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Tuesday, 12 January 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

COMMUNITY HOUSING AND HEALTH (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Community Housing and Health (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee has been arranged to take place **WEDNESDAY, 20TH JANUARY, 2021 at 6.00 PM** to consider the following business.

In light of the current Covid-19 pandemic and government advice on social distancing, the meeting will be held online and streamed live on the Council's [YouTube channel](#).

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Christie Tims', is written over a light grey circular stamp.

Christie Tims
Head of Governance and Performance

To: Members of Community Housing and Health (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee

Councillors Eagland (Chairman), Evans (Vice-Chair), S Wilcox (Vice-Chair), Baker, Ball, Binney, Birch, Humphreys, Leytham, Parton-Hughes, Silvester-Hall, Tapper and M Wilcox



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AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Declarations of Interests
3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting 3 - 6
4. Work Programme 7 - 8
5. **Standing Items**
 - a) Lichfield District Health Provision
 - b) Staffordshire Health Select Committee

The Strategic - Delivery Manager, from Staffordshire County Council will be in attendance to give an update on health provision in Burntwood.
6. Housing Assistance Policy Review 9 - 28
7. Coronavirus (COVID-19): Recovery Plan Scrutiny 29 - 36



COMMUNITY HOUSING AND HEALTH (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE

15 SEPTEMBER 2020

PRESENT:

Councillors Eagland (Chairman), Evans (Vice-Chair), S Wilcox (Vice-Chair), Baker, Ball, Birch, Leytham, Parton-Hughes, Silvester-Hall, Tapper and M Wilcox.

(In accordance with Council Procedure Rule No.17 Councillors Cox, Eadie, Lax and Pullen attended the meeting).

30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Binney and Humphreys

31 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interests.

32 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were circulated and subject to typographical amendments, were agreed as a correct record. It was asked if there had been any updates regarding the George Bryan Centre and it was noted that nothing had been received. It was also asked if there had been any progress regarding the poor communication between primary and secondary care. It was reported that these were matters that would be dealt with at County level at the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be signed as a correct record.

33 WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme was discussed and the Head of Regulatory Services, Housing & Wellbeing requested that an item be added on the Housing Assistance Policy that was due to be updated later in the year. It was noted that it had been agreed to consider an item on Stroke Pathways as the County Council had agreed for this to be dealt with at a local level and it was agreed for this to be investigated further and ask for the information from the County Council.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be noted and updated where required.

34 STANDING ITEMS

The Committee discussed the Healthy Staffordshire work programme and gave the District Council's representative, Councillor Leytham, requests for items to be raised and reported back.

The George Bryan centre and the uncertainty around its reopening was discussed and it was felt that the centre would be more vital as the mental health burden was increasing due to Covid-19. It was also felt that children were suffering more due to the effects of lockdown and now trying to return to school.

It was asked if updates on the changes to Samuel Johnson and Sir Robert Peel Community Hospitals could be requested as they too were vital for residents.

There were concerns that, due to the pandemic, there was a large backlog of hospital appointments for other treatments for example, asthma clinics, and there was concern there were no actions to change this. It was reported that GP surgeries were working a triage telephone service and seeing who needed to be seen. It was noted that Practice Nurses were doing all they could to reduce the backlog.

RESOLVED: That the items discussed be raised by the District Council representative at the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee

35 DELIVERY OF DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS (DFGS)

The Committee received a report updating them on the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs), performance and expenditure of the budget in 2019/2020 plus an overview of delivery during quarter one of 2020/2021 and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. It also provided information on the work being done to drive performance and the improvements to date.

It was reported that Officers had been working with the countywide SILIS Partnership to ensure the contractor, Millbrook Healthcare Ltd delivered the service satisfactorily following a period of under-performance. It was noted that to help with performance management the Partnership commissioned the Director of Cherrywhite Consultancy Services as Project Manager to oversee the whole of the contract and support service improvement. It was also noted that Lichfield also retained Cherrywhite's services to continue to manage the cases and DFG delivery on its behalf, which means that cases could be closely monitored and any issues across the partnership can be escalated swiftly.

It was reported that Millbrook had brought in a number of improvement measures including a new IT case monitoring system which used by the majority of home improvement agencies as well as a staff restructure and revised complaints system.

There was a request to amend the first recommendation to reflect that the pandemic was still occurring and so suggested to be stated as 'ongoing challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic'. It was noted that it should reflect post-lockdown so was agreed to be amended to that. The Committee did feel that performance issues were being experienced before the pandemic and although a challenge, did not give just explanation for all the issues.

It was asked why performance figures showed LDC underperforming on larger grant applications and it was reported that it was dependant on who applied and for what. It was noted that the reporting of KPIs had not been completely accurate but it was hoped this would change with the new IT system. It was also reported that the grant process was more complex when applications are for larger home adaptations for children, such as extensions that often include additional works and are therefore more difficult to manage and contained elements outside of the contractor's control such as obtaining planning permission.

Members recognised the work Lichfield District Council had undertaken to try and improve performance and were also pleased that there was now a project manager overseeing the contract. When asked, it was confirmed that the cost of the project manager was being covered by the district council out of the grant funding from the Government to deliver DFGs. Some Members did not agree with this as it was not the fault of the District Council that performance was not as expected and felt it should be for Millbrook as well as Staffordshire County Council, who were party to the contract to bear the cost. It was confirmed that the Partnership had employed Cherrywhite to project manage the contract and the District Council had employed them further to manage the cases in Lichfield and the payment was not affecting the level of grants available. It was noted that there was no provision in the contract

to recover the costs. There was also the view that the project manager would be able to give quantifiable information and so would give value and was cost effective compared to continued low performance.

It was suggested that it would be useful for the Committee to better understand the whole process starting with the county council Front Door through to application and on to completion of work.

It was noted that, for adults, it was a stringent means test for DFGs so it was normal to get a high level of drop out of applications especially in affluent areas.

It was reported that both Millbrook have stated that they currently hope to be able to catch up with delivery to be able to commit the DFG budget this year.

There was a view expressed by a Committee Member that apologies should be received from the organisations that had shown poor performance and thorough questions asked before considering the contract again. There were also views that the Partnership should be investigating if there were any break clauses in the contract that could be enacted if clear performance outcomes were not met. It was noted that the Partnership had served Improvement Notices and that had instigated the measures put in place to date. It was felt that there should be an investigation as to why Millbrook did not action all audit recommendations before being served the Improvement Notice.

RESOLVED: (1) That views on the delivery of DFGs in 2019/20, the measures that the council and SILIS Partnership are taking to drive performance, and the improvements that have happened to date be noted; and

(2) That the challenges that Millbrook have encountered post lockdown, the high demand for the service and the volume of cases in the pipeline be noted.

