 Council	28 Children and Young People's Scrutiny	29
Feb	1	2	3 Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny	4	5
	8 Executive (Budget)	9 Shareholder's Advisory Board Planning	10 Health and Wellbeing Board	11 Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny	12
	15	16	17	18	19
	22	23 Licensing Public Protection Sub	24	25 Executive (Budget)	26
March	1 Appeals	2	3	4 Audit	5
	8 Budget Council	9	10	11 Scrutiny Leadership Board	12
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday

Appendix 6(a)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
March	15	16 Shareholder's Advisory Board Planning	17	18	19
	22 Executive	23 Public Protection Sub	24 BWF Economic Prosperity Board	25	26
March/ April	29	30	31	1	2 Good Friday
April	5 Easter Monday	6	7	8	9
	12 Appeals Executive	13 Planning	14 Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny	15 Audit	16
	19	20	21	22 Children and Young People's Scrutiny	23
	26	27 Public Protection Sub	28	29 Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny	30
May	3 Early May Bank Holiday	4	5	6 POLLING DAY – PCC ELECTION	7
	10 Executive	11 Planning	12	13	14
	17 Annual Council	18	19 Licensing	20 Scrutiny Leadership Board (Informal)	21
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday

Timing of meetings

The following are day meetings due to the nature and length of their business:

- Appeals: start time 10.00am
- Annual Council: start time 2.00pm
- Health and Wellbeing Board: start time 3.00pm
- Shareholder's Advisory Board: start time 2.00pm

These meetings listed below are normally the early evening meetings due to the nature of their business and/ or public involvement. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is recommended that the start times of these meetings prior to the 1st September 2020 be determined by the Chair. However after that date they all start at 6.00pm:

- | | | | |
|------------------|---|-----------------------------|-------------|
| • Council | • Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny | • Audit | • Planning |
| • Budget Council | • Children and Young People's Scrutiny | • Licensing | • Standards |
| • Executive | • Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny | • Scrutiny Leadership Board | |

The Chief Officers Employment Committee would meet as and when required.

It is recommended that the Public Protection Sub-Committee determines the appropriate start time based upon membership.

Provisional calendar of meetings – May 2021 to December 2021

This may be subject to change, as the calendar will be considered at the Annual Council meeting in 2021

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
May	24	25 Public Protection Sub	26	27	28
May/June	31 Spring Bank Holiday	1	2	3	4
June	7 Appeals	8 Planning	9	10	11
	14 Executive	15	16 Health and Wellbeing Board Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny	17 Audit	18
	21 Standards	22 Public Protection Sub	23	24 Children and Young People's Scrutiny	25
June/ Jul	28	29	30 Council	1 Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny	2
Jul	5	6 Shareholder's Advisory Board (All) Planning	7	8	9
	12 Appeals Executive	13	14	15	16
	19	20 Public Protection Sub	21	22	23
	26	27	28	29 Audit	30
Aug	2	3 Planning	4	5	6
	9	10	11	12	13
	16	17	18	19	20
	23	24	25	26	27
Aug/Sept	30 Summer Bank Holiday	31	1	2	3
Sept	6	7 Planning	8 Public Protection Sub	9 Audit	10
	13 Executive	14 Shareholder's Advisory Board (BCH/BHC)	15	16 Scrutiny Leadership Board	17
	20 Appeals	21 Licensing	22	23	24
Sept/ Oct	27	28	29 Council	30	1
Oct	4	5 Shareholder's Advisory Board (BTS/BAOL/BWS) Public Protection Sub	6 Health and Wellbeing Board Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny	7 Children and Young People's Scrutiny	8
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Oct	11 Executive	12 Planning	13	14 Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny	15
	18	19	20	21 Audit	22
	25	26	27	28	29
Nov	1 Appeals	2 Public Protection Sub	3	4 Scrutiny Leadership Board (Informal)	5
	8 Executive	9 Shareholder's Advisory Board (BECL/ BOCL)	10	11	12
	15 Standards	16 Planning	17	18	19
	22	23	24 Council	25	26
Nov/ Dec	29	30 Licensing	1 Health and Wellbeing Board	2 Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny	3
Dec	6 Executive	7 Public Protection Sub	8 Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny	9 Children and Young People's Scrutiny	10
	13 Appeals	14 Planning	15	16 Audit	17
	20	21	22	23	24
	27 Bank Holiday	28 Bank Holiday	29	30	31
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday

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Report to:	COUNCIL
Relevant Officer:	Mark Towers, Director of Governance and Partnerships
Relevant Cabinet Member:	Councillor Blackburn, Leader of the Council
Date of Meeting:	11 May 2020

COVID – 19 – UPDATE REPORT AND DECISIONS

1.0 Purpose of the report:

- 1.1 To receive a report of the current situation for Blackpool regarding COVID-19 and the decisions taken by the Chief Executive since the Executive delegation to him on 23 March 2020.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

- 2.1 That following the introduction of the report by the Leader of the Council, to agree that the Chief Executive reports on how he has exercised his delegations at Appendix 7(a) with no time limit on his presentation. Members then to ask questions of the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council.
- 2.2 To endorse the council related decisions listed at Appendix 7(b) undertaken by the Chief Executive in respect of the coronavirus pandemic, in terms of additional expenditure and budgetary pressure caused by loss of income.
- 2.3 To approve, in retrospect, the taking of all actions outlined in Appendix 7(b) even if these actions should have been included in the Forward Plan or have resulted in unapproved departures from the budget framework, policy framework, or Contract Procedure Rules as the decisions were required urgently due to the major incident.
- 2.4 To agree to delegate to the Chief Executive delegated powers to act outside of the Forward Plan, the budget and policy frameworks and the Contracts Procedure Rules, should the need arise where such decisions are required urgently in relation to issues appertaining to COVID-19, following consultation with each of the Group Leaders and the relevant Cabinet Member. This to be reviewed at the next Council meeting.
- 2.5 To agree that weekly briefings continue between the Chief Executive, his extended Management Team, the four Group Leaders and the two Members of Parliament, until that group determines either the frequency of meetings change and/ or they are no longer required.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 To enable strategic and other decisions to be taken on behalf of the Council as a matter of urgency should the need arise in response the COVID-19 pandemic. This delegation to be reviewed at the next scheduled Council meeting.

3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? Yes – but the object of the report is to approve this departure.

3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council’s approved budget? No – but the object of the report is to agree the decisions outwith the budget framework.

3.3 Other alternative options to be considered:

The Scheme of Delegation could remain unchanged although Council would need to meet to exercise those functions for which it was responsible. The need to respond in an urgent manner would more than likely hinder the position of the council in dealing with the implications of the COVID–19 pandemic, unless a delegation is given.

4.0 Council priority:

4.1 The relevant Council priorities are:

- “The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool”
- “Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience”.

5.0 Background Information

5.1 The Chief Executive declared a major incident for Blackpool Council under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 on 23 March 2020 on the grounds that the definition of a major incident as laid out in the ‘Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles’ (JESIP) had been met along with the definition of an ‘Emergency’ as laid out under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. This was in relation to the developing situation regarding the coronavirus pandemic.

