

Extraordinary Council Report 21 May 2020

Spelthorne Borough Council; A borough-wide response to the COVID-19 crisis



Coronavirus - Spelthorne's response so far...



13,314 welfare calls, visits and email checks to vulnerable residents



working with food banks distributing **123,276** meals since the crisis began

delivery of prescriptions to over **302** households



working with the **NHS** to ensure patients have support

community helpline open 7 days a week; making over

220 checks per day



13 local rough sleepers placed into accommodation

Partnerships with Voluntary Support North Surrey



Support4Spelthorne community hub



financial and equipment

assistance to food banks and community groups



1,256 tonnes of waste and recycling has been collected (per week)



413 fly tips cleared

parks, cemeteries and streets staying open, clean and safe



free parking for NHS/Police and social care staff



£11.29m paid out in business grants



financial help and advice to residents



over **902** Covid19 business compliance checks



advice and information on website and social media

302,000 page views
103,000 content clicks (April 2020)



905 meals-on-wheels delivered weekly

Introduction



From the very start of this national emergency, we have sought to act quickly in implementing measures to safeguard life. From placing the Borough on an emergency footing on 13 March 2020, closing our offices and community centres, and introducing remote working, we have striven to do whatever it takes to help protect the welfare of colleagues and communities from the profound impact of coronavirus.

This pandemic has generated a shock on a scale never seen before. The severity of impact has been unprecedented and has generated a set of challenges in relation to health and wellbeing, communities, civic society, public services and the economy. This report is a testimony to the truly inspirational commitment of staff across the Council working in support our communities and businesses to overcome such challenges.

This Council currently remains on an emergency footing, with our priority focused on urgent actions within an immediate operational time-frame. Staff, across all ranks have now been engaged for over 60 consecutive days, with front-line and redeployed staff working extra-long days, into the evenings and on bank holidays and weekends, serving the most vulnerable in our society.

Whilst our corporate capacity remains stretched and there remains great uncertainty regarding the short-term outlook, some early considerations of potential recovery phases have commenced. Until a vaccine is widely available, there is unlikely to be a single moment when the risk is fully eliminated and the crisis is truly over. Everything points towards a considerable adjustment period ahead, for the nation and its public services.

Whilst we all feel the profound impact of coronavirus, not just on ourselves, but on our loved ones and our communities, we also have a great deal to be thankful for. For the dedication and professionalism of hundreds of essential workers from this Borough, I want to place on record my personal thanks and heartfelt appreciation to all my fellow colleagues who have worked flat-out throughout this emergency to safeguard our most vulnerable and to maintain the public services our communities rely on.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Daniel Charles Mouawad', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Daniel Charles Mouawad – Chief Executive

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

What is Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)?

(Based on information taken from the World Health Organisation [WHO], UK Government websites and local statistics for Surrey)

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus.

Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness.

The WHO advises that the best way to prevent and slow down transmission is to be well informed about the COVID-19 virus, the disease it causes and how it spreads and for people to protect themselves and others from infection by washing their hands or using an alcohol based rub frequently and not touching their face.

As the COVID-19 virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes, it is important that people also practice respiratory etiquette (for example, by coughing into a flexed elbow).

At this time, there are no specific vaccines or treatments for COVID-19. However, there are many ongoing clinical trials evaluating potential treatments.

The first case of COVID-19 in the UK was identified on 31 January 2020 with the first case confirmed in Surrey identified on 28 February 2020. Since then the virus has seen a rapid spread throughout communities all over the country, putting extreme pressure on the NHS and other public services and causing a significant number of excess deaths. The Prime Minister rightly described this as the worst public health crisis for a generation.

The threat posed by COVID-19 prompted the Government to ramp-up up measures to tackle the virus in the UK using a phased approach; designed firstly to stop the virus spreading across the UK for as long as possible (control phase); and then to slow the spread of the virus (delay phase) with the aim of pushing the worst of the outbreak away from the winter period, to avoid overwhelming health services at a time of the year when they usually face increased numbers of people in hospital with normal respiratory illnesses.