(The Meeting closed at 7.15 pm)

CHAIRMAN

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COMMUNITY, HOUSING AND HEALTH (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2020-21 (*Version 3*)

Item	16 Jun	15 Sept	14 Jan	10 Mar	Details	Officer	Member Lead
Policy Development							
Terms of reference	✓				To remind the Committee of the terms of reference and suggest any amendments	CLL	N/A
General Health Service Review					To update Members by Briefing Paper as and when required.	GD	
Feedback to and from Staffordshire Health Select Committee (standing item)	✓	✓	✓	✓	The Staffordshire Health Select Committee's work programme will be attached to the agenda to aid the Committee raise issues with the LDC rep, Councillor Leytham.	GD	DL / JE
DFG performance		✓			Report on performance and actions	LR	AL
Community Safety Delivery Plan				✓	To include crime and disorder.	SB	AY
Housing Assistance Policy			✓	✓	Updates to Policy	LR	AL
Covid Recovery Plan Scrutiny			✓		To consider elements of the Recovery Plan relevant to the remit of the Committee	GD	AL/AY
Stroke Pathways						GD	AL
Discretionary Housing Payments						PL	AS

COMMUNITY, HOUSING AND HEALTH (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2020-21 (*Version 3*)

Item	16 Jun	15 Sept	14 Jan	10 Mar	Details	Officer	Member Lead
George Bryan Update					Noted this is the remit of SCC	GD	
Emergency Planning					As and when required	GD	

Housing Assistance Policy Review

Report of Councillor Angela Lax, Cabinet Member for Regulatory, Housing and Health



Date: 20th January 2021

Agenda Item:

Contact Officer: Gareth Davies/Lucy Robinson

Tel Number: 01543 308741/308710

Email: gareth.davies@lichfielddc.gov.uk
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Key Decision? **YES**

Local Ward Members All, as applies to the whole of Lichfield district.

**Community,
Housing and
Health
(Overview &
Scrutiny)
Committee**

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Housing Assistance Policy sets out the types of financial assistance the Council offers to help residents who are disabled or vulnerable to remain in their own homes. The policy has not been significantly reviewed since 2013; the current version came into effect in 2019 when it was amended to reflect the change in Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) provider. The report provides a review of the policy and in **Appendix 1** sets out various options available to provide further assistance, firstly for discretionary disabled adaptations and secondly for emergency home repairs and energy efficiency measures. In addition to this, the report also recommends some minor amendments to the policy.
- 1.2 With regards to disabled adaptations, our ability to be flexible and consider further assistance has been made possible by an under spend in the capital budget. Once we have Members feedback we will need to do further work, which will include consulting with the DFG provider Millbrook on the deliverability of the chosen options before drafting a revised policy to be considered by this committee at its next meeting on 10th March 2021.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Members consider the review of the current policy and comment on the options identified to provide further assistance for disabled adaptations set out in **Appendix 1**.
- 2.2 That Members consider the review of the outcomes achieved by Emergency Home Repair Assistance grants (HRA) and Energy Efficiency grants (EE) and comment on the alternative options available set out in **Appendix 1**.
- 2.3 That Members consider and comment on other minor amendments recommended to the policy.

3. Background

Disabled adaptations assistance

- 3.1 Local Authorities (LAs) have a legal duty to provide Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. The maximum DFG is currently £30,000 and this has not been increased in line with inflation since it was last revised in 2008¹. Some adaptations cost more

¹ The 2018 DFG review led by Foundations found that if the £30,000 had been increased in line with inflation it would now be £38,000. See page 180 of the review at <https://wwwFOUNDATIONS.uk.com/assets/PDFs/dfg-review-2018-main-report-final-nov-2018a.pdf>

than the upper limit, usually the more complex cases particularly for disabled children and young people. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO) also gives LAs the discretion to provide other types of financial assistance according to local need, including additional top-up funding which can be used to fund adaptations where the cost exceeds the upper grant limit per applicant.

- 3.2 Since 2015-16, funding for DFGs has been provided to us via the Better Care Fund with additional funds coming from our own capital programme. A summary of spend against our BCF allocation and budget for the last 4 complete financial years is set out in Table 1 below².

Table 1: DFG Budget & Spend from 2016-2020

Year	No. of grants fully completed	Better Care Fund award	Total annual budget	Actual spend	Underspend
2016/17	90	£761,300	£850,000	£787,513	£62,487
2017/18	102	£915,711 (£833,619 & £82,092)	£1,010,000	£1,017,483	£0
2018/19	73	£1,013,440 (£905,939 & £107,501)	£1,193,000	£583,452	£609,548
2019/20	60	£977,562	£1,200,000	£790,795	£409,205

Source: LDC Finance and Procurement

- 3.3 Table 1 above shows that there has been an under spend of the budget over the last 4 years resulting in a surplus available of over £400,000 at the end of 2019/20. Our review has shown that this is due to a number of factors:-
- The increase in Better Care Funding and additional unexpected awards late in the financial year from central government.
 - Performance issues with the Home Improvement Agency that have been previously considered by this committee, most recently in the report dated 15 September 2020³
 - Many grants do not reach completion because the applicant is required to contribute to the cost following the statutory means test.

Options for consideration

- 3.4 Despite the high demand for DFGs, it is unlikely that the Council will be able to fully spend our grant funding and the under spend by only offering statutory DFGs. It is therefore proposed that the Council makes amendments to the policy to include additional discretionary adaptations assistance to enable the Council to help even more disabled residents to live as independently as possible in their homes. A summary of the current policy, issues identified and the various options available to provide additional discretionary assistance are set out in **Appendix 1** and include:
- 3.4.1 **To increase the Discretionary top-up grant for mandatory DFG work.** The current policy allows a discretionary top-up of up to £5,000 for adaptations which cost in excess of the maximum grant of £30,000. It is proposed to increase this to £10,000 or £15,000 to bring the maximum total grant available to between £40,000 and £45,000 which would ensure that more adaptations are not withheld or delayed. Last year there were 3 cases that were unable to proceed as the cost exceeded £35,000

² The BCF award in 2020-21 is £977,562 the same as in 2019-20. An additional BCF award of £131k has also recently been awarded in 2020-21.

³ <https://democracy.lichfielddc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=143&MIId=1688&Ver=4>

and we are aware of 3 further cases that Millbrook are currently dealing with which are facing the same issues now. We anticipate an increase in these issues as costs have risen a lot since 2008 when the current mandatory grant limit was set. The top up grant will be fully land charged on owner-occupier applications for 10 years, in addition to any land charge already applied for the mandatory grant. It is recommended that the option to vary the amount paid is written into the policy in exceptional circumstances, where the appropriate criteria have been met.

3.4.2 To introduce a Discretionary Contribution Grant. The DFG is a means tested grant, so in some cases, the applicant may have to make a financial contribution and each year there are many adaptations that do not go ahead because the applicant cannot afford to pay this. In 19/20, 21 out of 88 applications were cancelled due to affordability issues. **Appendix 2** provides case studies and means test scenarios to demonstrate this. Three options are therefore proposed:-

- To pay a discretionary contributions grant up to a certain amount e.g. £15,000 towards the cost of the applicant's contribution
- To not have a cap on the maximum amount offered. This will help applicants who, for example, are diagnosed with a terminal illness whilst still at employment age and will therefore either not be eligible for a grant or be required to pay a large contribution.
- To pay 100% of the first £5,000 of any assessed contribution and for anything over that a percentage would be paid, for example 50% paid up to £15,000.

With this option an assessment of hardship would be introduced for applicants to demonstrate they cannot afford their contribution or do not have the means to secure a loan for this amount.

3.4.3 To introduce a Palliative Care Grant. This grant will be similar to the mandatory DFG but will be fast-tracked in order to provide urgent home adaptations for a terminally ill person. It will be limited to £30,000 (per the mandatory DFG) and applicants will also be eligible for the discretionary top-up. There will be a means test and in cases where there is an affordability issue the applicant can apply for the Discretionary Contribution Grant. The council will make a decision on each application and the grant will be fully land charged on owner occupier applications for a 10 year period. Where a mandatory DFG has already been approved this will be in addition to any land charge already set for the mandatory grant.

3.4.4 An alternative to this is to not introduce a specific Palliative Care Grant but **work towards a fast track DFG pathway** for residents with a terminal illness but this would need to be agreed by all partners in the Supporting Independent Living in Staffordshire (SILIS) partnership.

