

SUBJECT	COVID19 – CITY OF LINCOLN COUNCIL POSITION STATEMENT
DIRECTORATE:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update Council on the current position with service delivery in response to the COVID 19 pandemic and future ongoing planning.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The key Priorities during the emerging crisis for the City of Lincoln Council were agreed in early March 2020 as:

- 2.2
- protect the most vulnerable in our city
 - Supporting Businesses
 - deliver our public protection/health and statutory responsibilities if we can
 - protect our staff and elected members
 - provide community leadership to our residents and businesses

- 2.3 As a Council we identified business-critical services which will ensure the delivery of the above and these are

- Homelessness/rough sleeping
- Sheltered accommodation
- Lincare
- Emergency Repairs
- Customer Services
- Communications
- Revenues and Benefits
- Bereavement Services
- CCTV
- Parking
- Refuse Collection/Street Cleansing
- Food Safety/Enforcement

We have utilised the capacity we have available in our workforce to try and continue to deliver these in some form and provide resilience. In addition, as part of our Community Leadership role we have created new teams to support the community (a new befriending service and community helpline) and a business support service (ensuring grants are paid and appropriate advice is given)

We have undertaken a financial impact assessment of the implications of the emergency together with a forecast – the shortfall in income and increase in expenditure is significant. We have submitted our forecasts to government, to the Local Government Association and to other lobbying bodies to ensure that any new resources released by government are allocated appropriately to all tiers of local government.

3. Background

3.1 As the COVID 19 emergency began to emerge the City Council began to implement its business continuity plan. As the guidance and situation changed on a daily basis, the staffing and service delivery had to respond to the changing situation. Priorities were agreed as:

- protect the most vulnerable in our city
- Supporting Businesses
- deliver our public protection/health and statutory responsibilities if we can
- protect our staff and elected members
- provide community leadership to our residents and businesses

3.2 Over the course of a week in mid March, normal service delivery across all services moved to, limited face to face, vulnerable staff being sent home, new technological solutions being developed, new risk assessments being undertaken, and then on to the current operating model of over 400 staff being given the capability to work and take calls from home. Many staff have been retrained and refocused on critical service delivery. Others have provided essential support to ensure businesses have been paid grants, invoices have been paid, advice has been given and the most vulnerable in our City have been supported through our new Community helpline and befriending service.

3.3 In addition, the City Council is a partner of the Lincolnshire Resilience Forum provides capacity and support to this partnership 7 days a week assisting in a coordinated county wide response.

4. Critical Services

4.1 As part of the Council's business continuity arrangements detailed plans were already in place to operate in emergency situations – due to the nature of this particular emergency these plans were reprioritised and refocused. Attached at Appendix A is an overview of the current operational situation with Council Services.

Service Delivery

4.2 Although the door at City Hall has closed, we are still very much open for business. Our customer services team are working from home to deal with a heightened number of enquires with many more teams delivering critical services from home.

- 4.3 All our waste services are currently operating as normal. Although with more people at home we are experiencing some access issues due to parked cars on some streets. In addition, with more people at home, household waste has also increased so we are advising residents to think about how they use their bins.
- 4.4 The “rent free” two weeks for tenants which are normally during the Christmas period were brought forward to the first two weeks of this month. In addition, we have set up a hardship fund, using Housing Revenue Account money, to help tenants who cannot pay their rent.
- 4.5 Our tenants’ gas checks and emergency repairs are still going ahead with strict social distancing and handwashing measures in place. Our staff have and use PPE where required and we ask all callers if they are shielding to better inform their requirements prior to visiting.
- 4.6 A Discretionary Housing Payment is available to those receiving Universal Credit and we are offering help to those who are struggling in paying council tax.
- 4.7 Homelessness is a continuing issue. We followed the directive from Central Government to provide a bed space for all our rough sleepers under the “everyone in” campaign. Initially there were 17 individuals who were provided with accommodation. Many of these people have very complex needs and although they have been given support, they have not all remained at their allotted accommodation which has created some difficulties. We have been working closely with other agencies including the YMCA, P3 and Framework. Some of these providers have made arrangements for self-isolating. For example; the YMCA has created a number of units for rough sleepers who need to self-isolate.
- 4.8 The work to bring void properties back into use has been prioritised for use with the homeless. We are only dealing with the highest priority allocations and all other allocations applications are on hold. We are also working with a number of private sector landlords to increase the supply of temporary accommodation.
- 4.9 Lincare which operates for vulnerable people signed up to the lifeline service as well as being the call centre for the County Wellbeing Service and our Out of Hours call centre, continues to be fully operational. This is a critical 24/7 service and we have trained additional staff to cover when required and have set up a system that enables remote working.
- 4.10 To comply with Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (England) Regulations, we have currently enacted a number of changes in Bereavement Services which limits the numbers that attend funerals, and they must follow the social distancing rules and not attend if they show symptoms. The reception room and Book of Remembrance at Lincoln Crematorium is closed until further notice and entries but can be viewed online at: Lincoln.bookofremembrance.uk. Our cemeteries in the city will remain open but social distancing rules apply.

