

Classification: Public
Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Commercial Services Cabinet Committee
Date: 02 March 2021
Reporting officer: Assistant Director (Corporate Services)
Subject: Portfolio COVID Update Report

Purpose and summary of report:

To provide Members of the Commercial Services Cabinet Committee with an update against how the council has responded to the COVID pandemic, both in terms of specific activities in response to the pandemic and how the council has managed to maintain service delivery across council services.

Recommendations:

None – the report is for information purposes only.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The practical impact of the global Covid-19 health pandemic for the council emerged in late 2019-20, principally via the Prime Minister’s speech to the nation on 23 March 2020 and the enactment of the Coronavirus Act 2020. This resulted in the council undertaking a number of different work streams in order to support the community and the council’s employees during the pandemic.
- 1.2 In June 2020, a report was presented to the Committee to set out the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic upon the practical delivery of the respective services within the portfolio.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Members on the approach to the pandemic, both throughout the first lockdown and in response to any additional work streams that have been implemented as a result of the subsequent lockdowns announced by central government in November 2020 and January 2021. In addition, it provides an overview of how the council has continued to deliver its services, despite the additional pressure brought about by the pandemic.

2. Corporate Delivery Plan

- 2.1 In responding to the pandemic, a Corporate Delivery Plan was established to identify the key projects for the Council and to act as a monitoring tool for senior managers to ensure progress continued to be made where possible.
- 2.2 Specifically in relation to the Commercial Services Portfolio, updates against the relevant activities identified within the Corporate Delivery plan are as follows:

Impact on Commercial Activities

- 2.2.1 During the period, the council has worked with Rosherville Property Development Limited and Reef Estates to bring forward The Charter development in Gravesend Town Centre. Planning permission for the development was secured in December 2020. At the time of writing this report, all parties are close to completing the legal and financial elements of the transaction and commencement of works on site is expected to take place in March 2021.

Impact on Commercial Activities

- 2.2.2 Progression of property investment opportunities continue to be stifled in the current economic climate.
- 2.2.3 At the present time rents are not being overly impacted other than in town centre retail where there is continuing downward pressure on rental values and store closures are impacting occupancy levels albeit this is happening nationally.
- 2.2.4 In respect of any impact on capital asset values, the valuations are currently being updated. However overall there is likely to be only a modest decline as whilst some values have decreased others i.e. industrial have held up well to date.
- 2.2.5 There will be continued monitoring of the activities identified within the Corporate Delivery Plan by the council's Management Team.

3. Response to the COVID workstreams

- 3.1 Throughout the pandemic, the council has taken responsibility for providing support to thousands of residents and local businesses across the borough, both in response to government initiatives but also in its role as a Community Leader. Specifically in relation to the Commercial Services Portfolio, the following actions have been taken:
 - 3.1.1 Corporate Debt – Our approach has been to continue to engage with and support local businesses during these difficult time. Reminders for outstanding debt continue to be issued, however officers work with local businesses to establish where appropriate payment plans for those that are struggling to pay their bills.

4. Maintaining council services

- 4.1 Despite the substantial challenge presented by the pandemic, with the authority having to divert significant resources and, equally, adapt to a variety of new statutory requirements introduced by the government's legislative programme, the

council continued to implement a suite of initiatives designed to deliver on the pledges made within the authority's adopted Corporate Plan (2019-23).

- 4.2 For ease of reference, Members may wish to review Appendix 2 which provides the latest quarterly performance report as considered by the Commercial Services Cabinet Committee on 26 January 2021. The report presents a statistical analysis of the Commercial Services portfolio throughout the pandemic.

5. Next Steps and future workstreams

- 5.1 The COVID-19 pandemic is still affecting the borough of Gravesham, and the entire country, and as such it is necessary for the council to continue to be responsive to the needs of its community, as well as supporting officers and Members alike.
- 5.2 Officers will continue to seek suitable property investment opportunities for consideration.

6. Background papers

- 6.1 Background papers pertaining to this report are held by the Corporate Change Manager. Anyone wishing to inspect background papers should, in the first place, be directed to Committee & Electoral Services who will make the necessary arrangements.

IMPLICATIONS	APPENDIX 1
Legal	In response to the pandemic, the Government put in place the Coronavirus Act 2020 as well as updating the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 and other key health-related regulations.
Finance and Value for Money	<p>Specifically in relation to the council's own budgets, updates have been provided in the quarterly budget reports that have been presented to and reviewed by Cabinet over the course of the year.</p> <p>In relation to funding specifically for COVID, the council has received funding from central Government in two key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific grants have been provided to enable the council to administer the schemes put in place by the Government, such as the various Business Grants schemes that have been put in place. • The council has also received c.£1.8m of non-ring fenced funding from the Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government (MHCLG) to help meet the unprecedented pressures resulting from the pandemic.
Risk Assessment	<p>The COVID-19 pandemic presented, and continues to present, significant risks for the council, particularly in terms of delivery of critical services to the public. As has been demonstrated through this report, the council's overall response to the pandemic has enabled those services to continue to operate effectively.</p> <p>The pandemic also presented risks to the Gravesham community, both residents and businesses. The council has been able to support both groups in minimising these risks by ensuring prompt payments of grants and allowances to support them through this tough time.</p>
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<p><i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i></p> <p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of personal data or special category data or criminal offence data? N/A</p> <p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice? N/A</p> <p>c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at gdpr@medway.gov.uk. N/A</p>
Equality Impact Assessment	<p>a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer. No</p>

IMPLICATIONS	APPENDIX 1
	<p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer.</p> <p>N/A</p> <p><i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i></p>
Corporate Plan	The way in which the council has responded to the pandemic has ensured that services have continued to operate effectively, which is fundamental to the delivery of all objectives within the Corporate Plan.
Climate Change	There are no climate change implications
Crime and Disorder	There are no crime and disorder implications
Digital and website implications	There are no digital and website implications
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	There are no safeguarding implications