

Report to the Council

Committee: Council

Date: 29 April 2021

Subject: Commercial and Regulatory Portfolio – Covid19 Responsibility

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Aniket Patel

Recommending:

That the report of the Commercial and Regulatory Portfolio Holder be noted in relation to Covid19.

The vaccination programme is progressing in accordance with the Government timetable and, thus far, new infection numbers remain low. Pressure on the NHS has significantly decreased from its peak just after Christmas, and some normality is beginning to return with the gradual easing of lockdown restrictions.

The Leisure centres reopened, with some restrictions, along with high streets and licensed premises on the 12th April, so there has been a shift in the Council's focus over the past few weeks back to enforcement and monitoring activity.

Our Environmental Health Team are actively reinforcing the Government's core messages, provide guidance and enforcing legislation both within the resident community and the business community. To ensure a smooth reopening of licensed premises and High Streets we have stepped up the use of Parkguard and contract support to provide additional presence in the District's larger town centres, visiting all licensed premises and businesses providing reassurance and advice. We also continue to work with the City of London to manage the safe use of the Forest.

Testing has become easier with the Government making Lateral Flow Tests widely available and free to all. Testing stations which focus on providing this testing method are gradually being closed with the emphasis shifting to home or workplace testing.

The Council's Revenues and Benefit services remains under pressure to distribute the various grant streams being made available by the Government and supplemented by Essex County Council. The Team still have a very high workload signposting businesses, receiving applications, assessing applications and making payments. They are also responsible for making Government support payments to those on low incomes who are required to self-isolate. Finally, they are helping to award business assistance grants from a funding allocation provided by Essex County.

Communications – We have continued to amplify the Government and Essex County Council's communication messages to our residents using all mechanisms available. The core message now being that whilst the number of infections is reducing and restrictions are easing, people should remain vigilant and abide by the Hands, Face, Space guidance.

In respect of service delivery, most services continue to operate, more or less normally, with some adjustment to ensure safety. Considerable attention is currently being directed to the elections with officers focusing on arrangements for safely running polling stations across the district, the receiving and counting of postal votes and for the safe verification and counting of votes after the Polling Stations close.

We will continue to watch how the public and businesses react to the easing of restrictions and adapt the actions of the Council accordingly.

Covid19 continues to have a financial cost and a negative impact on income for the Council. This has been reflected in the Council's financial plans for 2021/22 but officers will continue to closely monitor the actual costs and report these to members as part of its regular reporting.