3.4.5 To introduce a non-means tested Palliative Care Grant. This would be for works up to £10,000 which would facilitate fast-track adaptations for Palliative Care patients such as stair lifts that can be fitted swiftly.

3.4.6 To introduce a Hospital Discharge Grant. This is intended to help speed up hospital discharges for eligible⁴ clients. Applications must be via a referral from an appropriate health professional confirming urgent works are required, such as the fitting of a stair lift, ramp or handrails. A one-off clearance of hoarded properties could also be included to make the home safer for the person to return home as well as general emergency repairs such as the upgrading of electrical installations. The proposed maximum grant for this is £7,500 and would be means-tested and fast tracked.

⁴ These would be clients who are vulnerable due to age, disability or receive income-related benefits.

The above discretionary grants would only be available for works which are necessary and appropriate according to an Occupational Therapist (OT). On occasion, applicants will decide to carry out adaptations which deviate from the OT's recommendations and these are usually more expensive and time-consuming; these schemes will not be eligible for the above funding.

Other amendments

- 3.5 It is proposed to amend the policy wording for the **Relocation Grant**. The current policy offers assistance when it is not possible, or too expensive to adapt a disabled person's home to meet their needs. In these cases, the Council may assist applicants with the cost of moving to a more appropriate home that either can be adapted or already has suitable facilities. Currently, the policy states that this must not exceed the maximum grant limit and it is recommended that is amended to clarify that the grant can be a stand-alone payment of up to a maximum £5,000 towards removal costs⁵ in addition to a DFG for adapting the new home (up to the maximum £30,000).

Emergency Home Repair Grants (HRA)

- 4.1. The current policy offers emergency grants for vulnerable owner-occupiers living in the worst housing conditions. Applicants must be in receipt of certain benefits or vulnerable due to age, disability or income level. The maximum grant available is £5,000 per application and is intended for households who are unlikely to qualify for an equity-release product, or a delay due to waiting times for a loan would cause the works to become prejudicial to health or dangerous.
- 4.2. The HRA budget in the capital programme is £15,000 per annum up to 2023/24. Due to underspends, a further £21,000 is available in 2020/21 making this year's budget £36,000. Table 2 below shows spend and the low number of grants completed since 2018.

Table 2: HRA grant spend since 2018

Year	Annual budget	No grants completed	Actual spend	Underspend
2018/19	£15,000	1	£1,756	13,244
2019/20	£15,000	3	£6,768	8,232

Source: LDC Finance and Procurement

Options for consideration

- 4.3 A summary of the current policy, the issues identified and the options available are set out in **Appendix 1**. The options include:
- 4.3.1 **To cease providing HRA grants altogether and instead use enforcement powers under housing legislation to address housing repairs.** Any owner occupied housing in severe disrepair will be addressed through service of enforcement notices and works done in default by agreement if the occupier can't afford to do them or they lack capacity to organise the repairs themselves. The cost of works would then be charged to the property.
- 4.3.2 **Cease providing HRA grants and replace with a loan scheme.** These are becoming popular amongst LAs and are usually used to carry out essential repairs or improvements to remedy hazardous conditions. Some LAs offer low interest or interest free secured loans through a partner agency⁶ and the maximum offered is typically between £5,000 and £10,000. A land charge is also usually applied.

⁵ This is removal costs only and must not be used towards a house purchase

⁶ To offer loans an organisation needs to be FSA registered which the council isn't.

- 4.3.3 **Promote equity release.** The majority of enquiries about HRA grants are from elderly homeowners who own their property outright and have a lot of equity. In some cases equity release may be a good option to release funds to carry out emergency and other repairs needed to their home.
- 4.3.4 **To retain the HRA grant, begin a wider promotion and review again in 12 months' time.** Currently, the uptake of these grants has been low; it is not known exactly why this is the case but it may be due to a lack of awareness.

Energy Efficiency Grants (EE)

- 4.4 EE grants were introduced to help reduce the number of people living in fuel poverty by helping towards the cost of insulation and heating measures, such as the replacement of inefficient or broken boilers. They are also aimed at increasing the energy efficiency of the housing stock and cut carbon emissions.
- 4.5 However, central government currently funds these types of works through the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) scheme that we have access to through the Warmer Homes, Greener District (WHGD) initiative. The Council's EE grant is intended to help applicants where this scheme does not meet the full cost of installation. We are also part of the Staffordshire Warm Homes programme which funds the installation of first time central heating systems into eligible homes across the county.
- 4.6 Table 3 below shows that since 2019/20 no EE grants were given as ECO funding was available to cover the costs of all EE measures installed though WHGD. It is expected that ECO funding will continue, and so in 2020/21 and 2021/22 the need to use council funds towards EE measures will be very low or zero.

Table 3: Council spend on EE Grants since 2016

EE Grants	Annual budget	No grants completed with support from council grant	Actual spend	Underspend
2016/17	£56,000	16	£25,769	30,231
2017/18	£30,000	9	£9,278	£20,722
2018/19	£41,000	12	£12,926	£28,074
2019/20	£10,000	0	£0	£10,000

Source: LDC Finance and Procurement

Proposals for the Use of Energy Efficiency Grants

In light of the available ECO funding, the following is proposed:-

- 4.7 **To cease offering the EE grant and address energy efficiency and fuel poverty issues by other means, such as combine into the HRA grant (if continued) or by enforcement action (if HRA discontinued).** Should central government ECO funding cease/reduces and no longer cover the cost of EE measures, then the need for a specific energy fund can be reviewed.

Other amendments

- 4.8 In addition to the above the following minor alterations to the policy are proposed:-
- Remove reference to Target Hardening Assistance as this is included in Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Policy and is administered by the Housing Options Team.
 - Remove reference to Empty Homes as this is now covered by the Empty Homes Policy.

Alternative Options	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To do nothing and not make any changes to the current Housing Assistance Policy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is not recommended as the review of the policy has indicated certain issues which need to be addressed. • To retain the current procedure for administering HRA and EE grants may mean a continued underspend of these budgets. 2. To introduce some but not all of the discretionary assistance options. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By increasing the top up and introducing discretionary assistance, more grants will be carried out thus increasing the annual spend and enabling more residents to live safely in their own homes, in particular those that need urgent adaptations due to a terminal illness. 3. To explore other options not identified in the report.
Consultation	Further consultation can be considered following the meeting before the policy is redrafted. For example this could involve consulting relevant stakeholders, partner agencies and the County Council to ascertain their views on our proposals for discretionary assistance.
Financial Implications	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is no additional funding required as the proposed options are intended to spend underspends already in the DFG budget. 2. Millbrook, the Homes Improvement Agency generate a fee of 16% (+VAT) for completed adaptations which is eligible for grant funding and so comes out of the capital budget. 3. Discussions with Millbrook regarding their staff resources to provide the fast-track Palliative Care Grant and other fast tracked works would be required as this is not specifically stated in the current contract. 4. Funding for HRAs and EE grants is in the capital programme up to 2023/24; this is funded from our reserves and could be diverted to our affordable property acquisition.
Contribution to the Delivery of the Strategic Plan	The Strategic Plan 2020-2024 has four corporate priorities; the one that delivery of DFG's will mostly contribute to is 'enable people' to help themselves and others as having an adaptation can lead to greater independence both in and outside someone's home and an improved quality of life. The provision of a new Housing Assistance Policy also contributes to the corporate priority 'Be a good council' that is transparent and accountable, responsive and customer focussed.
Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications	An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) and wider impact assessment will be completed for the new draft policy. Once Members have made a decision on the options they would like to incorporate into the new Housing Assistance Policy then this will be completed.
Crime & Safety Issues	None identified
Environmental Impact	None identified

**GDPR/Privacy
Impact
Assessment**

A GDPR/Privacy Impact Assessment will be completed on the new draft policy.

