

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S
REPORT TO**

**Economy Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee
30 September 2020**

Report Title: Environmental Health Services – Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic.

Submitted by: Executive Director – Operational Services & Head of Environmental Health Services

Portfolios: Environment and Recycling

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To review the Environmental Health Service's additional workload as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak Government requirements and to further review the resourcing levels in place to achieve these requirements and risk to any current services as a result.

Recommendation

That the Committee receives the report and offers feedback.

Reasons

To provide the Committee with the opportunity to scrutinise how Covid-19 has impacted on the workload and capacity of the Councils Environmental Health Services Team and note the additional workload that has arisen.

1. **Background**

- 1.1 The Coronavirus pandemic is the greatest single risk to the health and wellbeing of this country since the Second World War. In February 2020 the Council established an Incident Management Team to plan the Council's response, ensuring that support to local residents and businesses was provided, that Council services were maintained, and the welfare of officers and members protected.
- 1.2 Informal Cabinet has been regularly briefed on the work being progressed, including a daily briefing with the Leader. The approach adopted is based on existing business contingency arrangements which have put the Council in a good position to respond rapidly and effectively.
- 1.3 The Incident Management Team interfaces with a range of groups which have been set up countywide to co-ordinate the response to the pandemic, including the Strategic Coordinating Group, and working groups on mortality management and vulnerability.
- 1.4 Cabinet received a report on the Council's response work at its meetings on 22 April and 20 May and 8th July. The 8th July report focused predominantly on the ongoing impact of the pandemic on Council services, and its developing response to the pandemic. The 8th July report provided an update on those matters and outlined the work streams in the Council's

“Back on Track” recovery programme following the (then) recently announced government recovery strategy.

1.5 The three Cabinet reports are available as background documents.

2. **Issues**

- 2.1 Insofar as the service areas within the remit of this committee are concerned, this has placed significant increased pressures, new demands and restrictions on a wide range of those services as previously reported but in particular, on the Councils Environmental Health Services Team.
- 2.2 Inspections and enforcement activity – in a number of areas either the health and safety issues presented by Covid, or the temporary closure of businesses, has meant that officers are working through a significant backlog of casework. This is across a number of Council service areas including housing grants, food premises inspections, planning enforcement, etc.
- 2.3 During the lockdown, statutory nuisance complaints in respect of noise and bonfires at domestic premises increased. Amended instigation procedures were developed to ensure compliance with Covid requirements.
- 2.4 Taxi driver and vehicle licencing & inspections – As highlighted above, this is a service significantly impacted by the pandemic in terms of service delivery. As a consequence, there is a backlog of new driver/vehicle licence applications and a backlog of additional requirements introduced due to Covid to process for current driver/vehicle licenses. In addition, vehicle inspections continue to be suspended and, as such, a significant demand for inspections can be anticipated placing pressure on the Garage Workshop.
- 2.5 Pavement Licensing Applications – Government has introduced new legislation through the Business and Planning Act 2020, which was reported to Licensing & Public Protection Committee on 4th August 2020, this provides a new approach to granting certain licences in an effort to facilitate bars, cafes and restaurants to service food and drink outside. This has included a short time periods of 14 days to process licences, which includes a 7 day consultation period, these are presumed approved if not processed within 14 days. It is anticipated that the Council will receive a significant number of such applications to be processed rapidly. The new Act also makes amends to allow operators with existing alcohol on-sales to also serve alcohol for consumption off the premises. The full requirements are available in the committee report
<http://svmma/documents/s33196/2.%20Business%20Planning%20Act%202020%20002.pdf>
- 2.6 Since the pandemic and lockdown was declared there have been numerous regulations relating to closure of certain premises at certain times and Covid controls. The enforcement responsibility have been with the Environmental Health Service, this has been dealt with reactively upon receipt of complaint and also proactively through patrols and officer observations.
- 2.7 Local Outbreak Control measures – this is a new responsibility for the Council involving, primarily, the Environmental Health service which will have a significant role in managing any local Covid outbreaks associated with businesses or certain high risk premises. The scale of the demand associated with this is as yet unknown, but potentially significant. The Council has received £50k Government funding via the County Council to support this function. Alongside the outbreak control work, is work associated with Covid compliance, advising, supporting and progressing non-compliance with current Covid controls. The nature and extent of this work is constant evolving, with the Service supporting the County with these functions.

2.8 In addition to the above, the work involved in preparing the North Staffordshire Local Air Quality Action Plan has not ceased. In addition to the existing workload associated with the project plan, the Council was written to by the Minister in early July, acknowledging the impact of the pandemic but reiterating the requirements of the October 2018 Ministerial Direction. The Joint Air Quality Unit now require the Councils to undertake sensitivity testing, to consider the factors that may affect future traffic flows (and hence emissions and NO₂ concentrations) and make a judgement on whether the plan will deliver the primary aim of achieving compliance with the statutory NO₂ concentration limits in the shortest possible time, and/or make a judgement on the uncertainty associated with achieving that outcome. This has added a significant additional task to the project plan on top of what was already a very challenging timescale. This Committee will receive a further report on this project at your November meeting.

3. **Proposal**

3.1 That the Committee receives the report and offers feedback to Cabinet.

4. **Reasons for Proposed Solution**

4.1 So that there is an opportunity to scrutinise the additional workload of the Environmental Services Team in relation to the CV-19 pandemic and to offer feedback to Cabinet on the same.

5. **Options Considered**

5.1 Not Applicable.

6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

6.1 There are no such implications arising directly from this report. Addressing the impact of Coronavirus locally has involved significant adjustment to some service provision. When making such changes there are a number of legal and statutory implications to take into account. These are all appropriately factored into decision taking by the Incident Management Team.

7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

7.1 There are no equality implications arising directly from this report. Members will, however, note the particular emphasis placed on supporting vulnerable people in the Council's response to the pandemic.

8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

8.1 Additional staffing resources have been secured to support the team during this period of increased demands and activity. A range of funding streams are being used to facilitate this support, including external sources.

8.2 A Mutual Aid arrangement has also been put in place as a result of concerns raised at the Staffordshire Coronavirus Strategic Co-ordinating Group. This agreement sets out the circumstances when Mutual Aid may be requested from neighbouring Local Authorities such that when a District or Borough Council is no longer able to allocate sufficient, sustainable resource to Covid response work without compromising its existing priorities, it will formally request mutual aid in accordance with the mutual aid section. Indicators for this would include the exhaustion of resources committed to outbreak management, an inability to deliver high priorities and a time frame exceeding 4 weeks. In other cases informal mutual aid between Councils can be agreed.

8.3 EMT are dynamically monitoring workloads of a range of teams who are impacted upon as a result of the Covid pandemic with the respective Heads of Services and this includes the Environmental Health Services Team.

9. **Major Risks**

9.1 There are a number of risks associated with the Pandemic and the Council's response to it. These are discussed in more detail in Appendix 1 to the Cabinet report referred to above.

10. **Sustainability and Climate Change Implications**

10.1 There are no such implications arising from this report. Any direct implications for sustainability and climate change are discussed, where relevant, in reports dealing with the implementation of specific measures that give rise to the same.

11. **Key Decision Information**

11.1 This report does not relate to a Key Decision.

12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

12.1 Cabinet Resolutions of 22 April, 20 May and 8th July 2020.

12.2 Licensing & Public Protection Committee resolution on 4th August 2020 regarding Business and Planning Act 2020.

13. **List of Appendices**

13.1 None

14. **Background Papers**

14.1 Cabinet reports referred to:-

<https://moderngov.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=118&Year=0>