Business Support

- 4.11 The government announced a £330 billion package of measures to support business and we've been following their guidance to implement this locally.

We have been delivering £10,000 cash grants to our small businesses and £25,000 grants to retail, hospitality and leisure businesses and collating information from all eligible businesses to ensure no one misses out on this payment. To date, £15.12 million has been released to 1,218 local businesses, with more payments to come.

Community Support

- 4.12 A community help phone line and email have been quickly created and staffed by redeployed staff to provide signposting support to those who needed help but aren't sure on where to turn. In four weeks, the team has received more than 500 calls, the majority of which have resulted in signposting to community support and referrals to foodbanks.
- 4.13 We have supported the Food in School Holidays Project (FiSH) to help children who would normally receive free school meals access food vouchers during the Easter holidays.
- 4.14 A digital map has also been set up to signpost people to support closest to their location and community groups can add their own details and services they can offer.
- 4.15 As well as a community help line to help those with physical needs, protecting the social and emotional wellbeing of those who may be vulnerable, or isolating has been deemed an essential priority.
- 4.16 We have written to approximately 12,000 people and called 2,500 to ask if they would like regular conversations with a chatty council worker to help prevent feelings of loneliness. The service also helps our own staff with socialisation benefits who may also be missing social contact while working from home.
- 4.17 Referrals for befriending are also being made through the community help line, with one worried daughter even calling from Australia with concerns about her elderly mother in Lincoln. The community help team were able to make contact and arrange a food delivery and pass along her details to the befriending service for regular light-hearted chats.

Recovery Plans

- 4.18 Plans are currently being developed within the Council in relation to recovery. Using the learning and transformation from this Emergency situation to create a new normal for how we operate as a Council moving forward.
- 4.19 In relation to the Economic recovery of the City and wider County we are part of a team working within the LRF shaping the required workstreams and developing programmes and interventions together with 'asks' of government.

5. Financial Impacts

- 5.1 It is clear that COVID19 is taking its toll on the financial resilience of the City of Lincoln Council as income streams are reducing, debt recovery is being deferred and there is a growing necessity to incur costs to ensure services are being provided throughout this difficult period.
- 5.2 Although the Government has been responsive and brought a series of financial packages of support for businesses and the wider community the same commitment of financial support to Council's, specifically Districts, to recompense them for directly related financial losses has not been as forthcoming. Whilst the financial support from Government received to date is to be welcomed, as the allocation of this was primarily targeted to social care pressures with the balance distributed using the SFA methodology this has resulted in District Councils receiving insignificant amounts. The Council's own allocation was £67k which only covers approx. one week of lost carparking income. A further announcement was made on 18th April and at time of writing this is still to be allocated to local authorities
- 5.3 Further financial support from Government would ensure that unbudgeted costs and reducing income levels do not have a longer term detrimental impact on the Council, resulting in service reductions in subsequent years.

6. Recommendation

- 6.1 Council notes the position statement.

Is this a key decision? No

Do the exempt information categories apply? No

Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply? No

How many appendices does the report contain? One

List of Background Papers: Appendix A - Service Status sheet

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