



**Performance and  
Administration Cabinet  
Committee**

Members of the **Performance and Administration Cabinet Committee** of **Gravesham Borough Council** are summoned to attend a meeting Virtually on **Wednesday, 10 June 2020 at 7.30 pm** when the business specified in the following agenda is proposed to be transacted. Details on how Members can attend the meeting will be sent separately.

In response to COVID-19, the Government has legislated to permit remote attendance by Elected Members at formal meetings. This is conditional on other Elected Members and the public being able to hear those participating in the meeting. This meeting will be streamed live and can be watched via Gravesham Borough Council's YouTube Channel:-

[www.youtube.com/graveshamtv](http://www.youtube.com/graveshamtv)

S Walsh  
Service Manager (Communities)

**Agenda**

**Part A**

**Items likely to be considered in Public**

1. Apologies
2. Minutes (Pages 3 - 8)
3. Declarations of Interest
4. To considered whether any items in Part A of the agenda should be considered in private or those (if any) in Part B in public.
5. Coronavirus: Cabinet Portfolio Impact (Pages 9 - 20)
6. Any other business which by reason of special circumstances the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency.

## 7. Exclusion

To move, if required, that pursuant to Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 that the public be excluded from any items included in Part B of the agenda because it is likely in view of the nature of business to be transacted that if members of the public are present during those items, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

### **Part B** **Items likely to be considered in Private**

None.

#### **Members**

Cllr Narinderjit Singh Thandi (Chair)

Cllr Brian Francis (Vice-Chair)

Councillors:           Helen Ashenden  
                              Harold Craske  
                              Dakota Dibben  
                              Sarah Gow  
                              Gary Harding  
                              Leslie Hills  
                              Elizabeth Mulheran  
                              Gurbax Singh

Substitutes:           To be notified

### Performance & Administration Committee

Tuesday, 18 February 2020

7:30pm

#### Present:

Cllr Narinderjit Singh Thandi (Chair)  
Cllr Brian Francis (Vice-Chair)

Cllrs: Helen Ashenden  
Harold Craske  
Dakota Dibben  
Sarah Gow  
Leslie Hills  
Les Hoskins  
Nirmal Khabra  
Gurbax Singh

Pat Knight	Head of Revenues & Benefits
Ben Turner	Corporate Performance Manager
Linda Gray	Income Manager
Jade Counter	Income Recovery Officer
Ben Clarke	Committee & Scrutiny Assistant (Minutes)

#### 64. Apologies

Apology's for absence were received from Cllr Elizabeth Mulheran and Cllr Gary Harding; Cllr Nirmal Khabra and Cllr Les Hoskins attended as their substitutes.

#### 65. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 14 November 2019 were signed by the Chair.

#### 66. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

#### 67. Debt Recovery Arrangements

Members were provided with information on collection rates and the level of arrears within the Cabinet portfolio and informed of the corporate arrangements to collect outstanding debt and support those who were vulnerable and less financially able to make payments to the Council.

The Head of Revenue & Benefits highlighted key points from the report to the Committee:

- The total level of debt outstanding in respect of Council Tax, National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) or Business Rates and Housing Benefit Overpayments as at 31 March 2015 was £13,060,041. As at the 31 December 2019 the total level of debt

outstanding had reduced to £12,012,410. This reduction is despite nearly five years of additional liability being incurred in the meantime

