

- The implementation of tier-2 on 31 October coincided with the Prime Minister's announcement that day of a new national lockdown for England from 5 November to 2 December.
- The new lockdown was however quite different from the one in March, as most business sectors now remained open and trading, along with the education sector. Hospitality, leisure services, and non-essential retail had however been required to close again. Furthermore, there was no national shielding programme for vulnerable people in place or any national food distribution system available this time.
- In terms of national statistics, as at 16 November the average number of new cases in England per day was 25,329 (up from 22,443 the previous week). Therefore, transmission was increasing week by week. There were 14,915 hospital in-patients with Covid-19, up from 13,025 the previous week. Average deaths per day, 28 days following a positive test result, was 413, this was an increase from 332 the previous week.
- A significant expansion of testing capacity was planned nationally and during 2021 there would be two new testing laboratories in Leamington Spa and Scotland. This will add 600,000 to the daily testing capacity. There were several vaccines currently undergoing clinical trials, such as Janssen, Moderna and Pfizer/ BioNTech; although there was no licensed vaccine as yet.
- Nationally unemployment, as at September 2020, was 4.8%. 9.6m jobs had been furloughed under the Government Job Retention Scheme as at October 2020.
- With regards to the Council specifically, most staff had continued to work from home so there was not the same level of transition needed this time, and all services, bar a few exceptions, were generally operating at normal level. The main exceptions being the closedown of leisure and culture facilities managed by Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles (IHL), along with non-essential retail at the indoor and outdoor markets operating in the District.
- Key priorities for the Council were similar to those in wave 1, with support being provided to the local test and trace programme, advice to businesses on compliance with the current regulations and restrictions, payments to businesses forced to close through fixed grants (mandatory and discretionary) and taking enforcement action where necessary if there were any compliance issues.
- In respect of those persons classified as being Clinically Extremely Vulnerably (CEV), of which there were 4,267 in the District, they would be receiving a letter this week from the NHS signposting them to local authorities for support, which would include connecting them to priority supermarket delivery slots for food shopping, and ensuring that community pharmacies undertook delivery of prescriptions, for which they were paid to do.
- The Council was also working with the Cannock and Hednesford branches of the Salvation Army, the Cannock and Rugeley Foodbanks and other voluntary organisations in the District to provide support if needed

- For the seven-day period up to 16 November, the number of positive cases of Covid-19 in the District was 353 per 100,000 people. Although a high rate, it was currently the lowest in Staffordshire relative to other local authority areas in the County. This was higher than the average rate in England of 269. The highest rate in Staffordshire was South Staffordshire at 437 and the average rate across Staffordshire was 411. It was important that all actions were taken to limit the spread of the virus within the District. It was too early to say whether the national lockdown was having an impact on reducing numbers, but it did look like it was slowing down.
- There were two high risk incidents in the District, one was in a working men's club and the other a nursing home. The working men's club would be allowed to open once the lockdown was lifted, provided they implemented the necessary precautions. Officers were supporting the club in this respect.
- In addition to the testing centre located at the Civic Centre site an application for a second Test Centre in the District based in Rugeley had been submitted. Residents in both Rugeley and Lichfield to be able to access this site, as there was no testing centre in Lichfield.
- Staffordshire had been selected as one of 67 pilot areas for lateral flow testing to be conducted. Such tests gave results in 30-45 mins, thus provided a fast way to test the local population. Work was underway with colleagues at Staffordshire County Council (SCC) on the necessary arrangements for the pilot.
- For the week ending 6 November the total number of deaths due to Covid-19 in the District was 863.
- The Economic impact as a result of the pandemic continued with the District having an unemployment rate of 5.6% and a much higher percentage of people on the Furlough Scheme. There were 3,570 claimants as at 8 October 2020. In July 38% of all jobs in the District had been furloughed (17,600 jobs).

He summarised by adding that issues related to the pandemic were expected to continue for some months. The next few months would be especially challenging for all of the public sector, and the Council was working with all relevant organisations in Staffordshire to ensure the right actions were being taken to mitigate the impact and spread of Coronavirus and to support businesses and the clinically vulnerable during this period.

The Chairman asked how the District was placed in regard to the test and trace system and whether people were waiting a while for their test results. The Managing Director did not have the up to date information on that aspect but commented that there was good access to tests within the District with the testing centre in Cannock being utilised at around 80%.

A Councillor sought confirmation of the location of the testing centre in Rugeley. The Managing Director advised that, as there were restrictions on identifying the location at present, he would email all Members outside of the meeting to confirm the location.

A Member asked how much had been paid out to businesses who were forced to close during the pandemic. The Managing Director confirmed that £20m had been paid out during Wave 1 of the pandemic and a working estimate of £4m during Wave 2.