Figures from the Office of National Statistics indicate that the number of reported deaths in Surrey involving COVID-19 were 794 up to 1 May 2020.

Appendix A provides a summary timeline outlining some of the national/international actions to control the virus and Spelthorne's response over the same timeframe.

2. PREPARING THE COUNCIL FOR ALTERNATIVE DELIVERY OF SERVICES

Need for urgent Council response

The Borough Council provides a wide range of key services which are essential to protect public health/safety and the local environment. In view of the rapidly developing situation with COVID-19 and the imminent likelihood of social restrictions in the UK, it was necessary for the Council to take urgent measures to ensure that it could:

- a. Keep essential council services going – maintaining ‘business as usual’ as far as possible
- b. Respond to any urgent need for community support; whilst also
- c. Having to cope with a potentially diminishing workforce through increased cases of COVID-19 infection plus those required to socially isolate

Although the Council had a Business Continuity Plan for a possible pandemic situation developing in the UK, nothing could fully prepare the authority for significant effects COVID-19, and the associated lockdown implemented in the country, could have on our communities and the Council’s ability to deliver services.

As concern started to grow over the likely spread of the virus around the world the Council set up a COVID-19 working group, which was reporting weekly to the Management Team. As the threat to the UK became greater, an early decision was made to implement the Council’s Borough Emergency Centre, but to run this on a virtual basis as far as possible (referred to as V-BEC). Members of the V-BEC include the Council’s Management Team, Group Heads, the Deputy Group Head for Commissioning and Transformation and other senior managers from Communications, Environmental Health, Building Control and Customer Services.

Spelthorne Borough Council is a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, which sets out the legislative framework for responding to emergencies such as COVID-19. This means that the Council has a vitally important role in responding to the pandemic at a local level. As part of the Surrey Local Resilience Forum (SLRF), the Council works with partner organisations to plan and activate emergency responses, with the assistance of Applied Resilience (for further information see **Appendix B**)

The SLRF declared a major incident on 19 March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic affecting Surrey, as well as the rest of the United Kingdom. The Surrey Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) was established to work with all partners and agencies across Surrey to provide a coordinated response to the pandemic, with the aims of:

- Supporting health colleagues to ensure that pressure on the NHS is reduced
- Delaying the spread of the virus and saving lives
- Supporting communities and protecting vulnerable residents

To ensure co-ordinated delivery of the response, a number of SLRF tactical sub-groups were set up, dealing with a variety of issues from infrastructure to excess deaths. Specified

council officers have played an active role in all these sub groups (see **Appendix B**). One of the roles of the Spelthorne's V-BEC is to act as the Council's conduit with the LRF.

Taking local decisions

In view of the urgency of the situation and the time it was taking for decisions, advice and guidance to come out of the LRF/SCG, a decision was made by the Management Team, in conjunction with the Leader, to begin implementing local measures to place the Council on a firm footing to address issues arising from the developing COVID-19 pandemic.

Closure of day centres

As Government advice was issued on the controlling the spread of COVID-19, and taking into account the threat the virus posed to vulnerable groups, an early decision was made by the Council's Management Team to close the Council's day centres as of 18 March; and to start preparing alternative support for clients, e.g. extra Meals on Wheels (MOW) deliveries.

Move to a virtual footing

The Management Team also made an early decision to move the Council onto a virtual footing as far as possible. In order to do this it was necessary to urgently review and update data identifying:

- a. Staff who could already work from home
- b. Staff who were currently unable to work from home, but could potentially do so with appropriate equipment, changes in procedure etc.
- c. Staff whose job did not lend itself to working from home

Self-isolation: Whilst this process was being undertaken, further Government guidance was issued requiring individuals who fitted into certain specified categories in terms of age and health conditions to self-isolate. Immediate steps were therefore taken to ensure that any member of staff covered by these requirements were advised to stay at home and await further instructions.