RISK	Risk Description	How We Manage It	Severity of Risk (RAG)
A	The key risk is non delivery of the mandatory DFGs as the budget is spent on discretionary grants.	Expenditure levels will need to be closely monitored throughout the year to ensure that there are sufficient funds to cover all mandatory grant approvals. A set amount each year could be allocated for discretionary assistance and/or it could be trialled for one or two years while we have budget underspends.	Likelihood: Green Impact: Amber Severity of risk: Green
B	If HRA assistance is removed the condition of the private sector housing stock may decline and there will be an increase in owner-occupiers living in dangerous housing or conditions prejudicial to health.	As the take-up of these grants is low, a significant increase in defective housing stock is not anticipated and other options such as enforcement will prevent this.	Likelihood: Green Impact: Green Severity of risk: Green
C	There is the risk of negative publicity if HRA was removed and replaced by enforcement action.	We would always seek to do enforcement action by agreement unless in exceptional circumstances.	Likelihood: Green Impact: Green Severity of risk: Green
D	Central Government funding is removed for energy efficiency schemes and there will be no help available for vulnerable residents in fuel poverty or living in homes with insufficient heating.	The council is kept well informed of an amendment or withdrawal of government funding which will give the opportunity to put internal funding back in place if needed. A HRA could be offered instead (if the option is retained).	Likelihood: Green Impact: Amber Severity of risk: Green

Background documents:

Lichfield District Council Housing Assistance Policy 2019

<https://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/downloads/file/1074/housing-assistance-policy-2019>

Relevant web links:

2018 DFG Review - Foundations

<https://wwwFOUNDATIONS.uk.com/dfg-review.php>

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Current Policy	Issues Identified with current policy	Options	Advantages	Disadvantages	Financial Implications	Comments
<p>• Mandatory DFG to meet the costs of adapting a disabled person's home. DFG is means tested for disabled adults but not parents/guardians with dependent disabled children. Max DFG award is £30,000.</p> <p>• Discretionary Top-Up for DFG Work exceeding max grant; funding limit is £5,000.</p> <p>• Relocation Grants can be paid where it is not possible or financially viable to adapt a disabled person's home. Removal costs paid for by LDC. Limit of £30,000 and a land charge is applied.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy not been significantly changed since 2013 There is an underspend of the budget. Most adaptations which exceed the mandatory limit also cost more than the max £35k (with £5k top-up inc) meaning the disabled person does not get works done or the schedule of work is reduced/revised which is time-consuming. Some applicants who are required to make a contribution cannot afford to pay so adaptations may be cancelled The £30,000 has not been increased since 2008. The 2018 Government 	<p>1. Increase the Discretionary top-up grant from £5,000 to £10,000-£15,000. Maximum DFG awarded will therefore be £40k-£45k</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council is seeing an increasing number of adaptations that exceed £30k and £35k. 3 DFGs last year exceeded this amount (for a case study– see Appendix 2) Would give greater flexibility More adaptations will be able to proceed as recommended by the OT which:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> will ensure the most suitable adaptations for the disabled person are completed will reduce delays due to the submitting of new designs will simplify the grant procedure and so speed up delivery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is the risk that the DFG provider may approve more extensive schemes which exceed 'mandatory identified need' if they can go above £35k 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding for DFGs is received annually from the MHCLG through BCF. Additional funds come from the council's own capital programme. The BCF for 2020-21 is £977,562. Underspend in 2019/20 was £409,205 Last year three DFGs went above £35k and currently 3 cases are with Millbrook with costs exceeding this It is anticipated no more than 5 cases per year will cost above £35k. For e.g.s see (Appendix 2) Additional DFG monies from Government via the BCF of £131k has just been awarded for 2020-21. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An underspend of the DFG allocation in one year can be carried forward to the next is ring-fenced for DFGs only. There is a risk that OTs could prescribe works which are not necessary if they know they can go above £35k. To mitigate this risk it could be possible to keep approval of a top-up with the council and not the HIA There is the option to introduce changes on a phased basis and/or to introduce a review of the funding limit for the discretionary grants on an

	<p>appointed DFG Review led by Foundations found that that if the mandatory limit had increased in line with inflation it would now be £38,000.</p>	<p>2. Introduction of a Discretionary Contribution Grant for applicants who cannot afford their assessed financial contribution towards the cost of a mandatory DFG</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The max amount for this could be unlimited or a cap could be placed, e.g. £15k • There is the option to pay 100% of all contributions below a certain level e.g. £2,000 or £5,000 or fund a %age of a contribution above this level e.g. 50%. For example with a £5,000 cap, on a £15,000 contribution the applicant would receive £10,000 and they have to find £5,000 – it should be noted that this may still mean some people are unable to proceed due to the nature of the means test for DFG. • Members could consider an option for discretion to fully fund in exceptional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More adaptations will go ahead as recommended by the OT. • This will help applicants with conditions such as MND who may be required to make a contribution as they are diagnosed whilst they or their partner are still in employment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a risk that applicants who can afford the contribution may be awarded this grant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is difficult to assess how many of the grants will be awarded per year & the cost. In 19/20 21 DFG applications were closed as applicants could not afford their contribution. Average cost of a DFG is £10-15k so could potentially cost max £315k (21x15k). • A land charge will be placed on owner occupied properties for 10 years. • A limit on available funding per annum for this grant could be given. 	<p>annual or biannual basis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There would need to be an assessment of hardship introduced - applicants would have to prove that there is hardship and they cannot take out a loan. This would need to be done by the LA (could potentially be through revs and bens) • Millbrook could administer this if there was a blanket fixed contribution level paid. We will need to consider LA staff resources to administer anything that we do not want the HIA to administer • Only 1 application for Top up Grant in a 5 year period should be allowed. • The grant will be fully land charged on owner occupier applications for a 10 year period.
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		hardship cases after an affordability test.				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eligibility for this top-up would be approved on a case by case basis so budget commitment and spend can be monitored.
		<p>3. Introduction of a Palliative Care Grant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Similar to the mandatory DFG but will be fast-tracked and so will provide urgent home adaptations for a terminally ill person. Applicants will also be eligible for the discretionary top-up and/or a discretionary contributions grant if there is hardship. <p>4. To not introduce a Palliative Care Grant but work towards a fast track DFG pathway across the SILIS partnership.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fast-tracking will speed up the delivery where grants are needed urgently to enable applicant to live at home for longer or be discharged from hospital quicker Allows discretion and flexibility so that support is offered if there is an affordability issue with the contribution To offer a fast-track grant would give an enhanced quality of life for those with a terminal illness and reduce the financial and emotional burden on the applicant and their family. <p>Less bureaucracy than with a specific new grant</p>	A separate grant is just additional bureaucracy and a fast tracked pathway could be explored instead across the whole SILIS partnership. (see below)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LDC had 4 cases last year that would have benefitted from this grant. Demand is difficult to predict but it is anticipated there will be less than 5 cases per year that would be eligible for this grant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We would need to decide on the criteria and consider whether to apply 'special rules' for those with a terminal illness¹. Would only allow one application in a certain time period. We would need to ensure that Millbrook are able to deliver this and needs to be agreed by all partners across the whole SILIS partnership. <p>Needs to be agreed by Millbrook and SILIS.</p>