- The implementation of the Council Tax Reduction Team in 2013 was problematic as it was very difficult to collect that money from people using that scheme however the team still has been successful as seen from the figures in the report
- The total outstanding debt figures for Business Rates and Council Tax have reduced when comparing 2015 to 2019; the figure for Housing Benefit Overpayments has increased roughly by £1.7 million
- Whilst the Council has a statutory responsibility to collect those three debts, only a proportion of those debts will be retained by the Council. Taking that into account, the total monies that are actually due to the Council is £6,116,965
- The collection rates for those three debt types over the last five years are extremely good when compared nationally; over the last three years there has been a general decline in collection rates nationally but GBC has weathered it well with little to no decline over the three debts
- Page 9 of the report outlines the slew of different powers that the Council has within its remit to collect debt for Council Tax, Business Rates and Housing Benefit Overpayments. However the powers regarding particular types of enforcement including bankruptcy and committal orders etc were seen as a last resort and very rare as the Council made every effort to work with people that had debts and attempt to understand why they had fallen into arrears
- The Revenues & Benefits Team has all been trained to deal with vulnerable people and review each case on an individual basis so that they can better understand what debts the customers are struggling with and the reasons for their struggle. In some customers circumstances they may not fully understand their financial situation and may be entitled to discounts or services which the team would advise/signpost them of
- There is a Vulnerable Person policy in place; many vulnerable people do not have access to online services and they are always encouraged to go to the Civic Centre and discuss their situation with the team members in person
- Many of the vulnerable customer cases are referred to the Council through the bailiff service, as all enforcement agents used by the Council must have a vulnerable policy in place
- The Corporate Debt Team has been very successful with their Corporate Debt approach targeting customers with multiple debts and devising a single payment method in which the payments are split between the debts owed according to priority. Corporate debt cases are overseen by the Income Team and the existing recovery officers who provide the single point of contact to the debtor. The report lists several case studies of debtors successfully paying off all their debts through single monthly payments over the course of an agreed upon time period
- Currently, 53 cases have been identified where it would be prove beneficial to the customer to have a one point of contact to discuss their arrears for multiple debts; of those 53 cases, 66% have already started paying towards their multiple debts

The Head of Revenues & Benefits and the Income Manager fielded questions from the Committee:

- The rollout of Universal Credit has not affected Housing Benefit Overpayments negatively as many cases have moved from Housing Benefits to Universal Credit thereby reducing the total number of Housing Benefit Overpayment cases

- Future communication between departments such as Housing, Housing Benefits and the Corporate Debt Team will be enhanced so that cases can be referred easily between the departments including the personal details of each case
- An update on the debt collection from vulnerable peoples/families and the help they received can be fed back to the Committee regularly
- A precept is paid to KCC, Kent Police, Kent Fire & Rescue etc regardless of collection rates for that year
- As collection rates have been decreasing nationally year on year, it will be difficult to vastly improve the Councils collection rates however GBC's collection rates are still some of the best in the County but there is always room for improvement
- A recent discussion was held with the Assistant Director (Corporate Services) regarding using the Communications Team to promote the Corporate Debt services. It was suggested that a surgery be organised for people struggling with debt although further thought would have to be given as how to advertise and invite the right people. The Head of Revenues & Benefits accepted the suggestion from a Councillor to possibly promote a surgery through Social Services as they would have first-hand contact with many vulnerable people
- The total level of debt outstanding across the Council at the end of the 2018-2019 financial year (as per figures provided by the Corporate Debt working group) was £14.2m which included sundry debts
- The number of cases referred to the bailiffs enforcement agency from the total debt outstanding figure of £12,012,410 will be circulated to the Committee after the meeting

## **68. Corporate Performance Update - Quarter Three 2019-20**

Members were presented with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the Council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter Three 2019-20 (October to December 2019).

The Corporate Performance Manager identified key points regarding the figures in the report:

- As the report is the first report of the financial year, it should be reviewed as the year to date position
- There is an interrelationship between the performance indicators and it is often worth reviewing indicators in themes or batches
- Wherever possible a comparison of the figures has been calculated either nationally or with neighbouring local authorities
- The reports will become more comprehensive once the new framework has had time to be implemented properly allowing further data to be collected and then year on year performance trends can also be incorporated into the reports
- The Performance and Administration portfolio has traditionally been high performing and, in the year to date, this standard has continued, particularly in regards to the Revenues and Benefits service.

The Corporate Performance Manager fielded questions from the Committee:

- Under the previous Performance Management Framework (PMF), the distinction between performance measures and performance indicators was that the performance measures were solely target based. Under the new PMF targets have

been removed, largely due to the inconsistent quality of targets that were previously used which undermined the reporting process.

- Without the use of targets, the new reporting style allows Members to focus scrutiny upon actual outturns and the progress being made towards the council's stated policy commitments within its Corporate Plan.

The Head of Revenues & Benefits advised that whilst Universal Credit has reduced the caseload for the team they were still receiving additional number of applications for discretionary housing payments which was important for people that required assistance. Additionally, the team had to keep on top of the regular changes that occur to Universal Credit which creates further work for the team.

Cllr Craske reported an issue viewing the Corporate Performance Update report on his iPad; the Corporate Performance Manger advised that he would fix the problem after the meeting, if possible.

