



Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel

Scrutiny of the Council's COVID-19 Response

Date: 26 May 2020

Key decision: No

Class: Part 1

Ward(s) affected: All

Contributors: Chief Executive

Outline and recommendations

The purpose of this report is to provide an update and assurance to the Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel about the Council's response to COVID-19. The report provides a summary of the overall local response to COVID-19, with a focus on critical services.

The Overview & Scrutiny Business Panel is recommended to:

- Note this update on the Council's response to COVID-19.

Timeline of engagement and decision-making

- **30 April 2020:** Council Urgency Committee agreed a programme of Council meetings in light of the Council's focus on responding to the immediate challenges of COVID-19.
- **5 May 2020:** Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel (OSBP) agrees an approach to receive a monthly COVID-19 update item that provides a high-level strategic overview of the Council's response to COVID-19
- **6 May – 1 May 2020:** As OSBP members, Select Committee chairs hold informal discussions with their committees to gather their wider feedback and questions to inform their questions in advance, and response to, this item.

This report has not been available for five clear working days before the meeting and the Chair is asked to accept it as an urgent item. This inaugural report was not available for dispatch on Friday 15 May because of the pressures of managing the Council's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The report cannot wait until the next meeting because the Committee requires an update each month to assure itself of the current position of the Council in managing the response to the pandemic.

1. Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update and assurance for the Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel about the Council's response to COVID-19. The report provides a summary of the overall local response to COVID-19, with a focus on critical services. The report also responds to member requests for additional specific information as provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Manager.
- 1.2. The Council's critical services in the context of COVID-19 are:
 - [Adult Social Care](#)
 - [Children's Services](#)
 - [Bereavement](#)
 - [Environmental Services](#)
 - [Housing](#)
 - [Finance](#)
 - [Corporate and other essential support services](#) - Public Health, Emergency Planning and Response, Call Centre, Communications, ICT, Health & Safety, payroll and emergency recruitment.
- 1.3. All Business Panel members were given an opportunity to put forward points of particular strategic interest in relation to this item which have been considered and addressed in writing this report.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The Overview & Scrutiny Business Panel is recommended to:
 - Note this update on the Council's response to COVID-19

3. Policy Context

- 3.1. The content of this report is consistent with all the Council's corporate priorities (as outlined in the Corporate Strategy 2018-22) as the need to protect the health and wellbeing of all our residents (particularly the most vulnerable) at the current time underpins the delivery of every commitment within the strategy. However, the recommendations are particularly relevant under the priority of:
 - *Delivering and defending: health, social care and support* – ensuring everyone receives the health, mental health, social care and support services they need
- 3.2. The Coronavirus Act (2020) sets out the temporary emergency measures that enable public bodies, such as local authorities, the NHS and police to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak. These measures are wide-ranging and involve the establishment of new powers and duties as well as changes to existing powers and duties.

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4. Background

- 4.1. On 5 May, OSBP agreed that all formal scrutiny activity be channelled through the Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel, which will receive a standing item at each meeting to provide members and the public with a high-level strategic overview and assurance about the Council's response to COVID-19. The committee's approach to this item was agreed as being focused on:
- How can our intervention have a tangible, positive outcome
 - How can we provide immediate support to the Council's operational response
 - How can we illuminate and improve decision making.

5. Lewisham Council's response to COVID-19

- 5.1. On 11 March, the Council activated emergency measures to respond to COVID-19. Council Gold and a borough-wide COVID Committee Groups were established, both working to a shared strategy and objectives:

Strategy:

We will work together with our partner agencies to respond to and recover from COVID-19 for our communities, businesses and staff.

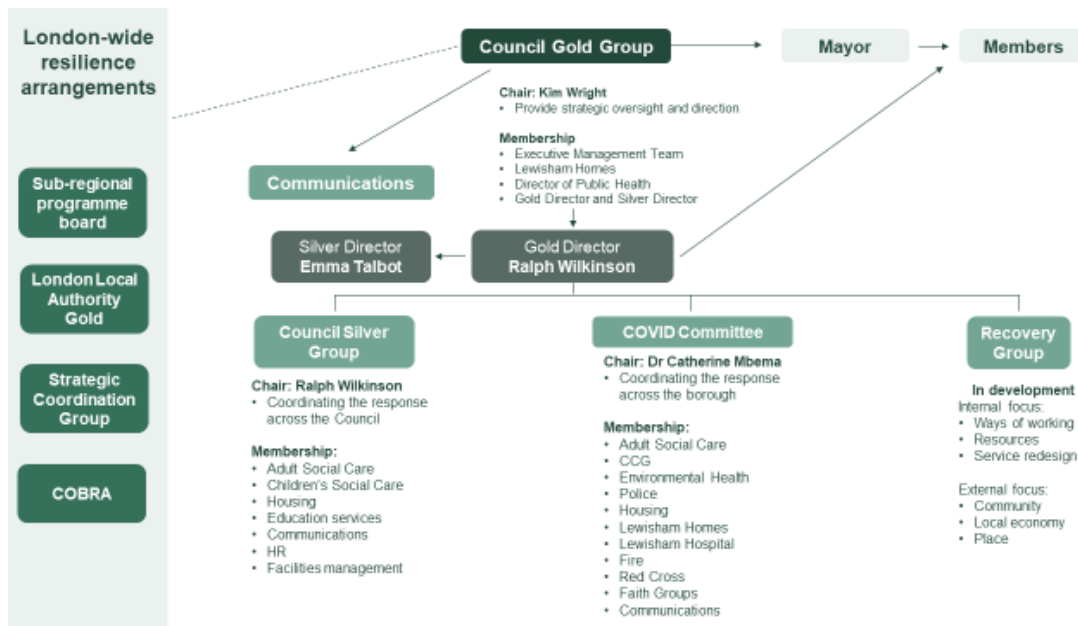
Objectives:

- **To provide support to the vulnerable**
 - **To manage resourcing to meet the needs of emergency and maintain essential public services**
 - **To provide support to our responding partner agencies who are protecting and preserving life**
 - **To provide support to Lewisham businesses and communities**
 - **To inform and reassure through communication and engagement**
 - **To provide community leadership/reassurance**
 - **To minimize disruption to infrastructure and business**
 - **To facilitate recovery and the return to normality**
- 5.2. In order to ensure a coordinated, strategic Council-wide response to COVID-19, the Council's Director of Public Services, Ralph Wilkinson, was designated Gold Director to act as a single point of contact in managing the Council's emergency response to COVID-19. The Gold Director acts as a liaison point between the strategic Council Gold Group, which takes decisions on the overall strategic direction of the Council's response, and the operational Council Silver Group which reviews the current position of the delivery of critical services, ensuring they continue to provide for Lewisham's residents. Supporting the Gold Director is an Incident Response Team, which includes, emergency planning, project support and secretariat support.
- 5.3. The Gold Director also sits on the COVID Committee, chaired by Lewisham's Director of Public Health, which ensures a coordinated borough-wide response with key partners across Lewisham including Lewisham Clinical Commissioning Group, Metropolitan Police, Lewisham Homes and Lewisham Hospital among others.

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- 5.4. To ensure a consistent and coordinated Local Authority response, and in line with longstanding agreements across the capital, the Chief Executive is also part of London wide arrangements to respond to emergencies which is coordinated by London Resilience. A Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) was set up very quickly and is chaired by John Barradell, Chief Executive and Town Clerk City of London and deputy chair by Eleanor Kelly, Chief Executive of Southwark. It was given “directive” status by the Government, to reflect the gravity of the situation. It has not, thus far, had to use those directive powers. Lewisham’s Chief Executive was asked to lead and chair the South East London Strategic Resilience Board, consisting, for the majority of the time of Lewisham, Bromley, Croydon, Greenwich and Bexley. The six sub regional Chairs reported into the London Local Authorities Gold Coordinating Chair (Martin Esom, Waltham Forest) who sat on the SCG. Other roles have been taken up by Chief Executives across London to support the response such as Adult Social Care, shielding, testing, personal protective equipment (PPE) and finance.
- 5.5. Lewisham has taken a “One Council” approach in responding to challenges posed by COVID-19. The entire Senior Leadership Team, that is Executive Directors and Directors, has been involved with the coordination and delivery of our response which has been essential to the effectiveness and continued smooth running of our critical services. All services across the Council, critical or non-critical, have been instrumental in the Council’s COVID-19 response, taking on new responsibilities and volunteering in critical areas of the business.
- 5.6. A Recovery Group is in development to coordinate the recovery of the Council and the Borough to a ‘new normal’. The recovery approach will focus on: the Council’s internal recovery with a focus on ways of working, resources and service redesign, and on the borough, focusing on local economic recovery, place-shaping and community resilience. Our recovery will be underpinned by the following principles:
- Tackling widening social, economic and health inequalities
 - Protecting and empowering our most vulnerable residents
 - Ensuring the Council's continued resilience, stability and sustainability
 - Enabling residents to make the most of Lewisham the place
- 5.7. The immediate focus of recovery is managing a coordinated easing of lockdown to ensure Council services remain safe for residents and for staff. This phase will focus on staggering the appropriate re-opening of non-critical services, managing expected

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increased demand for services in some areas, preparing for further waves of COVID-19 and planning for the Council and the borough's long-term recovery. There is much work to be done here and it will be the case that this will be harder than the actual lockdown itself.

- 5.8. Recovery will move in due course to a phase of review, consultation and assessment of the effect of COVID-19 on the borough. The Council intends to lead an extensive borough-wide impact assessment with residents, members, business partners in order to build an evidence base to inform policy and decision making. This phase will focus on equalities, analysing the various impacts of COVID-19 on those with protected characteristics to ensure that Council services and local partnerships are fit to tackle inequalities in a post-COVID Lewisham.

Council staff redeployment

- 5.9. Dozens of back-office staff were redeployed in the first few days of the pandemic to support the Incident Response Team and to operate the Council's newly established COVID-19 help line and email address. The COVID-19 helpline was established on 23 March 2020 designed to respond to residents' concerns and questions, provide reassurance and up to date information about the status of Council services and help alleviate pressure of enquiries on services. The helpline team have become adept at supporting residents with accessing the support they need, dealing with general enquiries and signposting to other avenues of support as required.
- 5.10. In eight weeks to Friday 15 May, 1302 email enquiries have been responded to and resolved, and 2586 calls have been answered by the remote team of volunteers managing calls and emails. Call rates have fluctuated in line with uncertainty, with an average of 71 calls per day. Member enquiries have been channelled through the Mayor's Office to support the Council focus resources on protecting critical services. Between 14 March and 11 May there have been 272 Councillor and MP questions. 84% questions (230) received an Officer response within 7 days. 9% questions (25) received an Officer response after 7 days.
- 5.11. On 31 March, the Council launched an internal volunteering scheme for staff in anticipation of a surge in demand in critical services. Staff were asked to volunteer to work in or to support the Council's critical services. A range of generic roles were created - project manager, admin support, delivery support, telephone support, transport support (driving license necessary) and social care support. As the programme developed, more specific roles were created to provide flexible support to critical areas as needed. Over 200 staff volunteered to take part in the programme across the Council. As at 18 May, there are currently over 100 staff volunteers reassigned to services including approximately:
- 10 staff volunteers working on the Lewisham Local community sector response to deliver food and essential items to local shielded residents
 - 50 staff volunteers calling shielded people to make sure they are getting the support and food parcels they need
 - 15 staff volunteers forming a new Outreach Engagement Team knocking on doors of shielded people we are unable to get in touch with to make sure their needs are met
 - 10 staff volunteers making contact with small businesses in the borough to make sure they have applied for the business rates relief they are entitled to
 - 10 staff volunteers supporting the frontline work of various of our housing teams, including supporting rough sleepers, emergency housing assessments and housing allocations

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- 15 staff volunteers training to be available to provide social care in the event of a spike in demand
- 30 staff volunteers working in back office support roles including IT, project support, customer service and administrative roles.