¹ For special rules see <https://www.gov.uk/terminal-illness-benefits>

		5. To introduce a non-means tested palliative care grant for between £5,000 to £10,000.	It would assist applicants who require stair lifts, for example, which can be fitted swiftly.			
		6. Introduce a Hospital Discharge Grant/ Hospital readmission prevention grant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To carry out minor adaptations or repairs/disrepair in someone's home Can fund urgent adaptations they require to return home safely, such as the provision of a stair lift or ramp Other minor works would also be considered, such as a one off clearance of hoarded properties and repair of electrical installations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would be fast tracked to enable the applicant to be discharged asap from hospital & prevent unnecessarily long stay Applicants will be able to rehabilitate quicker & be more comfortable at home Reduce 'bed-blocking' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Test of Resources required, otherwise it will mean those that can afford works will be using public money. Successful use of this is dependent on Millbrook being able to process them urgently. 	Discussions with Millbrook over resourcing would be needed as it is not included in the current contract	Suggest max of £7,500. Applications must be via a referral from an Occupational Therapist, etc confirming urgent works will enable the applicant to return home safely. Additional assistance could also be provided at a later date following the hospital discharge under the mandatory DFG for more major works.

Current Policy	Issues Identified with current policy	Options	Advantages	Disadvantages	Financial implications	Comments
<p><u>Emergency Home Repair Assistance Grants (HRA)</u> Offers HRA grants for vulnerable owner-occupiers living in the worst housing conditions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicants must be in receipt of certain benefits or vulnerable due to age, disability or income level. Max grant - £5k per application Is intended for households who are unlikely to qualify for an equity-release product, or a delay due to waiting times for a loan would cause the works to become prejudicial to health or dangerous. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has been an underspend for the last 3 years Uptake of grants is very low (1 each in 2017 & 2018 & 3 in 2019) Grant procedure is complex and resource-intensive Can be difficult to find contractors who are willing to carry out repair works Has not been widely publicised as the grant pot is very small and so there are concerns that we would run out of budget very quickly if we actively promoted it. 	<p>1. To cease providing HRA altogether & look to use enforcement powers instead under housing legislation to address housing repairs. Any owner occupied housing in severe disrepair will be addressed through service of enforcement notices & works done in default if the occupier can't afford to do them or they lack capacity to organise the repairs themselves. The cost of works will then be charged to the property.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It would still enable the most vulnerable and those on lowest income in the district to access help with emergency repairs through us serving Enforcement Notices. If the owner-occ. agrees to the council carrying out the works then these can be done as works in default (WID) & a land charge placed on the property. There is no legislative requirement to offer this grant. Only DFGs are mandatory. Occupants will be able to remain in their home once the works are done & the property made safe The Council will have more control over the works done As the take-up of these grants is low, there will not be a significant increase in the workload of the PSH Enforcement Team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vulnerable homeowners may not approach the council for emergency repairs & they will carry on living in hazardous conditions. Serving an enforcement notice may be seen as draconian especially as these will be served on the most vulnerable but this would be in agreement. The Housing Act 2004 requires LAs to review their housing stock in order to identify any action required and the provision of a grant or loan is recognised by the Government as a means of achieving this aim. HRA grants or loans reduce the number of homes that fail to meet the minimum statutory standard for housing The allocated funds are not that large - £15k a year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HRA budget is £15,000 per annum from capital programme. Not all of the budget in 2019/20 was spent so it was carried forward giving a total budget of £36,000 in 20/21. If Council resolves not to continue with HRA from 2023/24 this would put £15k back into the capital budget in reserves for purchasing our own properties for the housing pathway scheme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Govt guidelines do allow the option of serving Enforcement Notices– see Appendix 4 LDC Enforcement Policy allows this – see Appendix 3 Would need to create a new procedure on works by agreement. This is done by other LA's but usually where alternative options, eg grants or loans are still offered. We have sought legal advice (Note: not yet received at date report finalised)

		2. Replace HRA with a loan scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be more flexible with eligibility • Can offer more money than the max £5k for the grant e.g. Lendology offer £15,000. Lendology specialise in low interest loans for vulnerable clients. • Offer loans from Credit Union for Minor Works type repairs to eliminate Category 1 Hazards or items of disrepair that present a potential risk to the health and safety of the occupants. The amount that Fusion Credit Union will lend to its members is £50 – £500 for the first loan. Subsequent loans may be up to £2,0000 • A charge could be placed on the property to recoup funds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could discourage our most vulnerable and disadvantaged households who may be wary of loans. • Could be high administrative burden if done in-house. • Must be authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) to offer credit to consumers. https://www.gov.uk/offering-credit-consumers-law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If use a specialist low interest loan organisation, then will be no cost involved. However, will require officer time to organise repair works & sign off completed project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This option will need further investigation to see if viable. • This may also benefit owners of empty homes to help make ready for sale or bring back into use
		3. Promote equity release	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are many homeowners in the district that are capital rich but revenue poor. Equity release may be a good option. • StepChange charity offer this – on Age UK so good endorsement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could discourage our most vulnerable/ disadvantaged households who may be wary of these schemes or may not have the ability to make an informed decision. • Not all homeowners live in homes suitable for equity release & 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No cost involved other than possibly an initial visit to the property to assess if house may be eligible for equity release. 	This option is currently in the policy – says HRA available to those ‘who do not, or are unlikely to, qualify for any assistance thru an equity release product’ but we do not promote a specific scheme.

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Case studies in support of increasing the Discretionary Top Up

1. In July 2019 Millbrook received a DFG referral for a disabled child. This involved major works totalling £37,000 which were refused due to the high cost and the parents therefore complained to their MP. LDC agreed in principle to the discretionary top up funding of £5k and plans were amended to try and reduce the scope of the works and costs. In June 2020, the DFG was approved with costs reduced to £30,700. This required a range of design changes and removal of a shower bench. In July 2020 it was eventually agreed that the shortfall would be met from the Millbrook fee (due to delays on Millbrook's part) and no discretionary funding was required. The works finally began in Sept 2020.

Had the additional discretionary funding of £10,000 above the max £30,000 been in place in 2019, the grant would have been approved in January 2020 and the works would have been completed 9 months earlier.

2. An adult DFG application was made in April 2018. The original proposal was for adaptations costing £38,950. This was a housing association property that agreed to fund the shortfall in the works but not the Millbrook fee element that led to delays in the work being completed.
3. A recent case involved adaptations to a Bromford property totalling £60,000. Bromford agreed to fund the additional cost but not the Millbrook fee element. This created delays resulting in Millbrook eventually agreeing not to charge a fee, which caused delays whilst it was resolved.

Case studies demonstrating the need for a Palliative Care Grant

1. Client diagnosed with motor neurone disease (MND) & bowel cancer and partner also had a terminal illness. Means Test showed that the contribution was over £30,000 and so they were not eligible for a DFG. Case was eventually closed.
2. Client diagnosed with MND. Partner worked full time. Means Test showed contribution was over £97,000 and so the case was eventually closed.