	<p>A Member asked whether the lateral flow testing would cover the whole Cannock Chase area. The Managing Director advised that the Director of Public Health in Staffordshire would be allocated a total number of these tests and he would determine how and where they were deployed within Staffordshire. They may be targeted in certain areas such as the Education sector. Once a decision had been made details would be published in conjunction with the County Council.</p> <p>Reference was made to several shops that remained open during lockdown despite them not being eligible to do so. A Member asked whether they would be given a warning before being fined. The Managing Director confirmed that if businesses remained open, the Environmental Health Team would make contact to establish their understanding of the restrictions. There were a few grey areas where some shops sold both essential and non-essential items. However, the business must sell a significant amount of essential goods in order to remain open. Enforcement action would be taken to close the businesses if necessary. Members should raise any concerns they had in this respect with the Environmental Health Team.</p> <p>In terms of the discretionary element of the grants available to businesses forced to close during the lockdown the Managing Director confirmed that a document had been uploaded on to the Council's website under the Covid-19 business section that sets out details of the discretionary scheme.</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Homelessness Charter – Motion from Council 9 September 2020 and Housing First Project</p>
	<p>The Chairman referred to the motion that had been agreed at the Council meeting on 9 September 2020 that was outlined on the agenda. Prior to considering the motion she invited the Strategic Housing and Tenancy Services Manager to provide further information to Members in relation to the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, a copy of which was attached to the agenda.</p> <p>The Strategic Housing and Tenancy Services Manager explained that the Council's Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023 was approved by Cabinet on 25 January 2018. There was no longer a statutory requirement to produce a housing strategy, but there remained a statutory duty to produce a homelessness strategy. Therefore, a new combined housing and homelessness strategy was prepared that ensured residents, Registered Providers and other stakeholders could continue to refer to a document which outlined the housing and homelessness issues facing the District and the actions in place to address them.</p> <p>The existing Strategy was updated in 2019 to incorporate a Rough Sleeping Strategy following a Government focus on rough sleepers due to increasing numbers across the country. However, figures for Cannock Chase District do remain in low numbers. The next Homelessness Review would be undertaken during 2022-23.</p> <p>She outlined the three key objectives in the Strategy, as follows: -</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase Affordable Housing 2. Manage and Maintain Housing Stock (Council and non-Council)

3. To promote the provision of suitable accommodation, services, information and advice to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping.

The Housing Options Team provided applicants with a Personal Housing Plan to help them sustain their existing home or obtain a new home. The Team work with the Tenancy Sustainment Team to ensure that applicants are provided with one-to-one assistance to overcome any issues, particularly if they are first time tenants. There is a fast track service level agreement with Citizens Advice to provide budgeting and financial advice.

In order to meet the new “Duty to Refer” legislation hospitals A&E can make an immediate referral of anyone who has presented as homeless. In addition, an out of hours service is provided to assist anyone made homeless at weekends or overnight. The Team work with private landlords via the Landlords Forum (now on hold due to the pandemic) who provide accommodation to clients referred to by the Team and offer help and assistance with rent deposits and advances.

She also referred to the Shared Accommodation Project that utilises some difficult to let two-bedroom flats to provide accommodation for young single people. One flat has been piloted which has been successfully managed. However, this is quite complex and has limited expansion possibilities and has been limited further by the pandemic.

The focus for the last 2 years has been on Rough Sleeping. The Team initially started investigating for an outreach service in 2018 and provided a temporary winter service with help from the Government’s Cold Weather Payments. Lichfield District Council then made an approach to the Council regarding a joint Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Pathway and Housing First Project.

She then provided details of the Housing First Project, explaining that there are several supported housing units in the district that provide temporary accommodation and support to residents to prepare them to move on to a social housing tenancy. Where a client does not participate or engage with the support worker the accommodation may be terminated. Supported housing is generally for clients with low level support needs. However, clients with high level or complex needs either cannot be accommodated in supported housing or the accommodation is lost resulting in clients becoming homeless again.

The principles of Housing First are that the accommodation and support are not linked. Accommodation is secured for the client, this should be self-contained and, in a location suited to the client. A support plan is then designed based solely on the client’s needs. Failure to engage with the support worker or follow the plan does not put the client’s accommodation at risk. Long-term flexible support is provided and can be increased and decreased according to needs.

She advised that the joint Pathway & Housing First Project is funded by homelessness grants (Flex Housing Support Grant, Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding). It is for 2 years with an option to extend for further 2 years. The contract started in September 2019.

The outreach service aims to locate and engage with rough sleepers within the district, assess their needs and work with the client to secure suitable and appropriate accommodation; either temporary, supported or return to family. For some entrenched rough sleepers and those with complex needs, where other forms of housing are not appropriate or suitable, the Team work towards placing them in a Housing First property.

The outreach service has been invaluable during the pandemic assisting the Team with the requirements of the “Everyone In” Programme.

The project can currently accommodate up to 5 Housing First properties in the Cannock Chase District. Initially, attempts were made to obtain private rented accommodation, but approval was obtained to use 5 HRA flats. 4 have been accommodated.

She further advised that rough sleepers have complex issues. The project is being developed and a temporary Substance Abuse and Mental Health Worker has been appointed, through homelessness funding, to provide additional support to the project. Accessing services is an issue for all homeless clients and the Team engage with a cross County Working Group to establish a person-centred pathway to access a range of health and social services.