5.2 Later that day the Executive met and agreed as an urgent item the delegation of powers to the Chief Executive due to the developing coronavirus pandemic. This enabled the Chief Executive to make any decision on behalf of Executive and if necessary by implication the Council (subject to ratification). The decision would, in most circumstances, include consultation with the Leader of the Council. Where appropriate, the three opposition Group Leaders would also be notified in advance.

5.3 Often it has been clear that in certain circumstances that the rapid changes in the pandemic meant that decisions could be key decisions and such a process might not have been followed. Equally in decisions like closing fee generating services for an open-ended period is a situation where the decision is not a ‘key decision’ one at that

point, but can quickly become one. The Council's priority is in ensuring safety for residents, its staff and service users. In light of these exceptional and unforeseen circumstances the Council is asked to confirm approval in all circumstances the actions outlined.

- 5.4 The full decision notice of the Executive is accessible at this http://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/documents/s53291/EX22%20Emergency%20delegation_Executive.pdf. In light of the timing of this report, this delegation is currently being reviewed by the Leader. To complement this decision making process, the Chief Executive arranged for a daily briefing at 4pm with his extended Corporate Leadership team to which the Leader of the Council and one of the Deputy Leaders also attended, in a virtual setting.
- 5.5 The Chief Executive and Leader of the Council, together with the Chief Executive's extended Corporate Leadership team have been holding a weekly briefing with the three Opposition Group Leaders (Councillor Mrs Callow having a dual role in this as Lead Scrutiny Member). The briefing to be on the current situation affecting the Council and any decisions taken or likely to be taken, seeking their views as appropriate. The invitation was also extended to the two local Members of Parliament, Mr Maynard and Mr Benton.
- 5.6 Minutes of all these meetings have been taken and in accordance with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, a separate decision making log has also been kept.
- 5.7 As indicated some of the decisions the Chief Executive has made have been outside the budget and policy framework and although this was anticipated when the Executive decision was made, it is for this meeting to formally ratify these.
- 5.8 Appendix 7(a) is a report from the Chief Executive on how he has exercised these decisions and the Leader will invite the Chief Executive to expand on the Council's approach to dealing with the coronavirus pandemic and outline the decisions taken.

Does the information submitted include any exempt information?

No

List of Appendices:

Appendix 7(a) – Report from the Chief Executive about the Council's approach to dealing with the coronavirus pandemic.

Appendix (7b) – Report setting out the decisions taken by the Chief Executive, both from an officer Executive decision perspective and where necessary ones relating to those outside the budget and policy framework which require Council ratification.

6.0 Legal considerations:

- 6.1 The Government was at the start of the pandemic considering a Bill (now the Coronavirus Act 2020) to give emergency measures to give ministers powers to take the right action at the right time to respond effectively to the progress of the coronavirus outbreak.
- 6.2 The measures in the Coronavirus Act are temporary, proportionate to the threat, will only be used when strictly necessary and will be in place for as long as required to respond to the situation. However, this has put further pressure on the Council to respond to this emergency and the delegation for the Chief Executive to act outside the forward plan, the budget and policy frameworks and contracts procedure rules, following consultation with the Group Leaders, will assist with that and allow an immediate response.

7.0 Human Resources considerations:

- 7.1 The report identifies the role the Council's workforce has undertaken which has seen many staff be deployed into other roles and undertake duties which are necessary for dealing with the pandemic.

8.0 Equalities considerations:

- 8.1 There are no equalities considerations.

9.0 Financial considerations:

- 9.1 There are financial considerations and those the Council is aware of at the time of this report being published are listed in Appendix 7(b). Any decision in this category has been consulted on with either the Statutory Finance Officer or in his absence his Deputy.

10.0 Risk management considerations:

- 10.1 The proposals would ensure business continuity on strategic and other matters if it becomes necessary to postpone or cancel Council meetings.

11.0 Ethical considerations:

11.1 There are no ethical considerations.

12.0 Internal/ External consultation undertaken:

12.1 The four Group Leaders have been informally consulted on these proposals.

13.0 Background papers:

13.1 There are no additional background papers to this report.

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COVID-19 – CHIEF EXECUTIVE UPDATE REPORT

Introduction

It is no understatement to say that we are in the midst of the worst public health crisis this country has faced in generations.

Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic is perhaps the UK's single greatest domestic emergency since the Second World War. It is a time of great worry for us all.

Heartbreakingly, it is also a time of tragedy for too many families, locally and nationally. Yet through this darkness the light of countless selfless acts of kindness comes shining through, not least here in Blackpool, showcasing the very best of what we are as a society and giving us hope for the future.

This report is intended to provide an overview of the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic, its immediate impact on Council services and, most importantly, our subsequent response to help and protect people and businesses across Blackpool.

From the outset, it was vital that as a local authority we were able to step up to the mark to provide our community with leadership, guidance and unwavering support. I believe we have done just that.

As the health crisis gathered momentum, resulting in a UK-wide lockdown, our ability to deliver Council services in the usual manner altered virtually overnight as some non-essential services temporarily closed, many staff moved to home-working and essential care services found themselves facing a rapidly-escalating demand.

Our ability to adapt seamlessly to this fast-moving scenario became of paramount importance and we made it very clear that we would do whatever was required to support our residents and businesses even if we did not necessarily know how we would fund it at the time.

Since then, the imagination, dedication and devotion to duty that has been demonstrated by so many has been truly extraordinary, not least by our own staff who have willingly switching from non-essential work to support newly-established services aimed at helping the most vulnerable people in our town.

Tens of thousands of people have already benefited from this support and some of the stories that are emerging from our Corona Kindness community hubs are truly humbling.

This is public service at its finest.

Some of the crisis measures that are in place are likely to last for the foreseeable future and as a "new normal" emerges, we will find new ways of delivering services that will continue to test our strength and resilience. But I am confident we will get there.

At the same time, we have a duty to plan for the future and map out a road to recovery for our local economy. This work has already begun.

I am pleased that throughout this unprecedented period my Leadership Team and myself have had the full support of the Leader of the Council who is in regular contact. Both he and the Deputy Leader (Children) also join our daily Corporate Leadership Team teleconferences.

We have also had the full support of the other three Group Leaders and the two Members of Parliament with whom we have had weekly briefings.

All of this support has made difficult decisions easier to implement.

I trust that the content of this report confirms that the Council, its many partners and the people of Blackpool have what it takes to succeed in the face of this devastating virus, and that we will continue – together - to rise to the many challenges that lie ahead.

1. COVID-19 Public Health Overview

The first human cases of Coronavirus (COVID-19) were reported at the end of December last year in Wuhan, China.

Over the ensuing weeks, the virus spread across the world causing a global pandemic. Cases in the UK started to increase rapidly during the month of March and in the early phases the Government adopted the approach of containment with self-isolation of individuals who had travelled to the affected areas and contact tracing of those that had been in contact with cases.