Community Response

- 5.12. Lewisham residents have displayed enormous goodwill and generosity, with thousands of people signing up to volunteer as part of the borough's community response to the crisis. Community volunteering efforts are led by Lewisham Local, working with organisations across the borough to ensure residents' needs have been met during the pandemic.
- 5.13. At 15 May, 2085 people have signed up to volunteer with Lewisham Local. Volunteers who are DBS checked have been initially prioritised and assigned volunteering roles in the first instance. Nearly 400 volunteers have been assigned roles as befrienders, drivers and food packers with some volunteers carrying out multiple roles. Lewisham Local has received around 8000 referrals and has delivered over 5700 food packages.

Shielding

- 5.14. There are around 1.5million Clinically Extremely Vulnerable people in the UK who are required to shield themselves. This is a new area of responsibility for the Council and hasn't been without its problems and issues especially with the data we were provided with by the Government and NHS. The government has categorised vulnerable people into three groups:
- Vulnerable People (Non-Clinical) - people who can be classified as vulnerable due to non-clinical factors (e.g. children at risk of violence or with special educational needs, victims of domestic abuse and rough sleepers);
 - Clinically Vulnerable People - people considered to be at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19;
 - Clinically Extremely Vulnerable People (Shielding cohort) - people defined on medical grounds as clinically extremely vulnerable, meaning they are at the greatest risk of severe illness.
- 5.15. Clinically Extremely Vulnerable people have been advised to stay at home at all times and avoid any face-to-face contact. The government is currently advising people to shield until the end of June and is providing support to this group such as a free standardised weekly parcel of food and household essentials or priority delivery slots with supermarkets), medicines (arrangements to have medicines delivered to people's homes by local community pharmacies or their dispensing doctor), social contact and basic needs (emotional or social support, such as people to talk to on the phone or via a computer). The Council has also set up a Shielding team, consisting initially of 50 staff volunteers, to coordinate the support to Lewisham's Shielding residents. The Council is working with Lewisham Local to ensure that any shielding residents who are in this position are supported.
- 5.16. Clinically Extremely Vulnerable people receive a letter from the NHS or their GP encouraging them to register their needs on a government website. A full list of all those who are currently shielding is updated with the Council on a daily basis. At 18 May, there are 9389 people in Lewisham on the Government's shielding list. The Council has a team of redeployed staff from non-critical service areas that is contacting all those on the list, which is updated daily, within 24 hours to check their needs are being met. If residents request support, they are referred to Lewisham Local who are coordinating and delivering support to those residents who are shielding, and other

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residents who request support.

- 5.17. At 18 May we have attempted contact with everyone on the shielding list and have made successful contact with 8709 people on this list. Where there are shielding residents who we haven't been able to contact on the phone, the Council has established an Outreach Engagement Team of twenty redeployed staff from the Council and from Lewisham Homes to make physical welfare checks on vulnerable people who are shielding, adhering to social distancing guidance at all times. The shielding team conduct follow-up phone calls to all residents on the shielding list to ensure their needs are still being met and adjusting their support package accordingly.

Working with our partners

- 5.18. Our close joint-working arrangements with partners have been essential in the Council's ongoing response to COVID-19. We have worked in partnership with local health partners, emergency services and our voluntary and community sector to ensure a consistent and coordinated approach across the borough. The Council's COVID Committee brings together key partners to share information, align policy and decision-making and identify pressures and capacity issues across the borough. The COVID Committee has also managed key borough-wide issues such as personal protective equipment (PPE) and testing.
- 5.19. The Council's Gold Director has regular liaison meetings with the police to share information and identify areas of partnership working. The Met Police have been implementing the change in legislation announced by the Government, which gives officers additional powers by making it an offence for non-essential premises to remain open, or for people to gather in groups of two or more in public, outside of their household. Police officers are out on regular patrols across South East London to keep communities safe and prevent crime.
- 5.20. The Police have worked very closely with a number of critical and non-critical service areas, namely the Council's Parks and Enforcement services. Enforcement of compliance with social distancing regulations has primarily been led by the Police, with Council services supporting this through regular patrols, directions and advice. Council Parks officers continue to regularly patrol Lewisham's parks and open spaces, with increased patrols over each weekend. We redeployed some of our Parking Enforcement Officers to these roles too, in order to assist at busy times such as over Easter and Bank Holiday Weekends.
- 5.21. The Council continues to work closely with our health partners, including Lewisham and Greenwich Trust and Lewisham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), to ensure the continued delivery health and social care services across the borough. The CCG has opened two temporary community treatment centres ('hot hubs') to provide care for patients who are very unwell, suspected of having COVID-19 and require medical attention. One hub is based at Marvels Lane Surgery in the south of the borough and the other is based at the Waldron Centre in the north of the borough. Patients cannot self-refer to these 'hot hubs', they must be referred by their GP or NHS 111.

