

Extraordinary Council

21 May 2020



Title	Emergency Response to COVID-19		
Purpose of the report	To make a decision		
Report Author	Management Team & Group Heads (V-BEC)		
		Confidential	No
Recommendations	That the Council: 1) Notes the Council's emergency response to COVID-19 as set out in the attached report of V-BEC; 2) Notes the initial assessment of the impact on Spelthorne Borough Council's short term financial position; 3) Approves a revenue supplementary estimate of £4.5 million to be funded from useable revenue reserves, such funding to be drawn down only if further government support is not forthcoming or is insufficient to cover the financial impact of COVID-19 on the Council and sufficient cost savings cannot be found; 4) Approves the absence from attendance at meetings from 20 February 2020 until the date of the Annual Council Meeting of any member to which the six months' rule would otherwise apply; 5) That the Annual Council Meeting be held on a suitably convenient date as soon as practicable.		
Reason for Recommendation	To note Spelthorne Borough Council's emergency response to COVID-19 and address financial impacts. To address the statutory six month rule To make a decision on the holding of the Annual Council		

1. Key issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out the Council's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- 1.2 The attached report of the Council's V-BEC sets out in detail the actions taken to date, as the pandemic has unfolded across the country.
- 1.3 Many of the actions taken so far have involved incurring expenditure which was not included in the 2020-21 Budget approved at the Council Meeting on

27 February 2020, and therefore a number of recommendations are made as a consequence. The detail of the financial issues is set out in full in the V-BEC Report.

- 1.4 Of great impact financially has been the drop in income for services since the COVID-19 lockdown began. The combined effect of additional expenditure on the emergency response and reduced income means the Council is facing a significant financial shortfall on its Budget for 2020-21.
- 1.5 Spelthorne Borough Council has continued to deliver critical front line services to assist the vulnerable within the community, whilst also maintaining other services for the public, such as environmental health, planning and building control services and its full range of refuse collection and recycling services. In order to do so, the Council has been required to utilise its workforce to their maximum capacity, redeploying a considerable number of staff where necessary to cover frontline duties.
- 1.6 The delivery of all services has been in accordance with Guidance from Central Government and Public Health England on the very many issues that have occurred as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- 1.7 The Council has supported the staff throughout this response in many ways, including those redeployed. New policies and guidance have been rapidly developed to deal with issues such as annual leave, taking breaks and mental health support. Staff have been affected directly and indirectly by COVID-19, and again the Council has always taken into account the latest government guidance on employment matters.
- 1.8 The V-BEC Report sets out key data, which is correct at the time of publication. However, members will be updated at the meeting where this has changed.
- 1.9 Full details of all these issues are set out in the V-BEC Report.

2. Application of six month rule

- 2.1 Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 states:
 - (1) Subject to subsections (2) and (3) below, if a member of a local authority fails throughout a period of six consecutive months from the date of his last attendance to attend any meeting of the authority, he shall, unless the failure was due to some reason approved by the authority before the expiry of the period, cease to be a member of that authority.
 - (2) Attendance as a member at a meeting of any committee or subcommittee of the authority, or at a meeting of any joint committee, joint board or other body by whom for the time being any functions of the authority are being discharged, or who were appointed to advise the authority on any matter relating to the discharge of their functions, and attendance as representative of the authority at a meeting of any body of persons shall be deemed to be attendance at a meeting of the authority.
- 2.2 The Coronavirus Act 2020 did not change this provision. However, attendance of remote meetings does now count as attendance for the purposes of this rule.

- 2.3 Due to the current COVID-19 crisis, the Council's Management Team, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer, made the decision on 23 April 2020 that as a general guide a matter will only be considered as urgent if it cannot be dealt with under the scheme of delegation and it is highly likely to have a significant impact on:
- a) The health of the residents of the borough;
 - b) The statutory obligations of the Council;
 - c) The financial stability of the Council; or
 - d) The financial health of local businesses and/or the local economy.
- 2.4 As a result of this decision, councillors have limited opportunities to fulfil the requirement to attend at least one meeting of the authority in a period of six consecutive months. This is especially the case for those councillors who do not have a seat on any of the Committees.
- 2.5 As it is not known when the normal schedule of meetings might resume, it is proposed that Council approves the absence from meetings of any councillor to whom the six months' rule would otherwise apply, for the period from 20 February 2020 until the date of the Annual Council meeting in 2020.

3. Annual Council Meeting

- 3.1 The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panel (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) Regulations 2020 have ensured that that councils have flexibility in organising meetings. The Regulations also provide that appointments normally made at an annual meeting may be continued until the next annual meeting or until such time as the authority determines. The election of the Mayor may be carried out at a remote meeting.
- 3.2 All councillors were consulted on the options regarding the holding of the Annual Council Meeting in order to elect the Mayor and Deputy Mayor for the remainder of the municipal year, until May 2021. There are three basic options:
- To hold a meeting soon;
 - To hold a meeting in the autumn; or
 - To not hold an Annual Council Meeting until May 2021.
- 3.3 The majority of responses received indicated that the preference would be to hold an Annual Council Meeting as soon as practicable, allowing time to make the necessary preparations for a meeting to take place without the usual ceremony.

4. Equality and Diversity

- 4.1 COVID-19 creates a specific issue for our most vulnerable residents, particularly those over the age of 70 and with underlying health conditions. To ensure these residents are not significantly adversely affected and to ensure we are carrying out our duties under the Equalities Act, we have provided welfare calls, support and food parcels to these groups.

5. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

- 5.1 The immediate priority remains the current COVID-19 crisis, though increasingly consideration is being given to the recovery phases. The UK has seen significant decreases in air pollution in recent weeks due to transport use reducing as the public has followed government guidance to stay at home to slow the spread of the virus. If, following recovery from the current COVID-19 crisis, staff were to be encouraged to work at home more regularly, there could be an ongoing drop in emissions relating to the Council's activities, which could have positive health benefits on the Borough's residents.

Background papers: There are none.

Appendices: Report of V-BEC