This, along with the usual infection control advice of washing your hands regularly, initially delayed the spread in the UK, though it soon became clear that a further spread was increasingly likely.

The Government moved from a containment phase to a delay phase, introducing significant measures to socially distance the population, culminating in a lockdown on 23 March.

This lockdown has been necessary to reduce the number of cases and flatten the curve as well as to reduce the mortality in the most vulnerable ie, those over the age of 70, or with underlying medical conditions. At this point, the Council's Public Protection and Enforcement Division became responsible for enforcing the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Business Closure) (England) Regulations 2020.

A multi-tasking team from across Public Protection operated a programme of ensuring businesses were adhering to the new regulations, which required some interventions during the early stages.

In terms of public restrictions the Public Protection, Community Safety and Enforcement Teams have worked closely with the Police in dealing with anti-social behaviour, neighbour-related complaints heightened by and drug/drink-related incidents.

At the time of writing the lockdown appears to be working, with the measures suppressing the number of cases and deaths, and it appears that we are approaching a peak. This is reflected by the number of positive cases being reported by our local hospital trust.

Due to the combined efforts of the local authority and its health partners the healthcare system has been able to respond appropriately to the extra pressure and demand created by COVID-19. That said, we need to stringently continue with the social distancing measures until such time as Government makes a decision on lifting some of the restrictions. Otherwise, all the gains we have made thus far might be lost.

This particular virus is going to be with us for the foreseeable future and there are only two routes out of the current situation: Having an effective vaccine and/or antiviral drugs. Drug and vaccine trials are underway, but the full development of these are many months away. Until these are available some restrictions are likely to be in place for the medium to long term e.g., socially distancing the elderly and the medically vulnerable.

The Government might choose to lift some of the other restrictions, but will only do so when it is satisfied that the cases and transmission has declined substantially from where it is now.

2. Lancashire Local Resilience Forum (LRF): Emergency Response Overview

Blackpool Council is a core partner in the Lancashire Local Resilience Forum (LRF). The LRF is responsible for the coordination of a range of critical activities in emergency situations between the county's public services.

In this instance, the LRF is coordinating activity on crucial issues such as hospital capacity, the procurement of adequate supplies of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and emergency stocks of food to support the vulnerable.

The LRF has also been undertaking peer reviews of each organisation's response arrangements such as business continuity arrangements and establishment of community hubs. It is both pleasing and reassuring that in each assessment to date Blackpool Council is one of only a handful of local authorities considered to have a strong approach in this early stage of the pandemic.

Blackpool Council officers are playing a key role in the work of the LRF, in particular myself as Council Chief Executive; Karen Smith, our Director of Adult Services; and Arif Rajpura, our Director of Public Health.

The LRF is led by a Strategic Coordinating Group that is responsible for bringing together the work of a series of themes, each led by a local leader in public service.

I am chair the group that is leading the work of the "Humanitarian Aspects" work stream, which is responsible for overseeing the set-up of local community hubs and support for vulnerable people across the county.

This is a challenging area of work, involving 15 local authorities and numerous other public and voluntary partners. As mentioned above, Blackpool's own arrangements in this regard are strong, and more detail on this is explained later in the report in terms of our approach to Community Hubs and our unique Corona Kindness campaign.

Adequate supply of PPE to care settings continues to be a very real concern and challenge for the LRF. The national difficulty in securing and supplying PPE to local areas has dominated much media attention over recent weeks.

We are doing everything we can through the LRF, and our own local efforts, to ensure that providers in Blackpool have what they require. Our local efforts in this respect are covered later in this report.

In response to the pandemic, the LRF also set up a group tasked with planning for the very sad, but inevitable, rise in burials and cremations to take place across Lancashire.

Joceline Greenaway, Head of Registration and Bereavement Services at Blackpool Council, has led this group and has allowed for a uniform approach in terms of mortality planning, ensuring bereaved families experience a consistent service across the county at this very difficult time.

In line with Public Health England guidance, restrictions have been put on attendees at funeral services. This has been done as sympathetically as possible working with funeral directors, allowing video footage to be taken for the benefit of those not able to attend. Staff have been deployed from the Council's Community and Environmental Services Directorate to assist our local burial and cremation services, working into the evenings and weekends. Training has been provided for these working in skilled areas such as the crematorium.

We are very grateful to those Council staff members who have come forward from different service areas to undertake such difficult, but essential duties at this terrible time. Their selfless dedication to public service is exceptional.

3. Service Changes and Communications

Service Changes

Due to the rapidly changing nature of the Coronavirus pandemic, a significant number of Council services have been affected or temporarily suspended. Some of these changes are a direct result of Government guidance around social distancing to limit the spread of the virus.

The main changes, which are regularly updated on the www.blackpool.gov.uk website, are:

- Closure of main reception areas at all of our offices, the Town Hall and the Tourist Information Centre. The Wedding Chapel is also closed with any forthcoming ceremonies postponed. Email and telephone contacts are being maintained, and alternative arrangements for registration of births, marriages and deaths in place.

- All family hubs are closed until further notice with the exception of Grange Park and Talbot and Brunswick. Highfield Adult Day Centre is also closed and all adult, community and family learning courses are suspended until further notice.
- Household bin collections have been amended with grey and blue lid bins collected at the same time every fortnight on the normal grey lid bin collection day. Green bin collections, Bulky Matters and the Rover mobile recycling service are all suspended until further notice. The Bristol Avenue Household Waste Recycling Centre is also closed though at the time of writing the Government is reviewing such closures.
- All Blackpool libraries are closed although a vastly-extended range of online reading material and activities for adults and children has been developed including free access to digital newspapers and magazines. The Grundy Art Gallery is also closed.
- Council leisure centres at Blackpool Sports Centre, Palatine Leisure Centre and Moor Park Health Centre all closed along with swimming pools. Memberships have been automatically suspended with no further payments and they can get free access to professional at-home exercise classes. Leisure services staff have been redeployed to critical services including the Corona Kindness hubs.
- Council-owned assets including the Winter Gardens, Sandcastle Waterpark and Houndshell Shopping Centre are closed until further notice. Blackpool Transport is offering a reduced bus timetable with the tramway currently suspended. Blackpool Airport remains operational.
- Disruption of the VisitBlackpool major events programme including cancellation of the annual Pride Festival and Armed Forces Week. Other events including Air Show, Switch-On and World Fireworks are under review pending further Government guidance.
- All of our outdoor parks except Anchorsholme Park remain open, although the gates to the main car park at Stanley Park are closed at the request of police. The Council-owned Stanley Park Golf Club is also closed, although the course is being maintained by the operators.
- Foxhall, Seaside's Way and Talbot Multi-Storey car parks are temporarily closed.

Communications

Since the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic, our communication has been delivered across a wide range of channels and has adopted three central themes:

Reinforcement. Dissemination of Government, Public Health England and Lancashire Resilience Forum advice and guidance such as social distancing and the “Keep Safe, Stay Home” messages, and support for national and regional campaigns such as home learning; fly-tipping; mental health and wellbeing; the weekly “clap for carers” initiative and adult social care recruitment. There has been a particular focus on awareness of domestic abuse

support services and what the public should do if they suspect a child could be at risk of harm.

