

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

COVID-19 RESPONSE: LEARNING, SKILLS & CULTURE

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

1.1. Within the context of the national restrictions announced on 4 January 2021, cabinet is asked to:

- a) note and endorse the changes made to community functions in accordance with the scheme of officer delegations
- b) approve the continued prioritisation of functions that are permissible within national guidance that contribute to the health and wellbeing of residents, specifically: access to open spaces, measures to support digital inclusion, access to literature through 'click and collect', a digital offer for adult learning, sport, leisure and culture functions and the development of Community Champions
- c) approve the intelligence-led, community-first approach to enabling people who are clinically extremely vulnerable to self-isolate and remain socially connected
- d) note and endorse the priorities for education and the principle-based approach to responding to national guidance within the education sector

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 The council's approach to business continuity in response to the Covid-19 outbreak and actions taken to implement government guidelines have been rooted in the values, principles and ambitions of the council plan, and furthered through the strong partnerships within North Lincolnshire, framed under the following priorities:

- keeping people and our staff safe and well
- protecting the local economy
- enabling communities to remain resilient
- protecting the most vulnerable

At the same time, good governance and sound financial practice has been maintained across the Council.

- 2.2 National advice and guidance has been incorporated into the local response as it has become available. The most recent national restrictions were announced on 4 January 2021 and The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 3) and (All Tiers) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 came into force on 6 January 2021.

Community functions

- 2.3 In contrast to the first period of national restrictions of March 2020, the new restrictions afforded more opportunities for the council to continue an offer to residents in support of health and wellbeing. Specifically, access to open spaces, measures to support digital inclusion and access to literature through 'click and collect' is permitted. While community facilities across adult learning, sport, leisure and culture functions were directed to close, a digital offer is facilitating some continuity in the community offer. Council facilities and working arrangements remain Covid-secure, allowing functionality permitted by national guidance to support the health and wellbeing of residents.
- 2.4 Upper tier councils were also required to make arrangements for residents who are clinically extremely vulnerable and without support to access food, medicine and other basic needs. The local enabling approach builds on the experience of shielding during the first period of national restrictions (previously reported), the period of national restrictions in November 2020 and the subsequent requirements on North Lincolnshire as a 'tier 3' area. During this time, the council has enhanced its handling of data and intelligence to identify and support those people who may be most vulnerable. Partnership working with the voluntary and community sector has been further strengthened, enabling a 'community-first' response to ensuring people stay safe, well and connected throughout the period of national restriction.
- 2.5 North Lincolnshire Community Champions were recruited from December to enhance the understanding of public health messages within communities as the pandemic develops. Community Champions receive up to date information regarding Covid-19 on a weekly basis, along with ideas on how to support people within their communities who may be more vulnerable at this time. In return, Community Champions inform the council about what is working and what more might be done to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Post-Covid, Community Champions will evolve to add value to the council's priority for enabling resilient and flourishing communities.
- 2.6 Following a successful bid to government by the council and voluntary and community sector partners, a grant of £397K has been awarded to broaden and enhance the North Lincolnshire Community Champions approach. The grant is to support a range of interventions with residents who are most at risk of Covid-19, helping to build trust and empower at-risk groups to protect themselves and their families,

including residents of ethnically diverse communities. For specialist support, the North Lincolnshire approach prioritises extending reach to, people with a disability, those experiencing homelessness, drug and alcohol addiction, mental health conditions and sex workers.

- 2.7 Joint commissioning arrangements between the council and the CCG have been created to enable the recruitment, brokerage and development of volunteering across North Lincolnshire, led by the voluntary and community sector alliance. The partnership is also enabling the alliance as a place leader for supporting the sector to further strengthen and increase their capacity.
- 2.8 With a range of community services being suspended or moved to alternative means of delivery, staff are once again being deployed to support the council's priorities and meeting the requirements to support clinically extremely vulnerable residents.