ICT support: Staff who were already able to work from home were told to do so from 17 March, whilst those who could potentially do so were urgently issued with equipment to assist them to do this. The ICT Team were fundamental to enabling this transition to happen, working tirelessly to issue any available laptops, tablets and desktop PCs to staff in need. Those staff who wanted to use their own equipment from home to connect into work were able to do so through the Council's virtual desktop system. In order to increase the availability of PCs, the ICT Team used spare parts from various pieces of old equipment to construct usable desktop systems. The ICT Team continued to work long hours to ensure staff were set-up correctly from home and had the necessary support to enable them to do their job, not only by provision of equipment, but also by setting up new online forms and processes which would enable virtual operations. The team also provided similar support to assist Councillors to continue to access relevant Council systems, documentation and meetings. Further details on the support provided by the ICT Team are provided in Section 4 of this report and throughout other teams' updates below. Without our ICT staff's skills, energy and support, there is no doubt that the Council could not have delivered so much for our communities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Changes in procedure: A significant proportion of the Council's 420-strong workforce undertake operations that do not require them to log onto the Council's ICT network. Of those that do use this network, on average 218 staff have been logged on each day (since 18 March 2020), with 171 of those (41% of the total workforce) working remotely. This transition was not just a technical challenge in terms of ICT. It also involved each team adapting the way they worked to enable them to provide their services in a different way. Where officers normally undertook site visits, alternative ways of gathering site information were necessary, e.g. by applicants for planning permission sending in photographs and the use of Google maps images. Where site visits were still required strict social distancing measures had to be implemented.

Staff unable to work from home: For staff unable to work from home due to the nature of their work, e.g. street cleaners, refuse vehicle drivers/operatives, suitable Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and social distancing measures were implemented to protect staff. These measures were updated as new Government guidance was issued.

Documentation: All of the Council's staff required to work in the community during the lockdown were issued with a letter signed by the Council's Chief Executive, explaining that they were a key worker required to travel/work within the community, in case of challenge by the police/members of the public. Similar documentation was issued to key workers to enable them to place their children in designated schools during the lockdown.

Closure of Knowle Green

As of 18 March Knowle Green was closed to the public, with signs placed outside the building and other suitable locations advising people of the telephone numbers to call, plus email addresses to use to contact individual services. Similar information was placed on the Council's website.

Urgent need for support for our communities

Early in the crisis it was identified that Councils needed to play a key role in contacting vulnerable people isolated in their homes, to check that they were safe and whether they needed any support in terms of deliveries of food and prescriptions etc. The Government issued guidance which listed the different categories of people who may need assistance, with Category A being the highest risk. Early indications were that Spelthorne had over 2,997 people in Category A and 29,909 people in Category B. Individuals within the Borough in Category A were to be the responsibility of Surrey County Council (SCC) and would be receiving ongoing support direct from the Government. Spelthorne would initially have responsibility for dealing with the Category B people in the Borough.

Spelthorne was also made aware that hospitals were preparing for a large influx of COVID-19 patients by discharging large numbers of non-urgent cases from hospital. Early indications were that this would mean that 75 people would imminently require urgent assistance within our Borough. Urgent steps therefore had to be put in place to set up a local support hub (as required by Government) to coordinate the support required.

An early decision was made by the Management Team, in conjunction with the Leader of the Council, that Spelthorne should not wait for further guidance from the LRF/SCG or any

guarantees of future funding, but should push on with funding, development and implementation of this hub, which we named 'Support4Spelthorne' in order to immediately start addressing the needs of our vulnerable residents. Any support funding that then became available could be used to assist with the Council's costs.

Although support for Category A people in our Borough was supposed to be provided by SCC and the Government, in practice it was found that the County Council immediately requested support from Borough and District Councils. Ultimately, Spelthorne had to undertake the vast majority of contact and support for Category A people, together with all support for Category B people. Further information can be found in Section 3 of this report.