Awareness. Ensuring the public are aware of changes to Blackpool Council services including closures of schools, car parks, libraries and leisure centres; disruption to transport; and enforced changes to public services such as bin collection.

Reassurance. Creating town-wide awareness of the support that we have put in place including the Corona Kindness community hubs, the Council's dedicated business support helpdesk and the partnership work put in place to support the homeless. These reassurance messages are increasingly being reinforced by positive publicity about the heroic efforts that are taking place across Blackpool to help and protect our most vulnerable residents.

To ensure maximum impact and awareness of our support services, we are utilising multiple communication channels including development of a dedicated area of the website www.blackpool.gov.uk/coronavirus with constant updates.

This is complemented by extensive daily use of our social media channels; public service broadcasts three times a day on Radio Wave; leaflet drops; use of digital screens; outdoor advertising including posters on tram and bus shelters; use of e-editions of Your Blackpool; news releases to local media; and laminated tags on 50,000 household bins to promote the Corona Kindness helpline.

Our internal communication is also of vital importance at this time to ensure our own staff are well-informed, motivated and not feeling isolated by the move to home working. These communications have included regular information bulletins and personal messages from myself which go on the internal Hub and to more than 2,000 individual staff email addresses.

Over the past few weeks, we have seen a huge increase in volumes of people accessing our blackpool.gov website and social media channels – more than double the usual usage. Since the launch of the dedicated Coronavirus section of the website less than a month ago, it has generated more than 300,000 views and our combined social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Linked In) have had a combined reach of almost 400,000. These increases reflect the fact that the Council is clearly seen as the main source of credible public service information during this time of crisis and, more importantly, for vital help and advice.

There has been extensive media coverage (focused mainly on our Corona Kindness support services) in local newspapers, radio and on BBC and ITV regional news channels.

Tourism Marketing

From the early stages of the pandemic, our communication to visitors switched to a "Do Not Visit Blackpool" message to ensure that people respected the Government guidelines on social distancing and non-essential travel.

Our tourism marketing team has continued to utilise digital channels to engage with visitors, creating virtual “package tours” of our key venues and attractions, and continuing to promote the benefits of returning to Blackpool when it is safe to do so.

At the same time, work is continuing on destination marketing activity with key resort partners so this can be quickly rolled out at the appropriate time.

4. Corona Kindness/Community Hubs

The Coronavirus pandemic and emergency restrictions placed on the population necessitated the urgent need for the Council to take a lead role in shaping and delivering vital support services to help residents and protect the most vulnerable people in our community.

The immediate response was the launch of our unique Corona Kindness campaign on 23 March, closely followed by the establishment of 12 community hubs across Blackpool.

The principle of bringing together those who need help with those who can offer help has been the key to the success of this initiative. This was promoted through a dedicated helpline 0808 1963080 and email addresses: helpneeded@blackpool.gov.uk or helpoffered@blackpool.gov.uk.

Co-ordinated by Adult Social Care, the Corporate Chief Executive Team and Public Health, Corona Kindness is being delivered in partnership with a number of community-based organisations, private companies and voluntary services.

An army of staff and volunteers who already work in these groups have been knocking on doors, telephoning residents, co-ordinating support and delivering food parcels, shopping and ready meals to people across Blackpool.

The heavy promotion of a dedicated Freephone helpline and email addresses through numerous channels has enabled us to make as many people as possible aware of the Corona Kindness initiative.

In the first three weeks of operation, the Corona Kindness service received over 3,500 calls and emails requesting help. Calls to the helpline are manned by the Customer First team, many of whom have been able to work remotely taking calls from home.

There are now up to 19 lines available a day to support this work and up to 250 calls a day are being taken by the call handlers. Most enquiries are dealt with the same or next day.

The handlers seek to offer advice, guidance and signposting and, if the household is in need of practical support or more intense advice and guidance, will send details to the help needed inbox so that a coordinator covering their ward area can make contact. At weekends, the calls are routed to Vitaline between 9 and 5pm.

In these first few weeks, a lot of contacts have been from people whose means have dramatically reduced through loss of income or who live in poverty and usually access support from a food bank distribution partner, who are now not available because of the lockdown measures.

The people have been supported through Discretionary Support or a professional referral to access food parcels. The flexibility and support of the Discretionary Support and the Customer First Teams have been integral to the success of the rapid scaling up of this work.

The Corona Kindness team has also played a lead role in proactively contacting those on the Government's "shielded" list.

The latest figures include 4,559 people on Blackpool's shielded list. We have now succeeded in contacting the vast majority of people. Almost 3,000 people have been contacted directly by adult social care, with community hubs in conjunction with Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service leading on door knocking where we have been unable to track people down.

Approximately half of those contacted have said they do not need anything and confirmed they will ring us if things change. Over 800 have requested ongoing contact and have an allocated "shielded worker".

The speed at which contact has been made and support services have been put in place for vulnerable groups has been exemplary.

So too has the development and refinement of the services on offer which initially ranged from provision of food and pharmaceuticals to dog walking and talking to those who feel socially isolated, to now including advice on fuel supplies and household finances, and provision of lists of local suppliers who can deliver food to the doorstep.

A food hub was set up by the Council's Leisure and Catering Services team at Blackpool Sports Centre in the first week to ensure that schools were supported in provision of free school meals and also to create family and single household food parcels.

The hub is working in partnership with the Blackpool Foodbank, which is continuing to provide a service in Blackpool, and also directly coordinating and providing support for homeless people who have been placed in accommodation.

It is important to note that this local network and response sits separately from the national food distribution that has been arranged for people requesting help having received a letter from the Health Minister asking them to shield themselves i.e., take extra measures over and above those taken by the general public, and those in vulnerable groups, such as the over 70s.

For all other groups affected and in need of food, the food parcel packing and distribution is managed by our own food hub, delivering directly to schools and to each of the 12 community hubs in Blackpool. These hubs then deliver the food parcels to the people living in their community and check whether there are any other support needs.

To date, the food hub has delivered more than 200,000 meals to the people of Blackpool, an extraordinary achievement.

Looking forward, we want to ensure there is a clear strategy for delivering the right level of support for our most impacted population for as long as it is needed, including responding to any changes to the national and local restrictions.

5. Adult Social Care, Provider Support and Key Worker Testing

Provider support: Dedicated hub and new funding

A critical part of the Council's response to this crisis has been enhanced levels of support to our providers of adult social care. Social care is at the forefront of this crisis along with the NHS.

The Council recognised this situation early. We built an entirely new Provider Support and Resilience Hub, led by the Head of Care and Support Services, to offer direct support to our providers through this very difficult and challenging period.

This hub brings together the existing Quality Monitoring Officers with provider management expertise, Care Quality Commission advice, Infection Control specialist, Continuing Health Care nurses and other community health professionals.