The Chair thanked the officers for their hard work achieving the high levels of performance within the report.

## **69. Corporate Register of Partnerships and Shared Working Arrangements**

The Committee was informed of the Council's involvement in partnerships that were within the remit of the Committee.

The Corporate Performance Manager advised that the current partnerships that most directly related to the work of the Performance & Administration Committee were namely shared working arrangements:

1. Audit and Counter Fraud Shared Service
2. Revenues and Benefits Management Arrangements

The Corporate Performance Manager advised that the Council had a fully shared Audit and Counter Fraud service with Medway Council and as part of the arrangement a commitment was made to bring a report back to the Committee annually on the progress of the shared service. The Head of Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services took an update report to the Performance & Administration Cabinet Committee in September last year.

The Head of Revenues & Benefits outlined key points regarding the Revenues and Benefits Management Arrangements:

- Pat Knight took over from Mike Bytheway at the end of last year as the Head of Revenues & Benefits thus terminating the shared arrangement with Tonbridge & Malling Council and stating a new shared arrangement with Medway Council
- The Revenues Manager, Ian Johnson, from Medway Council also relocated to Gravesham as part of that shared management arrangement
- The shared management arrangement splits the cost evenly and has worked successful successfully so far; the future of the service will depend on the continued success of the shared arrangement
- There are many benefits to the shared management arrangement such as resilience, shared costs, ensuring high level of performance, an increased ability to negotiate,

sharing knowledge and experience between the two teams and the training of apprentices

Concern was raised by a Member over the surplus figure at the end of the Medium Term Financial Plan and requested assurance that the Council would carry on its commitment to find better value for money and seek further changes to improve the service.

The Corporate Performance Manager directed Members to page 32 of the report which gave an update on the Councils Change Strategy and gave assurances on the Councils commitment to improving future working arrangements.

The Chair asked that the Committees thanks be passed down to the two teams for their hard work.

### **Close of meeting**

The meeting ended at 8:22pm.

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**Classification:** Part 1 – Public

**Key Decision:** No

### **Gravesham Borough Council**

**Report to:** Performance and Administration Cabinet Committee

**Date:** 10<sup>th</sup> June 2020

**Reporting officer:** Assistant Director (IT & Transformation) and  
Head of Revenues and Benefits

**Subject:** Coronavirus: Cabinet Portfolio Impact

#### **Purpose and summary of report:**

To provide an overview of the impact of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic upon the practical delivery of the respective services within the responsible Cabinet portfolio.

#### **Recommendations:**

This report is for information purposes only.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Covid-19 pandemic has had the most profound impact on the daily lives of UK residents of any event this century; significant societal restrictions on movement and association, coupled with intense harm to the national economy through the enforced closure of businesses and an inevitable loss of jobs.
- 1.2 Collectively, the impact of Covid-19 is one of significant damage to the health and well being of the Gravesham community and, equally, presents a substantial challenge to the future sustainability of the council and its essential frontline community services.
- 1.3 On 13 May 2020, a report was considered by Council outlining the social and economic impact the pandemic has had upon the Gravesham community and providing details of the council's comprehensive community support offer during the period. At that meeting, Council unanimously put on record its gratitude to all those involved across all sectors in the outstanding response to the global Covid-19 pandemic and, equally, expressed condolences to those who have lost loved ones in this tragic event.
- 1.4 This report aims to provide a focus on the Performance and Administration portfolio in regards to the practical impact of the pandemic and, specifically, to provide clarity on what new policies or amended working practices were established in order to adapt to what was, and continues to be, a rapidly evolving challenge.

**2. Legislation and Government announcements in response to the COVID-19 pandemic**

- 2.1 In order to provide the powers needed to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, and to properly enable delivery against its already announced guidance at that point, the Coronavirus Act 2020 was enacted on 25 March 2020 as the Government's main legislative vehicle.
- 2.2 For district councils, a total of 39 new or amended powers and duties were created through the Act, providing a framework within which to operate and shape a local response.
- 2.3 In regards to the Performance and Administration portfolio specifically, the following provisions utilising existing legislation were announced as part of the Government's daily announcements/updates. These directly impacted upon the Revenues and Benefits service:

Government announcement	Impact
<b>Expanded business retail discount</b>	<b>New discretionary business rate policy written.</b>
<b><i>New scheme</i></b>  <b>Nursery Discount</b>	<b>Software changes implemented.</b>  <b>Website regularly updated with information. Letters issued and discount automatically applied to eligible ratepayer accounts:-</b>  <b>£11.54m expanded retail discount and £ 0.07m nursery discount successfully administered and provided to local businesses</b>
<b><i>New scheme</i></b>  <b>Business Support Grants</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Small business</b></li> <li>• <b>Retail, Hospitality, Leisure</b></li></ul>	<b>Devised new online form and provide/maintain communication on website and social media. Devised procedures to process eligibility checks. Work with key services including Economic Development; Finance; Communications and Audit.</b>  <b>Grants have been issued to 1,106 eligible ratepayers totalling £13.6m from a government fund of £16.162m (22/05/20)</b>
<b><i>New scheme</i></b>  <b>Council Tax Hardship Fund</b>	<b>Existing Policy revised.</b>  <b>Complex software changes implemented.</b>  <b>Website updated, social media campaign and 4,246 eligible council taxpayer accounts amended automatically and issued with explanatory flyer.</b>  <b>£629,389 of fund £893,182 spent (22/05/20) for residents in need</b>
<b>Changes to Universal Credit (UC), Tax Credit and Local Housing Allowance (LHA)</b>	<b>UC standard allowance and HB allowances increases and implemented on system</b>  <b>Effect on Council Tax Reduction Scheme – working age claimants</b>  <b>Updated system to reflect increase LHA rates</b>

2.4 The majority of government announcements came into immediate effect although in a number of instances the council was awaiting detailed guidance

### **3. Revenues and Benefits**

- 3.1 The demands on the service have been unprecedented with a number of initiatives impacting directly on all areas of the service (see paragraph 2.3) i.e. council tax, business rates and benefits.
- 3.2 The service made the following changes :-
  - 3.2.1 Staff have predominantly worked from home with some staff being strategically redeployed within the service. For example: some staff moved from recovery to assist in the processing of business support grants.
  - 3.2.2 As offices closed to public extra resource were put in place on telephones;
  - 3.2.3 The easing of verification in some areas on benefit claims in accordance with Department for Work and Pensions guidance
  - 3.2.4 Increased resilience put in place for assessment of benefit claims to ensure performance remains at a good level.
  - 3.2.5 Recovery of debt processes are constantly being reviewed

### **4. Corporate Performance**

- 4.1 In order to accurately monitor the impact of Covid-19 on critical frontline council services, the Corporate Performance team has worked with service managers to develop a new suite of 40 performance indicators (Performance and Administration element in Section 9). The suite has been reported weekly to the Corporate Management Team in order to enable critical early insight for potential intervention.
- 4.2 A cross-directorate group of officers was identified to operate as the council's Resilience Group. Acting as a research source and 'critical friend' to the Corporate Management Team, amongst its activities the group coordinated a series of reviews into the council's critical services. In doing so, the group was able to identify the various IT, HR and business requirements that were needed to ensure continued frontline delivery, enabling the Corporate Management Team to respond effectively. The Corporate Performance and Internal Audit teams are currently represented on the group, as activity now focusses on the preparations for a secure office environment.

### **5. Audit and Counter Fraud**

- 5.1 The Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service with Medway was identified as 'non-critical' in the early stages of the response phase of the emergency situation. As such, the service ceased the majority of normal business, with staff redeployed to assist other services at both Gravesham and Medway. The bulk of this work for Gravesham has related to Business Support Grants, with the validation of applications to reduce the risk of fraudulent claims and calls to businesses that may be eligible but had not applied. In addition a representative from the service has been part of the council's Resilience Group in order to ensure the appropriate governance was in place when managing the urgent decisions needed during the response. This work around governance will also help with a new risk assessment

of the councils control areas and inform a revised 2020-21 A&CF workplan based on changes that have occurred in response to the pandemic.

- 5.2 While the service was deemed to be non-critical, it would not be advisable for the council to continue without an operating Audit & Counter Fraud function for an extended period. As the peak of the emergency response has now passed, the service has begun to focus on completion and finalisation of audit reviews still outstanding from the 2019-20 workplan to ensure that there is an adequate level of assurance work across the council for the Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud to be able to deliver an annual opinion on the framework of internal control; which is a requirement as part of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and also the Annual Governance Statement process. Some officers will continue to support other services as required until 30 June as A&CF look to commence work on the 2020-21 work plan and a return to normal business from 01 July.