6. Critical services

- 6.1. Early on, the Council, and as part of a pan-London agreed position, identified a set of critical services that were to be the focus of maintaining delivery above all other services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The Council has been monitoring these services on a daily basis to ensure they continue and are sufficiently resourced to support our most vulnerable residents. The Council was reporting daily situation reports and data sets to the SCG in order to provide reassurance and part of Lewisham's Chief Executive's role was to report daily on the position in the South East London sub region. Daily reporting to the SCG for the Council and the sub region

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started on 18 March and was replaced by weekly reporting on 12 May.

- 6.2. This paper outlines the delivery status of the Council's critical services in order to provide strategic oversight and assurance for members.

Adult Social Care

- 6.3. Critical Adult Social Care services are: safeguarding, emergency duty team, emergency homecare response, placements and discharges from hospitals, care home placements. The Adult Social Care and Joint Commissioning services in Lewisham have been working closely with health and care partners across the system to support residents to stay safe and reducing pressure on the NHS.
- 6.4. As part of the government's response to the coronavirus pandemic, some temporary changes have been made to the Care Act 2014. The option of easements to the Care Act came into effect at the end of March make it possible for the Council to temporarily reduce its usual duties. While we are currently applying flexibility to processes in order to focus on rapidly giving residents the care they need outside of hospital, and therefore take pressure off the NHS to date, the Council has not needed to operate under the Care Act easements.
- 6.5. Safeguarding remains a priority for the Council and the Adult Safeguarding provision has remained performing as normal throughout the period of lockdown, delivering a service as equivalent to pre-COVID-19 operation.
- 6.6. There has been a slight reduction in demand regarding referrals from the community through the Social Care Advice and Information Team (SCAIT), however those referrals that we have received have been for increasingly complex cases. The service has also seen a number of additional referrals from those residents who are shielding. The Council's team of redeployed members of staff are referring residents on the shielding list, previously unknown to social care, where social care needs have been identified. Demand flows from the hospital have decreased and the Council has been working very closely with the hospital seven days a week to free up capacity in order to respond to ongoing COVID-19 pressures.
- 6.7. Social workers continue to undertake assessments where required, but are responding flexibly and using alternative communication methods to continue to support residents remotely. Since March 2020, staffing levels have remained at around 75% - 80%, with a number of staff needed to self-isolate.
- 6.8. The Council continues to be in close contact with all our care providers, including care homes. Care homes stopped visits from relatives and others very early in the COVID-19 awareness stage. Nevertheless, there were some early outbreaks in a small number of care homes. In care homes in Lewisham, official ONS data tells us there have been 14 deaths as at 1 May 2020.
- 6.9. Early on, care homes identified issues with the availability of personal protective equipment (PPE). The Council worked in partnership with One Health Lewisham on an interim basis to source and purchase PPE quickly until the London Resilience Forum established a system for the local distribution of PPE. The Council has redeployed a number of staff to work in a small team to manage this emergency PPE supply to those providers who are unable to access PPE through their usual PPE supply chain. Therefore, locally, providers have always had access to PPE either through their usual supply chain or the Council's emergency route. We have also established a team who are working on the redeployment of staff from non-critical service areas to work with or in our care homes to provide extra support and capacity if needed.
- 6.10. Lewisham's care market, including domiciliary care, supported living units and care homes have all responded very flexibly to meet need, ensuring that we have been able to continue to deliver care and support to the most vulnerable. There has been a

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reduction in contact between social workers and residents in care homes due to social distancing measures. Social workers have continued to provide appropriate support to those residents in care homes using remote methods. Council officers have also offered a range of support and advice to care home providers including specific advice from Public Health colleagues to help reduce risk to staff and service users. It remains a Council priority to manage capacity in care providers, thus supporting the NHS.

- 6.11. Testing in care homes has until recently been managed through Public Health England (PHE) and the Care Quality Commission with mixed results. Now, responsibility rests with PHE and Lewisham's Public Health Team. The Council, working with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Lewisham and Greenwich Trust (LGT), have developed a new local pathway for testing for providers. This local route supplements the PHE testing route which focuses specifically on new outbreaks of the virus. The local route aims to build local resilience and ensure care homes can be supported quickly. On 13 May the government announced £600m infection control funding for care homes. Officers are currently developing how Lewisham's allocation of this funding will be distributed to care homes.

Children's Services

- 6.12. Critical services in Children's Services are: safeguarding, children with complex needs, children in care and placements, education services such as childcare support network and advice to parents/carers. The key areas of focus for Children's Services during the COVID-19 pandemic have been to work with our schools to ensure they are open for vulnerable children and children of key workers, and supporting children and young people most at risk.
- 6.13. Children's Social Care has had to operate very differently throughout the lockdown period. Children's Social Care have undertaken a risk exercise for children with a social worker to identify those children most at risk. Children's social workers are only visiting these children considered to be most at risk of harm, and are following social distancing guidance and using personal protective equipment (PPE) where appropriate. All other children and families are being contacted virtually. Some families are being re-directed to the recently established Family Information and Support Service (FISS) for advice and help.
- 6.14. Referrals to Children's Social Care began to fall in March and have continued to reduce throughout the lockdown period. In line with other London authorities, there have been fewer contacts into the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) during lockdown and tight thresholds are being applied for referral thereafter into social care. With 60-70% of staff working from home full time, social care teams have adapted how they work with young people to minimise face-to-face contact. Social workers have found different ways to engage and communicate with adolescents using various media and communications channels.
- 6.15. Fostering placements remain stable and we have taken measures to support foster carers to ensure continued stability of placements. Children continue to be placed with both in-house carers and independent fostering agencies. The number of requests to move children and young people are decreasing as social workers are only making requests in urgent or emergency circumstances.
- 6.16. The Council is working closely with schools across the borough to provide support and guidance for following government guidance about providing continued learning programmes for children and young people remotely, and is supporting schools as they consider plans for the phased return of pupils. Schools have continued to open to provide for vulnerable children (including those who have a social worker and/or an Education, Health & Care Plan). The government's COVID-19 Recovery Strategy stated that local authorities and schools should continue to encourage vulnerable

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children to attend school in person.