The hub provides hands-on, practical support to any social care provider (residential care and care at home) requiring assistance. This includes supply and correct use of PPE; infection prevention and control; help with staffing; and supporting people to move where their needs deteriorate suddenly.

Collaboration between the hub, Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the Acute Trust has resulted in prevention of extremely fragile services failing on a number of occasions. The hub conducts a daily ring-round of all providers to check current position and whether any help is needed. In addition, the hub organises a weekly dial-in led by Karen Smith, Director of Adult Services, for all providers.

In response to the unprecedented pressure facing the sector and the very real risk of failure, we took the decision to increase our financial support to providers. We have taken a baseline level of funding set at pre-COVID levels and implemented a temporary 10% uplift of fees across the board.

We must do everything we can to continue to avoid provider failure at this critical time. As such we continue to operate an "open book" accounting approach with providers struggling financially despite national and local financial help.

Care and Support Services (in-house care services)

The majority of care and support services are fully operational. Those that are not are providing outreach support where appropriate.

All services are supporting a mix of people with and without COVID+ diagnosis, and managing their business continuity issues relating to staffing, PPE and infection control. Vitaline has contacted all of its service users to check on their welfare and have good contingency arrangements in place.

We have repurposed the Assessment and Rehabilitation Centre (ARC) from intermediate care to recovery of people who are COVID+ coming out of hospital or in residential services who are unable to return. This move will assist in reducing the continued risk of recirculation of the virus in care settings.

Externally commissioned provider services

Day services have ceased temporarily and support is being provided on an outreach basis. The provider has also repurposed to provide a shopping and meals preparation and delivery service.

All other services are operational, supporting a mix of people with and without COVID+ diagnosis, and managing their business continuity issues relating to staffing, PPE, finance and infection control.

Care at home providers with spare capacity are supporting residential providers who are short of staff or where individual needs have increased, requiring 1:1 support.

Our adult social care workforce

The adult social care workforce is particularly sensitive to the pressures of COVID-19. As such, we took an early decision to move to remote working and the majority of staff are still in that position. Shielded staff continue to work at home with whatever tasks they can that do not involve leaving the house, e.g., phone calls.

We also led on telephone contact with all the people actively involved with adult social care to check on their welfare, that they had contingency support in place, and knew who to contact if those arrangements broke down.

All, but essential visits involving face-to-face contact have ceased, replaced where possible by phone calls/emails/video calls. All essential statutory work continues. Potential Care Act easements have been shared with all staff; at the moment we have not implemented any. Due to Government guidance on hospital discharges we have moved to working till 8pm, Monday to Friday, and 8am-8pm weekends and bank holidays, reliant on staff agreeing to work those hours, but dependent on those who are not self-isolating or shielded. We are extremely grateful to staff for their flexibility in enabling these changes.

We are acutely aware that many in our social care workforce are on the front line of this crisis. Their dedication and bravery in undertaking so many difficult tasks is commendable. We are totally committed to continuing to do everything we can to safeguard staff as they perform these essential duties.

Key Worker Testing

There have been a number of approaches employed locally with regard to key worker testing:

- Providers can get in touch via our support hub, between 8am-8pm via email (providersupportHUB@blackpool.gov.uk) or phone 01253 478444 for support.
- A short-term interim key worker testing process was relayed to providers over the last Bank Holiday weekend. This tapped into spare capacity in the local health system and a short-term opportunity was taken advantage of by providers.
- We notified providers on 15 April that their key workers could apply for swab testing via fwccg.fcstafftesting.covid@nhs.net and they could apply for their key workers to be tested via a drive-in facility. They simply had to fill in the form and be eligible as a most effective use of the testing resource (ie, would gain benefit from it).
- The Army has attended our Provider Support and Resilience Hub over a number of days and undertaken mobile testing for key workers.

6. Business Support

A critical part of our response to the pandemic has been the immediate establishment of an enhanced business support service to help protect our local economy.

With thousands of Blackpool's businesses and their employees facing huge upheaval after the Government lockdown announcement, it was vital that we were able to deliver a dedicated service that gave credible help and guidance to those who needed it.

As central Government began to roll out £330bn worth of rescue measures including temporary loans, rate relief, cash grants Job Retention and Self-Employment Schemes to support businesses and save employees from hardship, the Blackpool Unlimited team from within our Economic Development service established a COVID-19 helpdesk: www.blackpoolunlimited.com/c19business-support

They formed a close working relationship with colleagues in our finance and business rates departments to provide urgent help to those businesses that were eligible for financial aid to be able to access it.

That partnership has provided a remarkable service to date, certainly second to none in the county. Within the first few weeks, there was a huge surge in usage of the website helpdesk with 12,000 enquiries and almost 900 businesses receiving direct support to date.

The strong, cross-working relationship with finance and business rates was crucial as many of these queries related to the rate support grants being administered by the Local Authority.

As part of its emergency measures, the Government had announced £10,000 Small Business Grants to eligible small businesses and grants of up to £25,000 through the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund.

On 1 April, Blackpool Council received a total of £59m from Government to start the process of paying the business support grant payments to local businesses.

The challenge was to get the money out of the door as quickly as possible, recognising that many businesses were becoming increasingly desperate for support. Over the next two weeks, messages went out across multiple channels to advise eligible businesses to send us their bank details so payment could be made.

At the same time, the finance and business rates teams were working around the clock and through weekends to check eligibility, make sure there was no fraudulent claim and then process the payments directly into bank accounts.

As of 22 April, the Council had paid nearly £33m to 2,883 businesses. The first publicised league tables showed that we were above average nationally in respect of the speed of getting these payment out to our local businesses – 51.8% v 49.6% national average by amount and 61.2% v 51.0% national average by number.

A reconciliation of business support grants made by the Council compared to the £59m funding received will be made by Central Government. Any underfunding will be made good whilst overfunding will have to be returned.

A number of local businesses have raised objections to not being entitled to these grants; it is important to highlight that the eligibility criteria was determined by the Government, not the Council. We are, however, identifying cases to Government where certain businesses have missed out on support where, if flexibility allowed, they would appear to have a strong case.

It is also important to note that the Council's adult employment services (such as Positive Steps) continue to actively support unemployed residents remotely, at a time when job vacancies in the local labour market have plummeted. These employability measures will be crucial once the economy starts to recover and where many more unemployed will require assistance.

While much of the work has focused on the emerging crisis over the past few weeks, the preparation for economic recovery has already commenced and this detail will be shared with members over the coming weeks and months.

7. Schools and Children

Children's Social Care: Revised Delivery Model

Despite the disruption caused by the current situation, we are determined to do everything we can to protect children and continue our Children's Services improvement journey. Detailed service planning began in the week beginning 9 March in anticipation of lockdown measures and we launched a revised model of service delivery from 23 March.

Initially, Children's Social Care, Early Help and the Youth Justice Service were split into two separate business units: Team A and Team B, taking it in turns to work in the office and from home. This model remained in place until early April.