Redeployment of staff: In view of the urgent need to provide support for our communities, contacting vulnerable people and ensuring they had adequate food supplies etc., all services were requested to advise which of their staff they could release for redeployment into other activities. In undertaking such a redeployment exercise it was essential to identify those services which were already critical to maintaining support for our communities and those which were required to continue their work under Government guidance, e.g. Environmental Health (enforcing social distancing/PPE for businesses) and Planning and Building Control (supporting ongoing development/construction work).

A detailed spreadsheet listing all staff was developed outlining whether their job was critical/non-critical in the current circumstances, whether they were sick or self-isolating and their availability for redeployment. Resources were then balanced accordingly to ensure that critical services maintained as close to normal operations as possible and sufficient support was available to support the new critical work required supporting vulnerable people. This was a challenging, technically complex task which was undertaken in an efficient and effective manner.

Furloughing: A decision was made early in the development of the Council's response to COVID-19, not to make use of the Government's furloughing scheme if this was available to local authorities. A commitment was also made not to make any staff redundant as a result of their work being affected by the pandemic. It was felt that in view of the Council's limited staff resources (which could be made worse through loss of staff due to COVID-19) and the volume of work likely to come out of the need to support vulnerable people, it would be better to redeploy our staff wherever possible to support his work, and where this was not possible, for example if they were required to self-isolate, they could be used to assist other services which were under pressure, e.g. answering/making phone calls.

Keeping in touch: One of the biggest challenges during this pandemic has been the need to ensure that all staff and Councillors are kept informed of activities within the Council and continue to feel part of the Spelthorne 'family', during the long periods of isolation from work colleagues. From the early days of the crisis, a decision was made to hold:

- Daily V-BEC meetings (7 days per week, including bank holidays)
- Weekly virtual V-BEC plus wider management meetings
- Weekly virtual all-staff briefings
- Weekly virtual Councillor briefings
- Written updates for Councillors twice a week

Staff welfare: Managers were required to ensure that they maintained regular contact with their teams (daily if possible) and that mechanisms were put in place to enable regular team interaction, e.g. through Skype meetings and WhatsApp groupings. The Human Resources Team produced a range of welfare guidance for staff and the Council introduced a welfare fund to assist any staff who were in financial difficulty during this period.

Health and safety: All staff working from home were asked to ensure that they had undertaken a home workstation risk assessment and that they had appropriate equipment to enable them to work from home safely. Where necessary, staff were able to take their Council office work chair home. As outlined above and within the detailed report, all staff requiring PPE to undertake their work activities (normal work or work through redeployment) were provided with appropriate PPE, following any updated guidance issued by the Government/Public Health England.

Meetings: Through the hard work of the Council's ICT Team and Committee Services, all routine service/staff meetings were able to run virtually through Skype for Business. Using such an approach can be very different to face-to-face meetings in the office and although this took a while to get used to, staff have now become very proficient at using and participating in such virtual meetings. Similarly, virtual meetings with Councillors has improved over time and is now working well. The Council has now run a number of virtual Council meetings, including two Extraordinary Cabinet meetings and one Planning Committee (for further information see the sections on Planning and Corporate Governance below).

Focus on urgent business: As the pandemic and associated social restrictions took hold within the UK, the effects on the staff and operations of the Council became more apparent, with new areas of work, increases in existing areas of work and loss of staff due to self-isolation and illness. It was therefore necessary for the Management Team to make a decision to focus only on urgent Council business until the situation improved. All non-urgent Council meetings were therefore cancelled until further notice from 23 April 2020.

3. SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES

3.1 SUPPORT 4 SPELTHORNE HUB (supporting shielded and vulnerable people)

Early discussions regarding Support 4 Spelthorne hub

A core group of staff from Community Wellbeing was brought together to begin to plan for a possible lockdown and the consequences for the team's staff and service users. At that stage there was a great deal of national uncertainty as to future measures and restrictions, however cases of COVID-19 were increasing in the UK and in view of the controls being implemented in other countries it was felt that it was only a matter of time before the UK went into lockdown.