- 6.17. All schools have provided pupils not attending school with work to do, either by email or on their website or hard copy delivered to their homes. The Department for Education (DfE) has also brought together an initial list of free online educational resources to help children of all ages learn at home. The list includes subject-specific resources for English, maths, science, PE, wellbeing and special educational needs & disabilities (SEND).
- 6.18. The Outreach Inclusion Service has also been offering support to disadvantaged children (e.g. those with challenging behaviour and/or a poor attendance record, but who are not defined as 'vulnerable' by the government). Within the service, there are qualified counsellors and therapists who can offer sessions with children and parents/carers, aiming to help them cope better whilst at home.
- 6.19. It is likely that those children who have not engaged in learning will need extra support when they return to school. At this stage we do not know when children will return to school but it is clear that secondary pupils in Y7 - 9 will not return before September. Lewisham Learning and officers in Education Services will be working with schools as they assess the progress of individual pupils and the additional support programmes which may be needed. Summer programmes will be provided in some form and the scope of those are being considered.
- 6.20. Lewisham Youth Offending Service has maintained business essential provision delivered remotely, with contact managed by telephone, video conferencing and in some cases face-to-face contact maintaining social distancing. The priority of the service is to manage public safety, court services and resettlement. During the COVID-19 outbreak, the number of children and young people being arrested with Lewisham addresses has reduced by nearly 50%. Overall levels of crime in London have reduced by approximately 40%, with serious youth violence down by 76% across London.

Bereavement Services

- 6.21. The Council's critical bereavement services are registrations of births and deaths, public mortuary body storage, Council Crematoria and Burial Grounds. Bereavement Services have seen increased pressure as a result of COVID-19. The service continues to follow guidance issued by central government, Public Health England and the London Resilience Forum and is working hard to support residents during a very difficult time while observing social distancing guidance.
- 6.22. Local authorities in London are working together to ensure a consistent approach to bereavement services and to coordinate mortality management and planning across the capital. Lewisham Mortality Planning Group meets on a weekly basis looking at the local death management process and putting in any contingencies that are needed to deal with the demands from each stage of the process. Lewisham is represented at the Inner South London Coronial Group which consists of representatives from Lambeth, Greenwich, Southwark and Lewisham and ensures a standard approach across the sub-region. The South London Coronial Group feeds into the London Mortality Planning Group which has oversight of London wide contingencies and resources.
- 6.23. Sadly, COVID-19 has led to an increase in the number of deaths registered in the borough. Lewisham's Registrars, normally responsible for the registrations of deaths, marriages, births and ceremonies, are currently only registering deaths via telephone appointments. ONS statistics confirm that 239 deaths have been registered in Lewisham at 1 May 2020. There has been more demand for bereavement registrations than normal but the service is coping well with demand and managing capacity well.
- 6.24. Everything possible is being done to honour the wishes of the deceased as well as their family and friends. Funerals, cremations and burials continue to operate during

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the week with a maximum of 10 mourners attending a funeral. Mourners are advised to remain two metres apart from anyone not in their household at all times, and those at risk are urged to stay at home. Lewisham's cemeteries are open every weekend for those visiting graves or memorials. Social distancing measures are in place in all of our cemeteries to ensure the safety of our staff and mourners.

Environmental Services

- 6.25. The Council's critical environmental services are highways management, refuse collection, refuse disposal, CCTV, emergency lighting, emergency licensing and enforcement and pest control, all of which are operating at either a reduced or normal service at this time. Where possible, staff are working remotely but this is not possible for a number of environmental services, such as refuse collection. Staffing levels across environmental services remain stable, with frontline teams operating on rotation to ensure resilience in the service.
- 6.26. Refuse and recycling collections are currently taking place as normal, as are garden waste collections. Across London this has generally been the case and there is much to be proud of with the response from this workforce across the capital. We are asking residents to help ease pressure on the refuse and recycling service by trying to minimise the amount of rubbish, recycling and food waste they produce, avoiding big clear-outs while at home, which will create more rubbish and recycling for council crews to collect, continuing to wash their hands regularly, maintaining good hygiene when handling rubbish and recycling, and keeping their distance when the workers are doing their collections where they live. Throughout April 2020, the total number of fly-tipping reports received has decreased compared to April 2019. In April 2020, 2367 fly-tipping reports were received compared to 7702 in April 2019. We reopened our waste and recycling centre, albeit on an appointment only basis, on 11 May 2020, along with most of London.
- 6.27. Contractors are continuing work on highway works where possible, ensuring that social distancing measures are in place. Contractors have been advised not to begin large maintenance or improvement works however essential maintenance works may still be required to keep the network open and ensure a safe passage for road users.
- 6.28. Council Enforcement officers have been working closely with local Police to ensure that businesses across the borough that are required to close, have done so and those that are allowed to operate are following the guidance on social distancing policies. While many businesses have complied with government directives, there have been a small number of businesses initially failing to adhere to these closure regulations. We have also encountered confusion from a number of businesses as to what type of business can legitimately open under lockdown but we continue to advise businesses on the guidance. In light of the latest government update on lockdown restrictions, officers are contacting and, where appropriate, visiting businesses to reiterate the closure requirements.