Since then we have refined our approach to concentrate as much attention as possible on the children we have the greatest concerns over – only these children will now be in receipt of face-to-face visits by social workers.

Other children open to the service now get “virtual visits”, using technology with which the family is familiar, or by phone. All social workers are now working remotely, with the exception of a reduced skeleton duty staff at the front door. It is likely that we will revert back to a Team A and B approach as the basis for workforce planning once the lockdown is eased.

Since the start of the lockdown period, social workers have visited nearly 1,300 children open to the service - two thirds of all those currently open to children’s social care. Since we have shifted to all social workers working at home, 250 virtual visits have been recorded and 630 children have been contacted in the last seven days.

We closely monitor daily activity across the service. We initially witnessed a significant decline in referrals from the general public and other agencies, but this has risen over the past two weeks, giving us confidence our partners are adjusting to the new context where problems may not be so easily visible.

As part of this, Children’s Services have set-up a partnership mailbox for agencies to provide information about contact that they have had with children. This ensures that lower-level concerns are shared and that information is provided about when agencies are having contact with a child, helping all agencies to maintain oversight of children at a time when there is reduced staffing and services available. The mailbox was initially made available to schools who provided information about 273 children in March and 583 so far during April.

Through the past two weeks, court hearings have been conducted virtually, as have initial child protection conferences and limited contact arrangements. We have continued completing looked-after children reviews.

Child protection conferences and reviews have been focused on only the most concerning families. We keep our approach to service delivery under daily review and it is noticeable that issues causing concern are rising in the local community, especially in families that were not open to children’s social care at the start of the lockdown.

Alongside all this disruption it is pleasing that we were still able to successfully launch the Blackpool and Lancashire Regional Adoption Agency on 8 April.

Schools

Blackpool’s schools have made a hugely positive contribution since lockdown with the vast majority remaining open, working hard to provide wraparound care for vulnerable children and children of key workers.

Attendance at schools has been low, but higher than national, with around 2% (compared to 1% nationally) of children attending a Blackpool school. We expect that this number will increase over the next few weeks (but not greatly), as the demand upon the NHS and critical

activity increases and the vulnerability of some of our pupils is highlighted and school once again becomes a place of safety.

Effective social distancing measures and rotas have allowed teachers to spend a significant amount of time at home with their families, whilst setting work remotely. We are particularly grateful to staff who have undertaken large numbers of doorstep visits to vulnerable families. We have had very little, if any, negative feedback on the effort of our schools, which is excellent in the circumstances.

Free school meal provision across the town has been largely consistent. Those schools served by Blackpool Catering have been in receipt of regular, non-perishable food parcels since the beginning of the crisis, so effective was the forward planning. Some schools have now moved on to the Government voucher scheme, but this has been stalled by the ineffectiveness of the computer systems and the distribution and printing of the vouchers.

We have sought to maintain the partnership approach to the Blackpool school improvement journey and are continuing with “remote” Blackpool School Improvement Board and Opportunity Area meetings.

Bespoke support is available to every school and we are currently working on identifying and planning for the issues that schools will face when they eventually return.

A key next step is to engage with the Government scheme to provide computer access to those vulnerable children who need it and we are compiling an initial list for submission when the portal is available.

8. Housing and Homeless

On Thursday, 26 March, central Government directed all local authorities to do whatever they reasonably could to get “everyone in...by the weekend”; in other words, to accommodate anyone rough sleeping, homeless, or at serious risk of becoming homeless. Government guidance also advised that night shelters should close. In Blackpool we had anticipated this move and, with the aid of our partners, had begun placing individuals into a network of Bed and Breakfasts from Monday, 23 March.

The Council is now working to the national model in respect of the placement of homeless people, which is made up of three categories of provision:

- COVID Care: Accommodation for people who have/may have symptoms
- COVID Protect: Accommodation for people with underlying health issues
- COVID non-symptomatic/low risk: Accommodation for people to comply with Government guidelines but are not yet symptomatic.

Accommodation is being used that allows people to self-isolate as necessary and follow Government guidelines. Our Homeless Partnership, Food Partnership and community hubs are supporting all individuals. This support includes three meals a day delivered directly to

accommodation, so individuals can remain safe indoors. We are hugely grateful to everyone who has made this extraordinary effort possible.

For all categories, wraparound support is in place ranging from housing, physical health, mental health, substance misuse services, the Food Partnership and many others, through the co-ordination of Public Health.

In addition, our Housing Options service continues to work with our partners to provide outreach services to identify any new rough sleepers, and provide advice to people who might be at risk of homelessness and supporting them to remain in their own homes as long as it is safe to do so.

Numbers in temporary accommodation (TA) now stand at around 150, with approximately 30 people having moved into a more permanent residence. Normal numbers in temporary accommodation are rarely above 40 in Blackpool, so this is a significant increase.

That said, Blackpool has long had high levels of homelessness, sofa surfing and transience, and the main pressures on accommodation are as a result of having to place anyone at risk of rough sleeping, as opposed to just those in priority need.

The vast majority placed in temporary accommodation are Blackpool people, known to services, and are respecting Government guidelines. However, we are aware that there is a small minority of problematic individuals within this cohort. The Council have provided security services where appropriate and have requested additional support from Police colleagues in managing what are sometimes very challenging situations.

In all of our efforts we have benefited from being able to draw upon the resource and expertise of our two housing companies: Blackpool Coastal Housing (BCH) and My Blackpool Home (MBH).

Both companies have assisted us in creating more temporary accommodation, alongside placing and supporting individuals.

Beyond this, both companies have moved to operating models that respect the guidance on social distancing, and are focusing on core services such as gas/electric compliance and emergency repairs.

Our companies are also focused on supporting their own vulnerable tenants. For example, BCH has telephoned 1,155 customers defined as vulnerable or over 70 to offer support, and over 200 who did not respond have been visited, with those in need being referred to our Corona Kindness community hubs.

9. Workforce and ICT Services

Workforce

As the pandemic gathered momentum, our focus immediately switched to ensuring that staff were following Government guidance on self-isolation either because of specific health

conditions or because they had symptoms of coronavirus, or were living with someone with symptoms.

Following the Government's lockdown announcement on 23 March, all staff capable of working from home were sent home. All employees in the vulnerable groups e.g. those aged 70 or over, pregnant or one of the specified health conditions were also sent home.

At the same time as helping to manage the implications of large numbers of staff home-working, the HR team was developing new methods of recording and analysing staff absence relating to Coronavirus as well as exploring which employees could be redeployed. As of 23 April, the number of employees absent with symptoms numbered 37, those living with someone with symptoms 105 and the number of employees not in work due to Government guidance regarding age, pregnancy or underlying health conditions, amounted to 303.

This total of 445 employees equated to more than 16% of the workforce. However, thanks to the benefits of the Council's home-working IT solutions, over half of these employees were able to work from home, bringing the overall absence total to 212 or 8%.

A suite of new absence codes has now been created so we can report daily on Coronavirus-related absence and immediately identify critical areas where absence is high and further support required.