At that stage there was no requirement for the Council to make direct provision for vulnerable members of the community; however steps were taken to try to calculate the potential numbers. Census data from 2011 showed that there were around 27,000 older people in Spelthorne, i.e. 27% of the overall population. In addition, the Council had the benefit of a database of 2,800 representing its Independent Living service users (Meals on Wheels (MOW), Community Centre and community alarm); 1,800 of these being Community Centre members. It was ascertained from the same data that this number of residents equated to just under 8,900 households with either one or more member in the potential vulnerable and shielded groups.

It then became evident that Central Government had identified in the region of £1.5 million UK residents who they had defined as extremely vulnerable and would need to be shielding for at least 12 weeks. The following table illustrates the County and Borough wide breakdown of the different categories of vulnerability. After the initial Category As were identified a process was undertaken by NHS England to identify more shielded residents, nationally this resulted in another 500,000 citizens

Surrey County	Spelthorne	Definitions	Category
39,323	2,997	Extremely Vulnerable/require shielding (e.g. immune-suppressed)	Category A
329,000*	29,909*	Vulnerable (over 70s and Flu Jabs)	Category B
Numbers not known		Individuals who, while not at increased risk but are at risk due to restrictions in place	Category C

*estimates based on local and regional data

Discharge to Assess

At the same time the acute and community hospitals had quickly moved to a two-hour 'Discharge to Assess' model that placed further significant pressure on the wider health system in North West Surrey. At this point it was suggested that 15,000 people would have to be discharged nationally, which equated to approximately 200 people per week for North

West Surrey CCG from Ashford & St Peter's Hospitals. This created an increased demand on local housing authorities to facilitate the new way of working.

Spelthorne Borough Council (SBC) had been developing a 'Step Down' offer to ease the normal discharge pressures. In partnership with A2Dominion, and with funding from the Integrated Care Partnership, the offer was quickly adjusted for the COVID-19 response with the provision of seven units for 'Step Down', enabling at-speed supported provision. This has given the hospital huge flexibility to move medically fit clients out of the hospital setting. At the point clients are discharged they would also have access to the general Support4Spelthorne offer. To be clear this was offered to the North West Surrey system, with a first refusal from SBC.

The start of Support4Spelthorne

SBC took the bold initiative to get ahead of the national and regional announcements and create a local wraparound offer, in addition to the current services of Meals on Wheels and Community Alarms that would make provision for local residents.

It was clear that a local response was required given that the regional and national responses, though well meaning, would be a logistical challenge with serious concerns that the most vulnerable would wait too long for contact, emergency food and prescriptions. It was agreed by the Management Team (MAT) and the Leader that Community Wellbeing could forge ahead. In the space of a weekend in late March a robust community offer was born, **Support4Spelthorne (S4S)**, incorporating the logistics, data and influence of the borough, the reach of the local housing provider A2Dominion, with the flexibility and agility of the local Voluntary Support North Surrey (VSNS). Even the catchy name and branding was created in-house.



A comprehensive emergency offer was created that included:

- An emergency food hub;
- A shopping and prescription service;
- Active signposting and support for all of our foodbanks; and
- Money/benefits advice through A2Dominion's Advice Plus service.



It soon became clear that the shielding group were the responsibility of Surrey County Council (SCC) but, after SCC top-sliced approximately 5% of the cohort (those who were known to either Adult Social Care or Children & Family Services), this ask was immediately passed onto the District & Boroughs to address. At this point SBC were able to hit the ground running with their S4S offer.

Early in the process it was also recognised that the S4S local emergency response would need to be robust and accessible and it was agreed that we must match the timescales set by the new hospital discharge remit, effectively 8am – 8pm, 7 days a week. This required a significant redeployment exercise in itself, in terms of rotas, availability and training of redeployed staff.

Over the same period of time the team doubled its MOW provision, introduced a teatime service and improved our ability to install Community (SPAN) Alarms, with new working practices for a ‘drop and remote install’ service.