Table 1 - Means Test Calculations – scenarios for different households

Household 1								
Household Type	Age	Income weekly	Income weekly	Monthly	Savings	Benefits?	Owner Occupied Contribution	Tenant Contribution
Couple	Between 65 and 69	£175.20	£175.20	£450.00	£5,000.00	Both eligible for Attendance Allowance (AA)	£9,496	£5,564
		SRP ¹	SRP	1 Work pension				
Household 2								
Household Type	Age	Income weekly	Income weekly	Monthly	Savings	Benefits?	Owner Occupied Contribution	Tenant Contribution
Couple	Aged over 69	£134.25	£134.25	£450.00	£5,000.00	Both eligible for AA	£1,309	£767
		SRP	SRP	1 work pension				

¹ State Retirement Pension

Household 3								
Household Type	Age	1 salary	Income weekly	Income weekly	Savings	Benefits?	Owner Occupied Contribution	Tenant Contribution
Family	Working age with 2 children	£34,000.00			£5,000.00	Various disability benefits	£22,530	£13,200
Disabled parent, other parent working		per annum						
Household 4								
Household Type	Age	Income weekly	Work pension	Income weekly	Savings	Benefits?	Owner Occupied Contribution	Tenant Contribution
Retired couple	Between 65 and 69	£175.20	£450.00		£25,000.00	None	£760	£445
		SRP	Month					
Household 5								
Household Type	Age	Income weekly	Income weekly	Work pension	Savings	Benefits?	Owner Occupied Contribution	Tenant Contribution
Retired couple	Both Over 69	£134.25	£134.25	£450.00	£10,000.00	AA for one	£2,025	£1,187
				Month				
Household 6								
Household Type	Age	Income weekly	Income weekly	Work pensions	Savings	Benefits?	Owner Occupied Contribution	Tenant Contribution
Retired couple	Both Over 69	£134.25	£134.25	£900.00	£10,000.00	AA for one	£15,623	£9,154
				2 x 450				
Household 7								
Household Type	Age	1 Salary	Income weekly	Income weekly	Savings	Benefits?	Owner Occupied Contribution	Tenant Contribution
Couple	Working age (no children)	£34,000			£5,000.00	Various disability benefits	£66,930	£39,218
		Per annum						

Extract from Housing Health and Safety Rating System: Enforcement Guidance

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7853/safetyratingsystem.pdf

Decision to serve an improvement notice

Where an improvement notice has been served an authority should consider whether it is appropriate to offer financial assistance or advice to the owner, landlord or tenant, for example on the availability of a Disabled Facilities Grant. It should also consider the circumstances and wishes of tenants and owner-occupiers, including the extent to which they are able to carry out or tolerate repairs. Where in the opinion of the authority, remedial works would lead to a high probability of serious health consequences for occupants, this is a factor which might lead them to suspend the action or to issue a hazard awareness notice.

Works in default and action by authorities with owner's agreement

5.13 Section 31 and Schedule 3 to the Act enable authorities to take the action required by an improvement notice itself, with or without the agreement of the person on whom the notice was served. The need to act with agreement may arise where a category 1 hazard exists and remedial action is required without undue delay, but the owner is not in a position to carry out the works or arrange for the work to be done, perhaps for financial reasons. Authorities may have to carry out works without agreement where a notice has not been complied with.

5.14 Where the authority takes action with the agreement of the person served with the improvement notice, the works are to be taken at his expense. Where the authority takes action without agreement, it may recover expenses reasonably incurred, with interest. Such expenses may be made a charge on the property. Schedule 3 also deals with appeals against the recovery of expenses.

Powers to charge for enforcement action

5.50 The Act enables local authorities to make a reasonable charge as a means of recovering certain expenses incurred in serving an improvement notice, making a prohibition order, serving a hazard awareness notice, taking emergency remedial action, making an emergency prohibition order, or making a demolition order. The expenses are in connection with the inspection of the premises, the subsequent consideration of any action to be taken and the service of notices. Authorities will be able to charge for each course of action including, where emergency remedial action is taken, for any subsequent notices.

5.51 This provision does not relate to the cost of any remedial action taken by the authority either with or without agreement. These are separate charges covered by section 31 and Schedule 3 to the Act.

Extract from LDC Enforcement Policy - Regulatory Services, Housing and Wellbeing– Sept 2020

Formal Notices

Certain legislation allows notices to be served requiring offenders to take specific action or cease certain activities. The time period stated on the notice will be reasonable.

Certain types of notice allow works in default to be carried out. This means if the notice is not complied with (known as a breach of notice) we may carry out the necessary works to satisfy the requirements of the notice ourselves. Where the law allows, we will normally recover our costs from the person / business served with the notice, through the courts if necessary. Sometimes costs are recovered via a charge on the property. Every formal notice will be issued with clear guidance on rights of appeal.

Prosecution

When considering whether or not to prosecute we will determine if there is sufficient evidence to prove the case and whether the intended action is 'in the public interest'. The final decision to initiate court proceedings will be taken by the appropriately delegated service manager following a case review.

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Recovery Plan Scrutiny

Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Emergency Response

Date: January 2021

Contact Officer: Gareth Davies

Email: Gareth.davies@lichfielddc.gov.uk

Key Decision? NO

Local Ward Members All Wards



Overview and Scrutiny COMMITTEE

Combined report with key areas of focus

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Coronavirus has had a significant impact on all council services throughout 2020 affecting how we deliver existing services to the district as well as the rapid introduction of new services to support residents and businesses.
- 1.2 This report seeks to update members on the activity and ongoing issues around recovery and provide a narrative regarding the progress and achievements against the [Coronavirus \(COVID- 19\): Recovery Plan](#) developed and issued in May 2020. Whilst this has been a significant body of work, the longer term impacts of the pandemic on both the authority and the district as a whole have yet to be fully quantified.
- 1.3 The recovery plan was split into four areas of focus; maintaining key services; helping those in need; supporting our businesses and keeping you informed. It outlined the things we needed the plan to achieve and how we planned to do so and who we would work with.
- 1.4 To support scrutiny of the plan, and due to its broad and overlapping nature, a series of key questions and areas of focus for this committee are detailed in section 6 so that the relevant scrutiny committee deals with relevant topics and prevents duplication.

2. Maintaining key services

- 2.1 Mobile and flexible working has now become business as usual for many of our staff. This transition was achieved relatively early on during the first lockdown where all staff who could work from home were equipped to do so within the first few weeks.
- 2.2 Many staff have continued to work from home and this in turn has helped us to become more resilient, as homeworking has allowed for better work life balance and flexibility to support childcare and any isolation or further lockdown periods. It has also enabled office based staff to continue to deliver services, with minimal impact on customers.
- 2.3 Where staff have not been able to work from home service delivery to the public has not been adversely affected with staff absence rates remaining very low. A recent flash audit on staff health and wellbeing showed substantial assurance regarding the support we have given to staff and that they have coped well with the rapid change in working practices since March. Good practice was noted in adapting policies to cope with absences and caring responsibilities, availability of support, regular communications, surveys and wellbeing activities.
- 2.4 Maintaining front line services has been a focus for Operational Services. The Joint Waste Service was able to continue to deliver a complete service across both Lichfield and Tamworth, throughout 2020. JWS was one of fewer than 10% of collection authorities able to continue the collection of refuse, recycling, garden waste and bulky waste, along with the delivery of new bins.