Employees who were available to support other business areas were identified and redeployed taking into account skill sets, training and risk assessments. A formal redeployment policy is under consultation with Trade Unions at present.

In what is a fast-moving environment, regular Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) briefings are being prepared and shared with managers and staff in relation to changing Government advice and local decision-making. An employee support booklet has been developed with a particular focus on health and wellbeing.

Policies on annual leave and flexi-time have also been reviewed and amended in certain circumstances to provide flexibility to critical services and to support employees.

We are participating in co-ordinated national/regional recruitment campaigns to attract children's social workers back to the profession and to recruit staff for our adult social care workforce.

Based upon revised Government guidance, there is now an opportunity for the Council to access testing for key workers who are absent due to Coronavirus symptoms or self-isolating due to living with someone with symptoms. This process will commence shortly and could enable employees to return to work earlier than would otherwise be the case.

ICT/Digital Services

From 16 March onwards there was an unprecedented increase in use of the Council's remote working ICT infrastructure. Prior to that date, the highest number of concurrent users working remotely was approximately 200.

This peaked at 1,400 concurrent users of the IT systems by 23 March when all employees who could work from home were instructed to do so because of the Coronavirus lockdown.

It quickly became apparent that the existing remote access VPN (Virtual Private Network) service was unable to cope with this unprecedented user demand, thereby hindering the ability of Council staff to work from home.

The ICT service immediately started work with its network infrastructure partner, TNP, to bring forward a project to replace and upgrade the remote working VPN service.

Over the next few days, the ICT team worked day and night to develop, launch and roll-out a new VPN. Software updates were pushed out to approximately 2,500 Council laptops and by the end of the first week of April, most of the Council's workforce had successfully been migrated on to the new network and were able to work seamlessly from home.

A project that would normally have taken months to implement had been delivered within a matter of days.

In parallel with this, the ICT team, TNP and Customer First were working on another scheme to deploy the Council's landline phone system so it could be used and accessed by employees through an App that works on mobile phones.

This meant the employees of Customer First and other customer-facing services could answer the Council's public-facing telephone numbers from their own home.

Work was also done to rapidly set up new hotlines, email addresses and digital systems to support the emergency relief effort across different parts of the Council.

10. Key Finance Issues

In addition to the extensive work undertaken by the finance team in relation to payment of business rate support grants outlined earlier in this report, there are a number of issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Support for local authorities

On 20 March central Government announced £1.6bn of funding to help local authorities address the pressures they are facing in relation to:

- Meeting the increased demand for adult social care and enabling councils to provide additional support to social care providers
- Meet the cost of extra demand and higher business-as-usual costs of providing children's social care

- Supporting those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19
- Meeting income and expenditure pressures across other services.

Blackpool's share of this initial allocation is £6.1m.

An announcement of a further £1.6bn of non-ring-fenced funding for local authorities was subsequently made. On 28 April, we received a letter advising us that our share of this additional funding would be £3.8m.

As this is a significant reduction compared to our original allocation and appears to be unfairly disproportionate compared to amounts allocated to other similar-sized authorities, we are making strong representations to Government for this to be reconsidered.

Hardship Fund

A £500m hardship fund to support "economically vulnerable people and households" affected by COVID-19 has also been established, to be administered by local authorities. Blackpool's share of the fund is £2.8m.

The Government expects that most of this funding will be used to provide more Council Tax relief, either through existing Local Council Tax Support schemes or through complementary reliefs. The guidance around this is as follows:

- It should be used to reduce the liability of those receiving working age Council Tax support by £150 in 2020/21
- Where a local Council Taxpayer had an existing liability of £150 or less, this would reduce the Council Tax liability to nil.
- Where liability is already nil, there would not need to be any change.
- Any remaining grant can be used to assist those in need.

These awards will be made automatically when software becomes available and there is no need to apply for the grant.

Homelessness Funding

On 17 March the Government announced £3.2m of emergency funding to help rough sleepers to self-isolate. The Government indicated that this was initial emergency response funding. Each local authority will be notified as to the provisional maximum amount it is entitled to reclaim.

Based on the number of rough sleepers reported in the autumn 2019 snapshot, Blackpool's provisional maximum amount is £11,252. We have already spent this sum many times over in responding to Government's 26 March instruction to house all those who are a homeless or at risk.

Business Rates Relief

The Government has gradually increased the Retail and Rural Businesses discounts already available to move these to discounts of 100%.

The relief applies to occupied retail, leisure and hospitality properties in the year 2020/2021 with no rateable value or State Aid limit. This has been further expanded to include a nursery (childcare) discount for this financial year.

Blackpool will be fully reimbursed by central Government for our local share of the discretionary relief.

Treasury Management: Cashflow

Due to Coronavirus, it was announced that measures would be taken to ease the immediate cashflow pressures on local government regarding business rates payments due to central Government and Social Care Grant payments.

As a result, councils will be allowed to defer £2.6bn of business rates payments to central Government until later in the year.

In addition, £850m of social care funding is to be paid upfront rather than in the usual instalments.

It is important to note that whilst these changes will support authorities' cashflow, they do not represent additional funding for the sector.

Impact of COVID-19

Blackpool Council's first return to Government regarding COVID-19 financial management information was submitted on 15 April.

It highlighted initial estimates of Coronavirus-related cost pressures of £21.3m for 2020/2021. This was broken down between expenditure pressures of £12.9m and potential loss of income £8.4m.

The main component of the expenditure pressure was on Adult Social Care to provide additional support for care providers, whilst the potential loss of income related to commercial income/fees and charges.

Statutory deadlines

The publication date for final audited accounts will move from 31 July to 30 November 2020 for all local authority bodies.

In order to give local authorities more flexibility, the requirement for the public inspection period to include the first 10 working days of June has been removed.

Instead, local authorities must commence the public inspection period on or before the first working day of September 2020. This means that draft accounts must be approved by 31 August 2020 at the latest. Authorities must publish the dates of their public inspection period.

Given the removal of the common inspection period and extension of the overall deadlines for this year, it is recommended that all authorities provide public notice on their websites

when the public inspection period would usually commence, explaining why they are departing from normal practice for 2019/2020 accounts.

COVID-19 Decisions taken outwith the Policy and Budget Framework

The developing nature of the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that a number of decisions have had to be made urgently due to changes in government guidance, temporary legislation and in response to needs of the local community. These decisions had to be taken due to the unprecedented crisis unfolding.

The Council has submitted a return submission identified as £22.7m, which was broken down between £13.2m expenditure and £9.5m for loss of income to the Ministry for Housing, Local Government and Communities and awaits a response. The Council has received £6,084,606 as part of the emergency £1.6billion funding for public sector organisations. This has been allocated in the most part of Adults, Children's and Public Health- the Directorates that have faced the most immediate financial challenge.

The impact can be summarised in two ways- one is additional expenditure incurred due to Coronavirus for example the purchase of equipment, additional staffing or overtime and the other being lost income from fewer customers using a service, this also includes potentially reduced dividends due to lower income from the Council's wholly owned Companies.