Housing

- 6.29. Critical housing services are emergency repairs, critical housing safety and emergency housing provision. Housing services have adapted effectively to COVID-19, swiftly adopting new and innovative ways of working with people remotely to continue effective service delivery while ensuring the safety of service users and staff.
- 6.30. As part of the Council's response to COVID-19, housing services have been working extensively to support rough sleepers who are at particular risk during this public health crisis. This work has taken place in a coordinate way across London, and with the Greater London Assembly, and focusses on the following strands of work:

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- Supporting homeless people who are on the streets or in emergency accommodation where it is difficult to self-isolate, such as in shelters and assessment centres.
 - Making sure that there is access to facilities that enable individuals to follow public health guidance, such as en-suite facilities and no shared sleeping facilities.
 - Providing support to those accommodated to keep them protected from COVID-19.
 - Looking at resettlement and support options through needs assessments to enable more permanent offers of support.
- 6.31. Since late March 2020 there has been an increase in single homeless households seeking support, whilst there has been a decline in the number of families approaching the Council for assistance, likely as a result of the measures the government have put in place to halt evictions.
- 6.32. 100 rough sleepers have been accommodated as part of the 'everyone in' approach, 82 of which have been housed by Lewisham and 18 housed by the GLA. 17 of these rough sleepers have already been resettled by the Lewisham Rough Sleeping team. The Rough Sleeper Teams are working to undertake needs assessments to plan for resettlement and support going forward. There is also pan London work going on to ensure a coordinated approach across the capital.
- 6.33. In relation to the Private Rented Sector, new eviction claims made after 25 March will only be lawful if there is a three month notice period and all ongoing housing possession claims are suspended for 90 days. This guarantees safety from eviction for most renters for the short term. Despite this, there remains threats of eviction to residents; the service continues to work with these households, including offering mediation between landlords and tenants, and support tenants to remain in their current tenancy through discussion with the landlord. Officers have prevented 44 illegal evictions since the 30 March, and in this period there has been a focus on preventing and relieving homelessness following evictions.
- 6.34. The Council's Licensing teams continue to ensure that our residents live in homes that are safe and secure and we work with landlords to ensure that all residents living in the private rented sector have support from us and also to ensure landlords are undertaking emergency repairs.
- 6.35. Since 30 March 2020 choice based lettings of Social Housing has temporarily been suspended. Available social housing has been directly matched to emergency and urgent lets, along recommended Government guidelines. 90 matches to permanent homes have been made, and 32 homeless households with health conditions that place them at risk of COVID-19 have been moved into self-contained accommodation.
- 6.36. Lewisham Homes continues to carry out essential compliance and safety services such as fire risk and gas safety assessments. They are carrying out Fire Risks Assessments and the actions coming out of them however Gas and Electric checks have been harder to complete on individual properties due to the challenges of tenants self-isolating, but checks in communal areas continue. They have been carrying out weekly welfare checks on Sheltered Housing tenants and have called over 4,000 vulnerable residents to check on their welfare during the crisis and signpost or assist where necessary. All housing partners have been carrying out welfare checks on vulnerable and elderly residents.
- 6.37. Caretaking services have continued throughout the lockdown with reduced working hours, but with increased cleaning in high traffic areas. Lewisham Homes have only been conducting home visits for emergencies or for Anti-Social Behaviour. Evictions

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and arrears actions were suspended in advance of the government directive. Lewisham Homes have seen a significant increase in Universal Credit claims and an also in rent arrears and continue to provide support to tenants along with advice on rents.

- 6.38. The Council continues to provide critical support for our most vulnerable clients, with the housing assistance team supporting partners to install aids and adaptations to facilitate discharges from hospital or to prevent homelessness. This service has continued during lockdown to install level access showers, stair lifts and ramps in properties.

Finance

- 6.39. Critical finance services are Revenues and Benefits and Business support. The Council has taken measures to support both businesses and residents who are facing financial hardship as a result of COVID-19.

Support for residents

- 6.40. Revenues and Benefits have been working to administer a range of measures to support residents facing financial difficulties. The government issued a £3.2m hardship grant to local authorities in response to COVID-19. The Council made these funds available to individual Council Tax payers through two routes:
- 1) Grants aligned to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme
 - 2) Emergency support for residents.
- 6.41. The first is an additional grant of £150 per working age claimant of the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS). Claimants have been written to directly, and all communication channels, such as the website and resident helpline, have been updated accordingly. The Council, as agreed by [Mayor & Cabinet on 13 May](#), is preparing to deliver this support via the Council Tax system and may supplement the amount available for hardship cases if necessary in response to demand. Residents are invited to apply for CTRS where the Revenues and Benefits team are notified of a resident claiming universal credit (administered by Department for Work and Pensions).
- 6.42. The Council also runs a local support scheme designed to ensure that, in a crisis or an emergency, those residents who are most at risk and least financially able to help themselves receive access to the support they need. To supplement the local support scheme, an emergency hardship scheme has been set up by the Council to provide a one-off payment (covering the costs of essential food and fuel) for people who are facing immediate financial hardship due to COVID-19 and have no other assistance available. The payment is a grant and it does not need to be paid back. As at 18 May, 131 applications have been received in the first week of operation, of which 73 payments have been distributed and 58 applications have been unsuccessful.

Businesses

- 6.43. The impact of coronavirus on businesses has been significant. The Government has responded with a range of measures aimed at supported local businesses, many of which are administered by local authorities. Central government has turned to local authorities to deliver and support a number of new support schemes.
- 6.44. For businesses, support measures include extended business rates relief for 2020/21, grants to small businesses and those in the retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors, and a grant to support Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) – those with less than 50 employees – not covered by the initial grant arrangements.