- 2.5 Similarly both the Streetscene and Grounds Maintenance teams were able to continue to deliver business as usual, maintaining the district to its usual high standards. A number of residents commented on a visible difference in the standard of presentation when travelling into Lichfield from neighbouring authorities. The teams also worked effectively with County Council colleagues in addressing the doubling of fly-tipping experienced in 2020.
- 2.6 The district's parks have continued to provide essential green open space for residents to the benefit of their physical and mental wellbeing during the Coronavirus period. Necessary changes have been made promptly to support Covid-safe park usage and to respond to evolving government guidance.
- 2.7 The Coronavirus restrictions necessitated either the complete closure of leisure centres or their restricted operation for most of 2020 and into 2021. Officers and members have worked with Freedom Leisure, the Council's leisure operating partner, to stabilise their operation and provide necessary support to ensure continued leisure provision for Lichfield residents. Alongside the management of the Freedom relationship through 2020, officers have continued the strategic development of the district's leisure estate, commencing the essential works to Friary Grange Leisure Centre and agreeing the site of the new Lichfield Leisure Centre subject to planning.
- 2.8 For our customers we have worked hard to ensure they feel comfortable in using the new ways of accessing our services and website. Dedicated webpages have been developed and continue to be updated with relevant information to support residents and businesses throughout the pandemic.
- 2.9 To keep staff and residents safe, our reception area has not been reopened to the general public yet. All key services have remained available through a variety of other channels. Where essential, home visits and business inspections are still carried out under Covid 19 Secure protocols.
- 2.10 We have rapidly introduced several new services including five (and counting) grant schemes in response to government announcements.
- 2.11 We have built upon our strong working relationships with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) to provide support to our most vulnerable residents.
- 2.12 We are working hard to plan for Covid 19 secure elections, carefully following government and Electoral Commission advice and encouraging the take up of postal votes as an alternative for polling in the elections currently scheduled for May 2021. It will be a challenging election year with multiple ballots; Police and Crime Commissioner (postponed from 2020); Staffordshire County Council Elections; a number of district and parish by elections and a neighbourhood referendum.
- 2.13 Covid 19 regulatory advice to businesses has been dealt with by Environmental Health, with pressure being brought to bear on traditional work streams. Some traditional work has been dropped or delayed but as this has restarted it has been a tough balance to maintain. Covid 19 enforcement work has also been undertaken, protecting the public and ensuring a more level playing field for all businesses affected by the pandemic.
- 2.14 The pace of change and constant updates to the advice and guidance brings new challenges for us around enforcement and community leadership. Provision of testing and vaccine facilities remains a priority as we continue to deliver our key services.

3. Helping those in need

- 3.1 Over the last nine months our housing team have worked exceptionally hard to ensure people are supported to prevent them from being made homeless. During the initial lockdown, we accommodated all rough sleepers and those in danger of rough sleeping who were willing to engage and also provided alternative accommodation for all the occupants of a women's refuge after it was forced to close due to staffing shortages as a result of coronavirus. The team worked closely with accommodation providers in both the social and private housing sectors, to ensure that we had sufficient capacity to accommodate anyone who needed assistance with accommodation. Between 22

April and 7 October 2020 we delivered 141 County supplied food parcels to temporary housed homeless people to support them.

- 3.2 Since the start of the first lockdown in March 2020 we have worked closely with the Voluntary and Community Sector to identify community support needs and how these can be met. As a result we pioneered a shopping service in partnership with the Co-Op. Between 30 March and 3 July 2020 we made 891 essential shopping deliveries to 220 vulnerable households. In July it was then staffed by volunteers from MHA Communities (Live at Home) and they have since made 178 shopping deliveries for 23 users. As other shopping options have developed there are now only 11 customers regularly using this service regularly but some of these are also benefitting from other MHA communities activities. They do have capacity to support more people should the need arise in the current lockdowns.
- 3.3 The LDC Coronavirus 'Just Giving' fund raised £25,000 and has to date distributed just over £15k to 19 different voluntary organisations so far to help them adapt their support offer, provide extra help and purchase PPE to ensure a Covid 19 secure environment.
- 3.4 We have also worked with the VCS to ensure that we share good practice and learning and participated in a Digital Engagement - Celebrating Successes and Learning event where organisations shared what they have been doing to adapt their service offer and make good use of digital options. This included top tips for use of social media, what organisations need to consider when working online with young people and vulnerable adults and how digital technology has been used to engage with older people.
- 3.5 We have paid 102 people the £500 grant payment because they have had to isolate under the test and trace rules and this has impacted on their income. We are limited as to the number of discretionary grants we can pay under this scheme but the statutory payments will continue to be paid to eligible applicants and the government will meet the full cost of these.
- 3.6 To date we issued 3,385 people with council tax hardship funding amounting to £475,001 and put a hold on Council Tax recovery during the lockdown and into summer 2020.
- 3.7 Number of new benefit claims received (Housing Benefit plus Council Tax Relief) increased from 155 in March 2020 to 521 in April 2020 and then 498 in May 2020 making Q1 of 2020/21 one of the highest in volume since Q1 of 2007/08.

4. Supporting our businesses

- 4.1 In June 2020 we were allocated £92,501 funding from Central Government to support the safe reopening of high streets and other commercial areas addressing the health and safety concerns of the public and businesses. The monies could not be used for capital spend or supporting salaries of existing staff so a plan was developed to employ an Information Officer for the district, initially on a six month temporary contract. This officer successfully liaised with local businesses and was a physical presence on the high street to reassure and advise the public. It proved so successful the role has been extended until March 2021. The information officer works directly with licensing and environmental health officers to ensure any queries were shared and responded to effectively.
- 4.2 Twelve pavement licenses were approved for hospitality businesses to accommodate seating outside and the fee waived. As we moved into the gradual loosening of lockdown we became focussed on supporting the businesses on our high streets and shopping areas to be safe for people to visit and slowly encouraging footfall across the district. We did this by providing floor stickers to enable safe queuing in shops and liaising with the county council, city council and three spires shopping centre to ensure the safety of shoppers was a priority. Ongoing support and signposting has been given to licensed premises and regular mailshots sent to the taxi trade. We also ran a successful communications campaign, digital and print to ensure government messages were being circulated

- 4.3 Over the last 6 months unemployment has dropped in Lichfield by 5%, against a Staffordshire wide decrease of 2% and 2% increase nationally. The number of people unemployed for England has increased from 2,188,335 to 2,248,430 Staffordshire has moved from 25,055 to 25,270 and Lichfield from 2,750 to 2,795 in the last month (December 2020).
- 4.4 To assist recovery, the online directory marketing campaigns aimed at a national and regional audience, undertaken by the Lichfield Place Board will help raise the profile of Lichfield District as a great place to visit and encourage visitors from a wider area to visit the district. Promotional videos of the city and district will also be used in the marketing activities.
- 4.5 The Visitor economy team are working with Lichfield Cathedral and Peter Walker to update the Lichfield Sculpture trail to include the new 3m high, bronze statue of St Chad, the sculpture trail will be promoted as an outdoor visitor attraction to attract new visitors to the district. New guided tours are being developed for visitors to enjoy in line with updated restrictions advice.
- 4.6 Free and reduced car parking was provided in Lichfield City Centre for key workers and to encourage a return to support local businesses. The Lichfield Group Travel Partnership will increase marketing activity to encourage groups and coaches to include Lichfield as a destination to visit as part of their tours programme. Monthly e-newsletters are being sent to consumers promoting Lichfield as a great place to visit once restrictions are eased, this e-newsletter provides businesses with an opportunity to be featured in it.
- 4.7 During the first national lockdown we issued £11,455,000 to 1193 businesses for the Small Business Grant Scheme (£10,000 per claim), £7,120,000 to 385 businesses in Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Scheme (£25,000 maximum) & £951,000 to 105 local businesses for the Discretionary Grant Scheme (£9,096.15) and again recovery was held off during the first 6 months to allow businesses more time to pay.
- 4.8 We have received 117 applications to the Additional Restrictions Grant, which is a discretionary grant for small businesses that have seen their income drop due to coronavirus. So far we have paid 38 businesses a total of £285,000.
- 4.9 To date 14 pubs have been identified as eligible for the Christmas Support Payment for wet- led pubs and we are now proactively mailing other businesses we have identified as potentially eligible to ensure they get the support they are entitled to.
- 4.10 The Visitor economy team developed an online gift guide on the popular Visit Lichfield website which provided businesses a platform to promote their online shops and sales in the run up to Christmas. In addition they provided a further opportunity for food and drink businesses, with a platform to promote take away/delivery options whilst Staffordshire was in tier 3.
- 4.11 We have also launched the Visit Lichfield Card, a new initiative designed to encourage both local people and visitors to use the shops, restaurants, accommodation and attractions In Lichfield District. The card is available free of charge, and qualifies card holders for unique discounts and offers at participating tourism businesses, shops and restaurants in Lichfield District. All offers are posted on the Visit Lichfield website – making it easy for cardholders to see what offers are available. Most importantly, it is also a chance for participating businesses to benefit from additional promotion.
- 4.12 We continue to support tourism businesses by providing weekly e-newsletters that include information on grants, funding, business support, training opportunities and numerous options to help businesses market and promote their business, through the Visit Lichfield website, social media platforms and various publications.