Education functions

- 2.9 From the onset of national restrictions in March 2020, schools, colleges and settings have played an important role in ensuring that children and young people are safe and well and sustain a sense of connectivity to their peers and teachers. Across North Lincolnshire, there are many examples of the contribution made to the wider community by schools and settings, and leaders have been diligent in supporting public health intelligence and outbreak management. As a result, despite periods of disruption, most schools, colleges and settings have remained open for most children and young people for most of the time that they have been permitted to.
- 2.10 National guidance continues to be issued as policy evolves in response to the pandemic, notably in aspects such as lateral flow testing, remote learning, support for vulnerable children and access to free school meals.
- 2.11 the council response continues to prioritise:
- enabling leadership of settings to support the prevention of Covid-19, including contributing to public health intelligence and managing outbreaks
 - coordinating and overseeing school and setting responses to national guidance and requirements relating to Covid-19
 - ensuring access to settings, including admission and transport duties
 - sustaining SEND functionality
 - supporting vulnerable children and their families to access their learning and broader entitlements, including free school meals
 - ensuring sufficiency of childcare places for critical workers
 - ensuring stability in leadership across the education sector
 - enabling trainee teachers to complete their qualification

2.12 In the role of facilitator and enabler, the council has worked closely with the local managerial associations and trades unions to ensure that responses have been timely, joined up and focused on the priorities of the moment. Informed by local context, the local authority has advocated for children and setting leaders through the regional and national structures.

2.13 The North Lincolnshire education response throughout the pandemic has been guided by a principled approach. Going forward, this mean that the local system for education will continue:

1. being informed by local public health intelligence when responding to national guidance
2. supporting leaders to implement national advice and guidance and to enact local prevention and outbreak management responses
3. trusting headteachers and principals, working with their governors and trusts where applicable, to make sound decisions for each school based on their deep knowledge of children's needs, communities, staff and school facilities
4. prioritising the wellbeing and learning of vulnerable children and children of critical workers
5. implementing our one family approach during Covid, realigning resources in support of vulnerable children, families and schools

A principled approach has effectively steered the local system through the phases of the pandemic and as policy has evolved.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Within the context of the national restrictions announced on 4 January 2021, the cabinet is asked to:

- a) **note and endorse the changes made to community functions in accordance with the scheme of officer delegations**
- b) **approve the continued prioritisation of functions that are permissible within national guidance that contribute to the health and wellbeing of residents, specifically: access to open spaces, measures to support digital inclusion, access to literature through 'click and collect', a digital offer for adult learning, sport, leisure and culture functions and the development of Community Champions**
- c) **approve the intelligence-led, community-first approach to enabling people who are clinically extremely vulnerable to self-isolate and remain socially connected**

d) note and endorse the priorities for education and the principle-based approach to responding to national guidance within the education sector

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 4.1 Cabinet members noting officer decisions is an act of transparency and supports democratic oversight in a fast-moving policy environment.
- 4.2 The proposed prioritisation and digital provision allows the council to contribute so far as is possible to the health and wellbeing of residents, while adhering to the national requirements at this time. The continuation of adult learning supports contract value being achieved and, moreover, supports residents in their future opportunities.
- 4.3 The intelligence-led, community-first approach to the requirements for supporting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable is consistent with the council's values. The approach enables vulnerable residents to feel connected and to be connected within the places that they live, creating a legacy of community resilience to sustain beyond the pandemic.
- 4.4 Sustaining a partnership approach to enabling the education sector throughout the pandemic is informing a system wide response, while the principled approach is enabling leaders to make confident decisions for their school, college or setting based on their own context and responsibilities.

5. FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (e.g. LEGAL, HR, PROPERTY, IT, COMMUNICATIONS etc.)

- 5.1 The reallocation of staffing is consistent with the policies of the Council, including the policy for the deployment of staff in emergency situations.
- 5.2 Sufficient staff time for maintaining specialist site-specific community functions has been retained so that sites remain safe during the suspension of service and commercially viable once public restrictions are lifted.
- 5.3 Currently offset by Covid-related grants, commercial income assumed within the council's budget for 2020/21 will not be realised e.g., suspension of membership fees across leisure and lost income from events.
- 5.4 Changes to community functions have been communicated through the usual channels of the council and directly to individual service users where possible.

6. OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS (e.g. CRIME AND DISORDER, EQUALITIES, COUNCIL PLAN, ENVIRONMENTAL, RISK etc.)

6.1 Resumption of community functions will be dependent on lifting of national restrictions. To ensure sustainable operating conditions, priority will be given to bringing the commercial offer back on stream. Secondary will be making a community offer through the six community hubs at Ashby-Riddings, Barton, Brigg, Crowle, Epworth and Scunthorpe Central. Finally, the wider offer will be determined by community capacity to adopt functions important to their communities. E.g. the resumption of community run libraries.

7. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

7.1 N/A – responses are as a consequence of national direction.

8. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED

8.1 The local approaches outlined in this report are informed by ongoing discussion with leaders across schools, settings and colleges, their managerial association representatives and trades unions representatives and through partnership arrangements with the voluntary and community sectors.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Within the context of the national restrictions announced on 4 January 2021, the cabinet is asked to:

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report: None