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- 6.45. The Council has received £47m to distribute in grants of £10k or £25k to small business within certain rateable values and/or in the retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors. At 15 May the Council had assessed all those who have applied and disbursed over 2,700 grants from the 3,650 expected and over £34m (73% of the £47m received) with another 147 cases pending assessment. Work continues to actively reach out to those 818 businesses who may be eligible but have yet to apply. Unfortunately, we were not as swift at getting on top of this work as would have been preferred and we are still working hard to reach as many businesses as possible. The Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) publishes regular performance data on this and as at 11th May Lewisham was 266th out of 314 Councils.

The known and anticipated financial impact on the Council

- 6.46. The government has provided some financial support to councils to undertake additional activities in recognition of the unplanned costs they are incurring in responding to COVID-19. The Council is experiencing additional unplanned work and costs to sustain critical services. These include supporting the social care market, distributing personal protective equipment (PPE), and providing shielding support to the most vulnerable as critical services. As well as the extra work to run and support services including housing, waste, benefits, and bereavement services with higher levels of activity while also maintaining social distancing and safe working practices.
- 6.47. Lewisham has identified a potential £22.9m increase in expenditure and £26.8m loss of income. A total estimated impact for the COVID-19 response of £49.7m. Towards which, the Council has received £18.0m (or a third) in funding from the government. The Mayor has written to the prime minister urging more funding to councils in order to continue running vital services, support local people and save lives. We plan to write to the Government again to make the case on the basis of our financial position as it stands currently.
- 6.48. A more detailed paper on the financial implications of COVID-19 will be provided to Mayor and Cabinet on the 10 June 2020.

Corporate, HR and other support services critical to the COVID-19 response

- 6.49. Other services that are critical to the Council's COVID-19 response are emergency planning and response teams, customer service centre, communications, health & safety, payroll and emergency recruitment, ICT and critical public health services all of which are focused on supporting and enabling the Council's COVID-19 response and its critical services.
- 6.50. COVID-19 has required Council staff across the organisation to work very differently. Corporate support teams have been instrumental in enabling staff to adapt to new ways of working, ensuring they have the right equipment, guidance and support to fulfil their roles and support residents. Staff have been required to work in a much more flexible way, responding to need and working with agility. Many staff have volunteered to work in a new area of the Council, honing and developing new skills and learning about different service areas. There have been many positives from this new way of working and the Council's internal recovery will be focused on harnessing and embedding the benefits that have been seen throughout this period.
- 6.51. The Council's IT division has responded will to a surge in demand for IT support, adopting a new flexible working model of support to staff and rapidly deploying laptops to priority services. New technology has been effectively rolled out across the organisation to support remote working. Likewise, HR policy and guidance has been rapidly reviewed and updated to support new ways of working, guiding managers on the best way to communicate and support teams remotely.

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7. Financial implications

- 7.1. The most up to date assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on the Council's finances is the monitoring return to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) submitted on 15 May. This identifies the potential financial impact at £82.7m to the 20/21 budget - from additional costs of £22.9m and lost income of £59.8m - before applying government funding received. After applying government funding received of £33m for business rate reliefs, £18m for Council services, and assuming (although still to be confirmed by government) the remaining estimated Collection Fund lost income of £11.5m is met by government once the full impact becomes clear, the outstanding financial gap for the Council is currently estimated at £20.2m. This represents all of the unallocated reserves the Council holds of £20m.
- 7.2. This is the current position with the recovery and longer term impacts to the budget still to be assessed and funded. The Council continues to make the case and claim support for these financial impacts from the government as the cost of responding to COVID-19.
- 7.3. However, if further government support is not made available any unfunded costs or lost income will fall to the Council's reserves. This is because, while the actions consistent with the services agreed in the budget, the scale of their impact is over and above the budgets set for the year. At the present time, noting the estimated cost to the Council and the government's financial support to date as set out above, the s151 officer confirms the Council has sufficient reserves to support the recommendations in this report. Any significant extension of the duration or scale of impact of the Covid response could change this assessment. Updates will therefore need to be brought back as part of further financial updates for Members' decisions. This is discussed further in the Mayor and Cabinet report for 10 June.

8. Legal implications

- 8.1. The Coronavirus Act 2020 received Royal Assent on 25th March this year. It gives the Government emergency powers to combat the COVID 19 pandemic. The provisions of the Act are time-limited for two years, though this period may be shortened by ministerial direction. In addition the Act is subject to Parliamentary review every 6 months.
- 8.2. The Act enables the Government to restrict or prohibit public gatherings, control or suspend public transport, order businesses such as shops and restaurants to close, temporarily detain people suspected of COVID-19 infection, suspend the operation of ports and airports, enrol medical students and retired healthcare workers in the health services, relax regulations to ease the burden on healthcare services, and assume control of death management in particular local areas.
- 8.3. Many of its provisions are specific to local government. For example the Act temporarily suspends local authorities' legal duty to meet the care needs of all people who are eligible under the Care Act 2014. Instead, councils will have a duty to provide care only if necessary to avoid breaching a person's rights under the Convention of Human Rights (ECHR). However as set out in the report, the Council has not sought to rely on any of the easements to the Care Act allowed in the Coronavirus Act.
- 8.4. The Act also makes provisions for elections and annual general meetings to be deferred and for council meetings to be held remotely.
- 8.5. A number of directions have been made to legislative provisions using the Coronavirus provisions. For example, the Secretary of State issued a direction on 31 March 2020 to Ofqual about the calculation of students' GCSE, AS and A level results and on 9 April in respect of technical qualifications though many of the government's intentions for

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local government have been expressed through non statutory guidance. Whilst having no statutory force, the Council would be well advised to have regard to this guidance, and only departing from it with good reason, particularly bearing in mind that the Secretary of State retains the power to issue directions if necessary.