- 4.13 The Building Control team had 2235 applications in 2019/20 and an estimated 2308 for 20/21 (3.3% increase). The team have remained busy throughout the pandemic and it is likely to show an increase despite the impacts felt elsewhere in our economy. Planning have also seen an increase in applications of 2.5% for the same period (1522 against 1482 for 2019/20), though valid applications have decreased by 9% (1343).
- 4.14 Information on inspections and advice to business will be reported when available.

5. Keeping you informed

- 5.1 People are regularly updated and informed. Since March the Communications Team has delivered;

- 203 outgoing Twitter dedicated posts covid-19 resulting in 360,598 impressions
- 174 Facebook posts resulting in a reach of 324,690.
- 65 Covid 19 related press releases, covering service updates, housing, benefit claimants, emergency shopping, business support and grants and more.
- Website text and updates for the dedicated LDC website section

- 5.2 Social media output/impact has increased significantly since the start of lockdown (March 2020), highlighting both the increase in output from LDC and the demand from the local community for on-going information about local and national developments. This can be highlighted with reference to increased activity and engagement measure on Twitter.

	Pre- March 2020	Since March 2020
Average monthly tweets sent	52	97
Average impressions	54,000	130,000
Average profile visits	960	1580
Average mentions	235	359

- 5.3 In order to maintain a visible presence for Covid related information in and around open spaces and to provide direct information to residents the team has provided creative design for:

- Six different parks posters related Covid-secure rules at the park during the first lockdown
- Nine designs when park facilities opened up again.
- Building information signs for the District Council House
- Bin tags with resident support information
- Social media artwork for the #HereForYou campaign
- Floor plans and direction signs for the District Council House and depot.

- 5.4 Alongside the general Covid 19 communication activity, the Communications Team has also supported the development, launch and updates to the #LoveLocal and #LoveLocal this Christmas campaign including;

- Covid-secure checklist leaflet for all businesses
- Floor stickers, window vinyl and poster for shops
- Roadside and park banners
- Information leaflet to all residents
- Dedicated website section including a resource library and directory of Lichfield and Burntwood shops still operating during the second lockdown.
- Birmingham Road billboard advert
- Bus station post series
- 59 Facebook posts resulting in a reach of 69,104

- Eight boosted Facebook posts resulting in a reach of 66,800
- 43 tweets resulting in 68,407 impressions.
- Eight #LoveLocal press releases

5.5 Since May 2020 all of our council meetings have all been broadcast live and then available on our YouTube Channel. These have received over 5,039 views reaching far more people than ever before. Overall, attendance at meetings is higher via zoom supporting members to balance their role with other responsibilities.

5.6 Since March 2020 over 50 messages have been issued by the Chief Executive and leadership team, sometimes on a daily basis, to ensure all staff and members have the most up to date information to pass on to residents and stakeholders. The messages have covered the current infection rates, latest guidance to keep people informed and hold teams together during this busy period. It has been used to share good news stories and thanks received from customers for the key services and support we have given. Over the pandemic period, Managers Briefings – our internal staff cascade has continued via zoom with more than 40 managers in attendance to each session.

6. Areas of focus for this committee

6.1 The committee is asked to consider items in section 3, along with 2.11, 2.13 and 4.14 and to note the remainder of the report, which will be covered by the relevant scrutiny committee(s).

Alternative Options	The Council could have presented the recovery plan in a variety of ways, this narrative style is in keeping with the original plan format and puts in context some of the metrics which otherwise would be very difficult to interpret.
Consultation	Wherever feasible, aspects of the plan have been consulted with local ward members, task groups, overview and scrutiny committees, the community, service users and key stakeholders.
Financial Implications	<p>The full financial impact of Covid 19 is very difficult to quantify – however the quantified financial impact (prior to the third national lockdown) is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2019/20 – an impact on the Council of £50,000 (reduced income and additional expenditure of £62,550 with Government Grant of (£12,550) used to offset the financial impact. • In 2020/21 – a projected impact on the Council of £2,639,800 (reduced income and additional expenditure is projected to total £4,615,960 with Government Grant of (£1,301,160) and the compensation from the sales, fees and charges loss scheme of (£675,000) are being used to offset the impact. • The Government will allow Council Tax and Business Rate Collection Fund deficits to be spread over three years rather than a single year. • The Government will also provide 75% support for Council Tax and Business Rate uncollectible losses in 2020/21 (projected reduced income for this Council included in the projection of £4,615,960 in 2020/21 is £930,900). However the guidance is currently being developed and it is therefore difficult at this stage, to quantify the level of compensation. • The Government will provide additional further support in 2021/22 related to grant of (£440,578), Local Council Tax Support Grant of (£126,451) and an

	extension of the sales, fees and charges loss scheme for the first three months of 2021/22 estimated to be (£124,000) .
Contribution to the Delivery of the Strategic Plan	Covid 19 response and recovery actions are now reflected in the councils Delivery plan to support the District Council's Strategic Plan.
Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications	Contributions to the Council's equalities objectives have been captured and will be reported in our annual objective statement published at the end of January 2021. Where an impact on people with protected characteristics has been identified, this has been assessed and wherever possible, mitigated.
Crime & Safety Issues	Our duty to prevent crime and disorder within the District (Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act, 1988) has been taken into account
Environmental Impact	The move to online meetings and home working has greatly helped reduce carbon emissions of members and officers of the council.
GDPR/Privacy Impact Assessment	All data used to support Covid 19 response has been provided or covered under relevant data agreements with Staffordshire County Council, NHS and other partners.

	Risk Description	How We Manage It	Severity of Risk (RYG)
A	That members are not aware of the full impacts of Covid-19 on the operation of the council	Keep members aware through regular briefings and ongoing overview of progress and reports to relevant committees	Green (tolerable) Likelihood (low) Impact Assessment (Med)
B	That the impacts of Covid-19 undermine the financial stability of the council	That regular assessments are undertaken of the financial impact and reflected in our MTFS. Lobby of relevant ministers for funding to offset.	Yellow (material) Likelihood (Med) Impact Assessment (Med)
C	That the impact of Covid -19 fundamentally undermines our ability to achieve our strategic objectives	That we monitor impact on our residents and the local economy, lobby and deploy any funding provided as quickly and effectively as possible.	Yellow (material) Likelihood (Med) Impact Assessment (Med)
D			
E			

Background documents

Relevant web links https://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/downloads/file/1582/ldc-coronavirus-recovery-plan

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