## **6. Corporate Change**

- 6.1 The Corporate Change Team has been involved in supporting the council's response to assisting NHS Shielded and Extremely Vulnerable residents that require support from the council.
- 6.2 Officers have been directly involved in contacting residents and speaking with them to gauge their level of need (if applicable). This has been ongoing since the end of March and will continue for the foreseeable future.
- 6.3 Officers have also been working on the administrative side; setting up the process that we would follow in managing the cases (including Visio process maps to have a visual representation) and supporting the strategy development as required. Outside of the process side, officers have also been involved in ensuring that all cases receive their follow up calls at the right time, referring cases on to the visiting officers (and Police where necessary) for door knocks and ensuring that Management Team are provided with regular monitoring statistics on the process. The majority of this work has been out of hours i.e. working in the evenings to prepare the lists etc. for the following day.

## **7. Information Governance**

- 7.1 It was recognised early on by the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) that council resources available for responding to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests may be diverted to other areas. As such, guidance was issued to say the ICO will take a pragmatic approach to any complaints arising from FOI responses exceeding the 20 working day reply target during the COVID-19 response. The information governance team contacted all current requestors who had recently submitted an FOI to say there may be a delay in responding, and also updated the acknowledgement communication for all new FOI requests to reflect the current guidance. However, officers have endeavoured to return FOI's within the original timeframe where possible.
- 7.2 The information governance team also provided advice to officers on the appropriate handling of personal data received for NHS shielded and extremely vulnerable residents which was required for the operation of our community hub.

## **8. Corporate Governance**

- 8.1 It has been of even greater importance during this period for the council to maintain its strong corporate governance arrangements to ensure that it continues

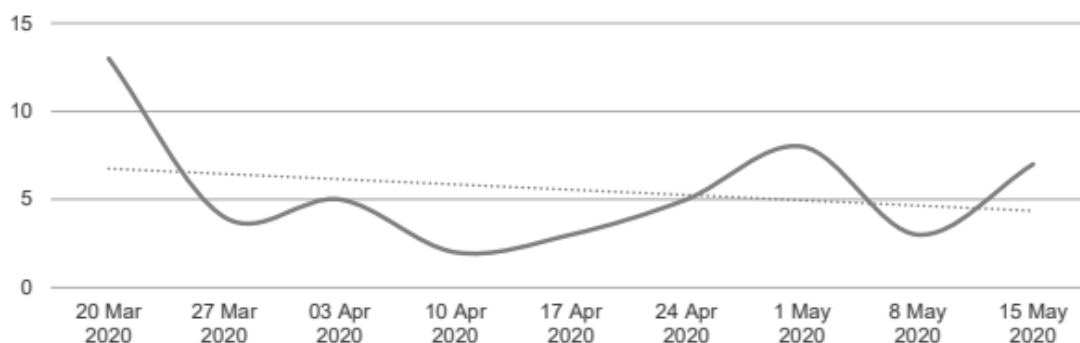
to follow its established procedures and processes for delivering council business and decision-making. As set out in paragraph 5.1, the council established a resilience group in order to ensure the appropriate governance was in place when managing the urgent decisions needed during the response.

**9. Performance**

- 9.1 In its response to Covid-19, the corporate Management Team moved quickly to introduce a dedicated suite of performance indicators. The aim was to enable early and targeted intervention and redirection of resources where it was needed to those critical services deemed underperforming.
- 9.2 In consideration of the practical challenges outlined at paragraph 2 to this report, within the Performance and Administration portfolio relevant performance monitoring as part of this suite involved:

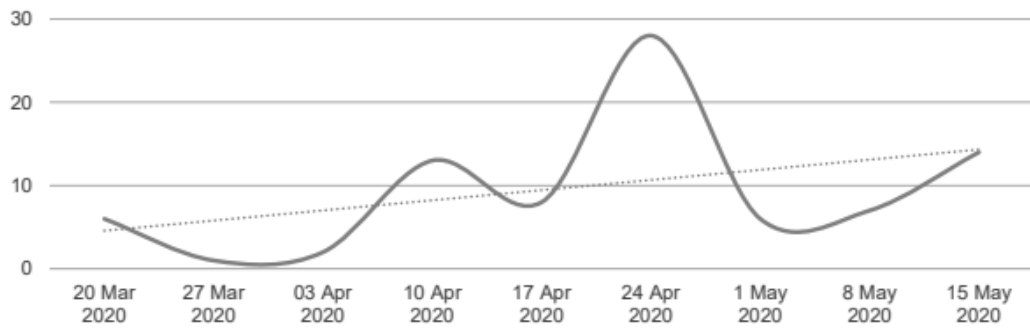
**CV 21** *Total DHP applications*

	20 Mar 2020	27 Mar 2020	03 Apr 2020	10 Apr 2020	17 Apr 2020	24 Apr 2020	1 May 2020	8 May 2020	15 May 2020
<b>OUTTURN</b>	13	4	5	2	3	5	8	3	7



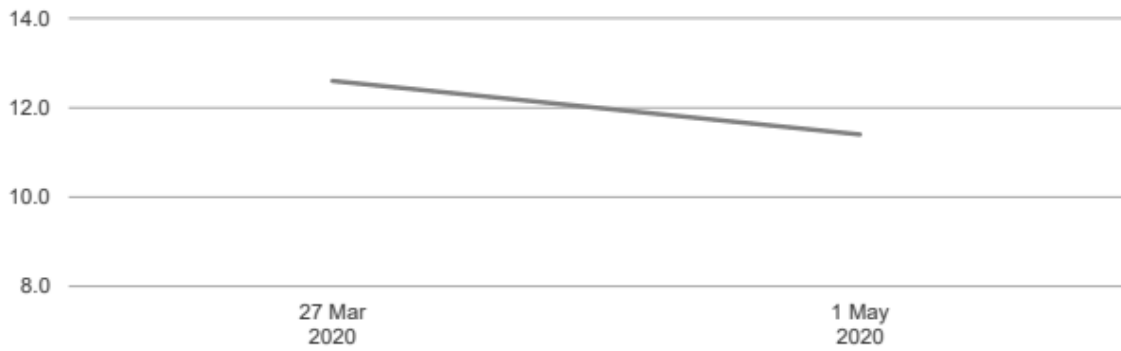
**CV 22** *Total new Housing Benefit claims received*

	20 Mar 2020	27 Mar 2020	03 Apr 2020	10 Apr 2020	17 Apr 2020	24 Apr 2020	1 May 2020	8 May 2020	15 May 2020
<b>OUTTURN</b>	6	1	2	13	8	28	6	7	14



**CV 23** Average processing time for Housing Benefit claims (days)

OUTTURN	20 Mar 2020	27 Mar 2020	03 Apr 2020	10 Apr 2020	17 Apr 2020	24 Apr 2020	1 May 2020	8 May 2020	15 May 2020
		12.6	Collected monthly				11.4	Collected Monthly	



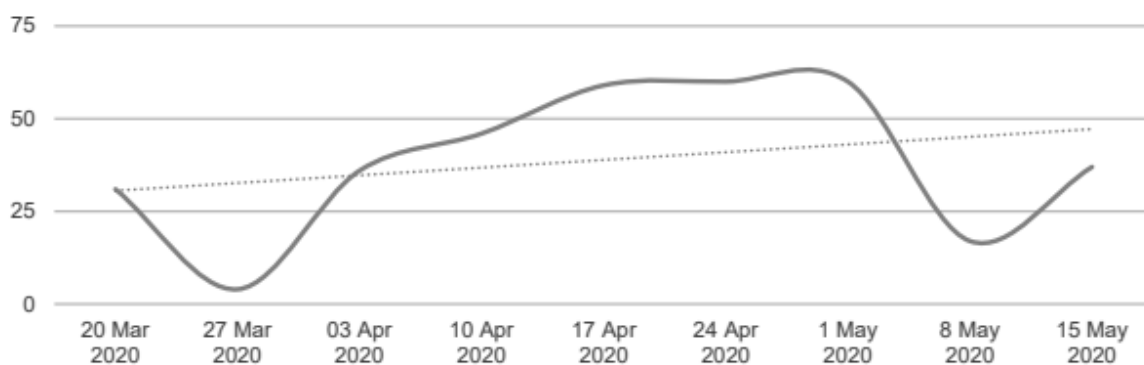
**CV 24** Average processing time for changes of circumstance in Housing Benefit claims (days)