Loss of Income

The overall loss of income for the whole Council is forecast at £2.7m for March and April 2020. It is anticipated that for the financial year 2020/21 this will result in a total loss of £8.4m. The losses from closures of services are focussed on those directorates that benefit from fee incomes so Community and Environment, Communications and Regeneration, Governance and Partnerships and some more specialist areas in Children's Services linked to Service Level Agreements with schools. The loss of income represents the full range including services where government guidance has required services to close, where good practice has, where demand has reduced or where services have not been able to be delivered due to staffing issues. The loss of income set out by directorate below when aggregated does not total the forecast overall loss of income, as only council related issues are listed.

Additional Expenditure

There is also forecast to be £2.8m of additional expenditure in March and April 2020 due to Coronavirus. It is anticipated that this will reach a total of £12.9m over the financial year 2020/2021. The additional expenditure set out by directorate below when aggregated does not total the forecast overall additional expenditure, as only council related expenditure is listed.

Corporate

The Council has made contributions to a number of county-wide schemes - £142,000 for the county-wide food reserve and £130,000 to provide temporary additional mortuary facilities. There has also been an impact on Treasury Management returns due to changes in interest costs with a budget pressure of £431,000 reported. There is an overall pressure of £100,000 in relation to staffing due to self-isolation with increased overtime costs.

Adult Services

The challenges in Adult Services are centred on the need to continue to support the most vulnerable while dealing with the increased demand for support and staffing issues around self-isolation.

It has also been necessary to ensure that care providers are able to continue to provide care to vulnerable residents during these difficult times - the providers have additional costs relating to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), additional sick pay and demand pressures given neighbours, family members or voluntary groups may find it harder to support vulnerable adults.

The costs to the Council in terms of the risk of care providers not being able to provide services would be significant. The Council has increased minimum payment levels to care providers and also implemented a 10% COVID premium to all rates to support provider sustainability at cost of £423,833. The Council has also increased minimum payment levels to care providers at a cost of £91,500 in March and April 2020, increased levels of activity from above the minimum which costs £525,000.

Costs are also being incurred in relation to hospital discharges, freeing up beds in acute trusts so they can cope with increased COVID admissions. The government has allocated £1.3bn for this to Clinical Commissioning Groups. These measures are forecast to cost £4.9m but no costs will sit with the Council as they will be covered by this separate funding. Cost to the Council for Adults Services are forecast at £1.1m for March and April and c. £5m for the financial year 2020/2021.

Chief Executive

The additional costs in the Chief Executive's directorate are centred on housing the homeless and allowing them to access emergency accommodation that permits social distancing, namely en-suite accommodation with individual cooking facilities. This has resulted in forecast additional costs of c. £37,000 for March and April 2020.

Children's Services

In line with Adult Services, challenges are centred on the need to continue to support the most vulnerable while dealing with the challenge of an increased demand and staffing issues around self-isolation. The directorate has also been organising a help line to help key workers identify early years provision and also organising additional child care for key workers who have previously relied upon vulnerable family members. The forecast cost in 2020/2021 for covering sickness, self-isolation and additional packages of care is circa £1.1m.

Communications and Regeneration

There is a limited additional expenditure at present in this directorate. This is predicted to increase as the freeze on construction working will start to have an impact on the delivery of key regeneration projects.

There are a number of small losses of income such as loss of room hire income in relation to events at Libraries, as Libraries have been closed since 20 March 2020 in line with government advice.

There is the potential within the directorate for increased loss of income as a number of future events have already been cancelled.

Known event cancellations and postponements include:

- Pride Blackpool 2020 (due to be held over the weekend of 5-7 June)
- The European Dance Championships (original dates 10-12 April, rescheduled to 15 – 17 October) at the Winter Gardens
- The Blackpool Junior Dance Festival (original dates 16 - 19 April. Ballroom, Latin and sequence events rescheduled to 31 August – 4 September. Formation events rescheduled to 19 - 20 September)
- Blackpool Dance Festival (original dates 16 - 29 May, rescheduled to 25 August - 6 September)

The annual USDAW conference in April has been cancelled along with the International Fitness Exhibition. The GMB union conference in June has also been cancelled. All were due to be held at the Winter Gardens.

A further £100,000 is forecast to be lost from advertising revenues in March and April 2020, together with loss of commission from sales of the report pass, and a significant reduction in planning income. The full year 2020/2021 impact of these income shortfalls is forecast to exceed £580,000.

Community and Environmental Services

There is very limited additional expenditure in this directorate which is restricted to items such as costs of additional cleaning.

The biggest loss of income to the directorate has been the closure of the Council's Leisure Centres which came into effect on 20 March 2020. The forecast loss of income to the Council for March and April 2020 was £188,000 for refunds of membership fees to direct debit customers and £177,000 relating to the reduction in income for casual hire of the facilities. All Council Leisure Services staff have been redeployed to critical services.

There are smaller losses of income in relation to Waste Services, particularly the cessation of Green Waste collections and the cessation of the Bulky Waste service during the pandemic. The closures were as a result of a range of pressures, notably staffing issues, and the need to avoid too much demand on the service. The lack of Bulky Waste income and the refunds of Green Waste collection fees lead to a forecast budget pressure of £36,000 for March and April 2020.

School closures have also led to forecast pressures in the Catering service of £71,000 in March and April 2020 due to the loss of income from school meals.

Further, in March and April 2020 there is a forecast loss of income of £45,000 in relation to the Road and Street Works Act (RASWA) as less works are undertaken whilst lockdown arrangements are in force.

Governance and Partnerships

There is a limited additional expenditure at present in this Directorate. The majority of the budget pressures here have come from reductions in income.

The area which has been most affected by a loss of income is Life Events with a projected £66,000 loss from the Registrars service for the first three month period of the pandemic. Since changes in government advice on the 23 March 2020 - all Citizenship ceremonies, all birth registrations and all weddings have been suspended.

Public Health

Public Health have led on a project to set up 12 community hubs at an estimated cost of £108,000.

Resources

There are additional identified costs of £100,000 in April and March for extra ICT equipment and software licensing.

There are also the costs in the set-up of a dedicated helpdesk to support local businesses during the coronavirus pandemic to maximise uptake of government assistance.

The helpdesk helps businesses to understand and access the £330 billion package of rescue measures announced by the chancellor – including temporary loans, rate relief, grants and other help to small businesses and self-employed. The helpdesk was set on Friday 20 March 2020.

Budgets outside cash limit

There are a number of significant areas where income has been reduced, notably car parking, where Foxhall and Seaside Way car parks have been closed due to reduced demand and the opening hours at Talbot Road Multi-Storey car park have been reduced- decision 113 on the COVID-19 decision log refers. The decision to close car parks was in response to falling demand but there remains a forecast shortfall in income of approximately £945,000 in March and April 2020.

Further reductions in income are expected in 2020/2021 in respect of lost rentals and dividends from Council wholly-owned subsidiary companies.