- 8.6. Under Section 17 Crime and disorder Act 1998 the Council has a duty in the exercise of its functions to consider the impact of all their functions and decisions on crime and disorder in their local area.
- 8.7. Section 12 of the Health and Social Care Act inserted a new section 2B into the NHS Act 2006 to give a local authority a new duty to take such steps as it considers appropriate to improve the health of the people in its area. The steps in this report are consistent with that duty.
- 8.8. Under S3 Local Government Act, 1999 the Council must make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. This duty remains even in these exceptional circumstances.

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1. There is emerging evidence that suggests a disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on groups with protected characteristics. National research shows there are significant health inequalities affecting Black African and Caribbean communities, which are perpetuated by inequalities in the wider determinants of health such as housing, employment and education. These have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and may underpin some of the excess deaths in these populations.
- 9.2. Lewisham Council and Birmingham City Council are partnering to conduct a review gather insights on health inequalities within Black African and Caribbean communities in Birmingham and Lewisham asking 'how do we break the cycle of inequality?'. The Council has also submitted evidence to the Women and Equalities Committee about the different and disproportionate impact that the Coronavirus – and measures to tackle it – is having on people with the protected characteristics under the Equality Act. The Council plans to supplement this work with an extensive impact assessment of COVID-19 on the borough, with a focus on those with protected characteristics.
- 9.3. The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) introduced a public sector equality duty (the equality duty or the duty). It covers the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 9.4. In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
 - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
 - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
 - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- 9.5. It is not an absolute requirement to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct, or to promote equality of opportunity or foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. It is a duty to have due regard to the need to achieve the goals listed in the paragraph above.
- 9.6. The weight to be attached to the duty will be dependent on the nature of the decision

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and the circumstances in which it is made. This is a matter for members, bearing in mind the issues of relevance and proportionality. They must understand the impact or likely impact of the decision on those with protected characteristics who are potentially affected by the decision. The extent of the duty will necessarily vary from case to case and due regard is such regard as is appropriate in all the circumstances.

9.7. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has issued Technical Guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty and statutory guidance entitled “Equality Act 2010 Services, Public Functions & Associations Statutory Code of Practice”. The Council must have regard to the statutory code in so far as it relates to the duty and attention is drawn to Chapter 11 which deals particularly with the equality duty. The Technical Guidance also covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty. This includes steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The guidance does not have statutory force but nonetheless regard should be had to it, as failure to do so without compelling reason would be of evidential value. The statutory code and the technical guidance can be found at:

- <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/equality-act-codes-practice>
- <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/equality-act-technical-guidance>

9.8. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has previously issued five guides for public authorities in England giving advice on the equality duty:

- The essential guide to the public sector equality duty
- Meeting the equality duty in policy and decision-making
- Engagement and the equality duty: A guide for public authorities
- Objectives and the equality duty. A guide for public authorities
- Equality Information and the Equality Duty: A Guide for Public Authorities

9.9. The essential guide provides an overview of the equality duty requirements

- The essential guide to the public sector equality duty
- Meeting the equality duty in policy and decision-making
- Engagement and the equality duty
- Equality objectives and the equality duty
- Equality information and the equality duty

9.10. The essential guide provides an overview of the equality duty requirement including the general equality duty, the specific duties and who they apply to. It covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty including steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The other four documents provide more detailed guidance on key areas and advice on good practice. Further information and resources are available at:

- <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty-guidance>

10. Climate change and environmental implications

10.1. There are no direct climate change and environmental implications arising from this report.

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11. Crime and disorder implications

11.1. There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

12. Health and wellbeing implications

12.1. There are no direct health and wellbeing implications arising from this report, however it should be acknowledged that COVID-19 presents a serious threat to the health and wellbeing of Lewisham's residents, as it does across the world. The Council's response and recovery objectives are rooted in promoting good public health and safety for Lewisham's residents.

13. Background papers

13.1. [Overview and Scrutiny Committee 5 May 2020 - Scrutiny of the Council's COVID-19 Response](#)

14. Glossary

Term	Definition
Council Gold	A gold/silver/bronze command structure is a hierarchy used by the emergency services and other public sector organisations (including local authorities) to manage the response to major incidents. Gold command is responsible for formulating a strategy for dealing with the incident and has overall control of resources.
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. The two main symptoms of COVID-19 are a high temperature and a new, persistent cough, but people
Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel	<p>Lewisham has two Business Panels (sub-committees of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee).</p> <p>Overview & Scrutiny Business Panel is made up of the chair and vice-chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the chair of each of the Select Committees, and two other non-Executive councillors.</p> <p>The main functions of Business Panel are reviewing key decisions once they have been taken (potentially "calling in" key decisions that have been made but not yet implemented); coordinating and approving the overall scrutiny work programme; and allocating scrutiny work in the event that it crosses the remit of more than one scrutiny body.</p> <p>Three parent governors and two diocesan representatives sit on the Education Business Panel, alongside the councillors that make up the regular Business Panel. The Education Business Panel reviews.</p>

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Term	Definition
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	PPE is equipment that will protect the user against health or safety risks at work. It can include items such as safety helmets, gloves, eye protection, high-visibility clothing, safety footwear and safety harnesses. It also includes respiratory protective equipment (RPE).
Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)	The MASH provides a single point of access to advice, information and support services for professionals working with vulnerable and at-risk children and young people.

15. Report author and contact

- 15.1. If there are any queries about this report, please contact Charlotte Parish, Principal Officer – Policy, Service Design and Analysis, by phone (020 8314 6101) or by email charlotte.parish@lewisham.gov.uk.

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