OUTTURN	20 Mar 2020	27 Mar 2020	03 Apr 2020	10 Apr 2020	17 Apr 2020	24 Apr 2020	1 May 2020	8 May 2020	15 May 2020
		4.0	Collected monthly				3.4	Collected Monthly	



**CV 25** *Total new Council Tax Reduction Scheme claims*

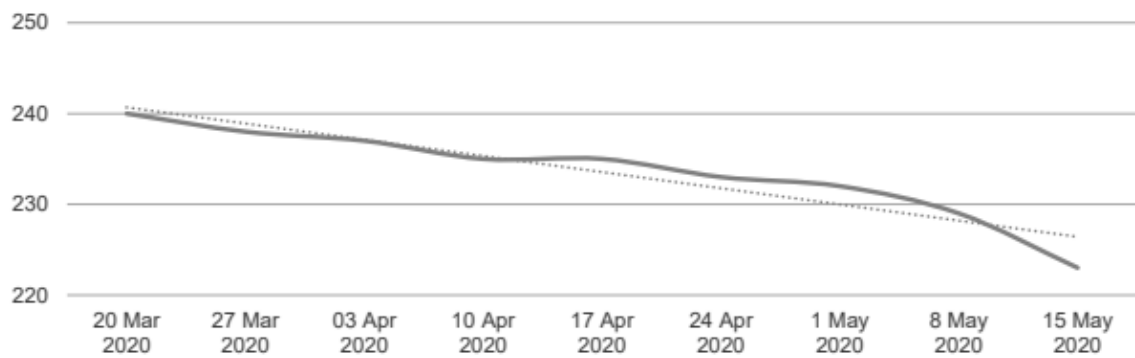
OUTTURN	20 Mar 2020	27 Mar 2020	03 Apr 2020	10 Apr 2020	17 Apr 2020	24 Apr 2020	1 May 2020	8 May 2020	15 May 2020
	31	4	36	46	59	60	60	17	37



**CV 26** *Total vacant commercial properties*

OUTTURN	20 Mar 2020	27 Mar 2020	03 Apr 2020	10 Apr 2020	17 Apr 2020	24 Apr 2020	1 May 2020	8 May 2020	15 May 2020
	240	238	237	235	235	233	232	229	223





9.3 Outside of this operational suite, in order to maintain delivery against the council's Corporate Plan, monitoring against the adopted Performance Management Framework was maintained throughout. Members will subsequently be presented with the latest quarterly report for consideration.

## 10. Next steps

- 10.1 The last few months have been a challenging time for services within the Performance and Administration portfolio. It has been a time not only dominated by a need to respond quickly to the crisis as it developed, but also a time to take stock and to progress a number of new initiatives, setting the foundations for recovery.
- 10.2 A fuller appraisal of the impact on services, especially in respect of those which collect income for the council, will not be fully possible until later in the year.
- 10.3 Steps are being taken to draw together key actions to be included in the Council's overall Covid-19 Recovery Programme.

IMPLICATIONS	APPENDIX 1
<b>Legal</b>	The Coronavirus Act 2020 is the Government's main legislative change in response to the pandemic. Most of its provisions came into effect on 25 March 2020, but detailed further legislation in the form of statutory instruments, and government guidance have been issued since that date and continue to be published. This is identified at section 2 to this report.
<b>Finance and Value for Money</b>	It is currently too early to fully measure the impacts of the pandemic situation on the council's collection rates for council tax and business rates. These will continue to be monitored during the year and reported through the council's Performance Management Framework and will be presented to Members during the course of the year.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	As per Finance & Value for Money section above.
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	<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 <a href="#">personal data</a> or <a href="#">special category data</a> or <a href="#">criminal offence data</a>? No</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 <a href="mailto:gdpr@medway.gov.uk">gdpr@medway.gov.uk</a>. N/A</p>
<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>	<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> <p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer. No</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>
<b>Corporate Plan</b>	Strategic Objective #3 Progress
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	N/A

<b>IMPLICATIONS</b>		<b>APPENDIX 1</b>
<b>Digital and website implications</b>	N/A	
<b>Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults</b>	N/A	

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