Members were the offered the opportunity to ask any questions. A Member asked how the Team distinguished between a rough sleeper and someone who became homeless, for example, through a breakup of their relationship and had nowhere to go but were not sleeping rough. The Strategic Housing and Tenancy Services Manager advised that the individual would be assessed by the Team alongside the legislation and criteria for assistance and their individual needs. A person who was in some type of accommodation would not be covered by Housing First. The Housing Options and Homelessness Team Leader confirmed that they would not be dealt with in the same way as a rough sleeper as assistance would be provided to prevent them from becoming homeless.

The Chairman was pleased to hear of the on-going work to support individuals with housing needs. However, she was concerned that with the coming winter months and the pandemic it may prove difficult to find accommodation for individuals in need. The Housing Options and Homelessness Team Leader advised that the Team did their best to source accommodation for those in need and there was a duty to provide accommodation during periods of bad weather. It was acknowledged that it was a challenge to house individuals locally.

With regard to paragraph (A) of the motion the Committee considered that the current Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was comprehensive and covered everything that was required, and a review was therefore not necessary.

A Member asked what percentage of newly built housing was required to be social housing. He was advised that there was a policy for the percentage of affordable housing required on new builds. However, Developers could negotiate according to the viability of the development. The Managing Director commented that the Council’s social housing programme delivered a much higher percentage of social housing – 50% social/50% other tenure.

With regard to paragraph (B) of the motion, the Chairman considered that given the situation with the pandemic, it would be difficult to arrange a stakeholder event as detailed in the motion. The Committee noted that such an event would be useful as it was important to bring together local voluntary organisations and partners to help deliver relevant elements of the Strategy. However, it was considered that it would be best to defer the stakeholder event given the current circumstances with Covid-19 and further discussions should take place at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

	<p>Resolved:</p> <p>That the Committee noted the motion from Council on 9 September in relation to homelessness and agreed: -</p> <p>(A) That the existing Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was comprehensive and there was no requirement to review it.</p> <p>(B) That, although it was important to engage with local voluntary organisations and partners to help deliver the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, the proposed stakeholder event be deferred given the current circumstances with Covid-19 and further discussions take place with regard to this at the next meeting.</p>
6.	<p>Promoting Prosperity Priority Delivery Plan Performance Update – Q1 and Q2 2020/21</p>
	<p>The Committee noted the latest performance information in relation to the Promoting Prosperity Priority Delivery Plan for Q1 and Q2 (Item 6.1 -6.8).</p>
7.	<p>Covid-19 Recovery Strategy</p>
	<p>Consideration was given to the Council’s Covid-19 Recovery Strategy and associated action plans (Item 7.1 – 7.26).</p> <p>The Managing Director advised that the strategy and its associated plans were relevant as the Council would move out of response phase again, and there would be a longer-term legacy impact from the pandemic on the Council and the District.</p> <p>Key issues for the Committee’s awareness under each of the four work streams were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial recovery: The Council was facing a deficit funding position. Although central government grant support of circa £2m had been provided, this was in comparison to a deficit in the region of £3m. It was expected that the Council would end this financial year £700,000 in the red, with the funding gap being covered by earmarked reserves. The pandemic had destroyed income levels, so the speed of financial recovery would be dependent on wider economic recovery. <p>There was also substantial uncertainty on how the Local Government Sector is to be funded in the future.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic recovery: Unemployment would be a semi-permanent feature for the District. Pre-Covid levels were the lowest ever seen and consistently below the regional average, so it had not been a massive issue over recent years. Now however the District had moved back to facing issues of unemployment, and the Council was working with businesses to support employment opportunities. <p>The District had a very high number of small businesses in operation, many of which suffered major cashflow problems during the first wave of the pandemic, so whilst there was a need to see what the impact from the second wave would be, the full impact wouldn’t become clear until during 2021, particular after the end of the extended furlough scheme.</p>

Of particular concern was the age group 18-24 as there would be a disproportionately high level of unemployment within this age range due to Covid-19.

- Community recovery: The position on this was more positive, with a renewed focus on supporting vulnerable people and strengthened relations with the voluntary sector in the District, which would need to be maintained going moving forward.
- Organisational recovery: The pandemic had changed working practices for the Council (such as holding committees remotely via zoom), and 80% of staff had been consistently working productively from home. As such, this raised questions about the need for physical office space. Staff had made use of new technologies and adapted to new ways of working, so it was important to keep this going.

The Committee was offered the opportunity to ask questions. A Member questioned the need to retain the Civic Centre offices when a significant number of staff were working from home. The Managing Director commented that several options would need to be considered. There was no proposal for all staff to work from home 100% of the time but a mix of home working/office-based communication would be required going forward. If there was a surplus of office space, there may be a need to seek new tenants to occupy the space. Alternatively, consideration could be given to relocating to another site and finding a different use for the current offices.

A Member commented that the Council had made the best use of technology during the pandemic and would now be more flexible in the post Covid-19 society.

A Member acknowledged the negative effect the pandemic was having on young people aged 18-24. She considered it was important to engage with them and provide assistance with any employment opportunities.

The meeting closed at 5.30pm.

CHAIRMAN