The Community Wellbeing team made an early decision to maximise the redeployed workforce as opposed to accessing volunteers. Experience of managing volunteers in previous emergencies had enabled the team to understand the complexities of managing volunteers through an ever changing landscape of demands and needs. SBC used the skills of Voluntary Support North Surrey to manage volunteers and recognise their value and skills, whilst still managing expectations and have the ability to flex demand.

Comfort Packs

The Council initially based its food comfort pack on the official Trussell Trust foodbank offer, with a clear remit that these packs would be available to bridge the gap between the Government food deliveries ramping up and other shielded and vulnerable residents getting access to online delivery slots or other provision.

The team at the food hub took on the challenging task of arranging large scale food supplies at a time when the whole nation was stockpiling and demand for food was at its height. The initial pack was created to last one person seven days. At the same time, SCC were setting up their own regional food hub, although to date SBC have not needed to access this resource. This is in contrast to the majority of other Districts and Boroughs.

At time of writing, the Government offer is slowly ramping up and approximately 300 SBC residents are receiving packs directly from Central Government. Taking into account the last few weeks, where some Central Government support has materialised, the team at the S4S Hub have been rationalising the food pack offer within tight budget controls. They have ensured a pack that meets basic needs is offered and that residents do not become reliant on ongoing food deliveries from the local borough. This has been a significant undertaking not least in terms of stock management, rotation and delivery. Staff have been redeployed from across the authority to deal with all of these areas. Without exception they have taken on their roles with consummate good humour and a high level of professionalism.

Welfare Visits

SBC made a decision, with the support of the borough commander, to locally perform welfare visits for those residents that we could not contact by phone or whose contact details were inaccurate. The staff team redeployed to perform this role did this at speed and with the upmost efficiency ensuring residents were door knocked, checked for food availability and encouraged to call the welfare number. SBC were incredibly successful completing 2347 visits with only 13 escalations to the police. On one day, twelve staff members completed 528 welfare visits.

Data management

SBC made a decision early on to push ahead with developing our own system rather than wait for a county wide solution. This proved to be an excellent initiative as it enabled us to hit the ground running.

The solution which was designed from scratch is a form-led database that has enabled the Council to redeploy staff across numerous disciplines, to complete forms, automatically manage requests from residents and subsequently comprehensively report to SCC in relation to residents of all categories of vulnerability. This was developed primarily by the Council's ICT team, who committed a huge amount of resource to make this happen quickly; creating a working solution within days, which would normally have taken months to develop. This solution has been offered to SCC, who in contrast, have struggled to manage Category A data inputs from the other ten Districts and Boroughs.

One of the ongoing issues has been the timescales and format of the Category A shielded lists of people which have been passed to Spelthorne and other councils from Surrey County Council. This is a national issue but has meant at times there have been large numbers

provided in one go, with the expectation to contact them quickly. This included almost 1000 records being sent just before the Easter weekend. At one stage there was a view that the majority of shielded clients had been contacted, but then a large tranche was sent through in early May, which was unexpected. Despite this, the Council has responded positively to the challenge.

In addition, officers with differing skillsets undertook a huge exercise both to identify and to establish contact details for the service users District and Boroughs had lead responsibility for, those deemed Category B. This was a group defined by the Government as vulnerable by virtue of either being over 70, pregnant or with health conditions deemed less severe than those on the Shielded or Category A list.

Once advice had been gained regarding GDPR implications, records of the following were searched and cross referenced to ascertain phone numbers and email addresses: those requiring assistance with refuse bin collection; day centre users; Housing Register applicants; Housing Benefit applicants; the Council's Vulnerable Persons Register; electoral roll; A2Dominion housing provider information. This was an extensive and comprehensive exercise, particularly given the limitations of different computer systems recording the information and also differing information held on each system. In total this provided a list of around 8900 people the Council considered to be Category B.

The Independent Living team have acted as the escalation group for all enquiries and managing the emails generated by this endeavour. They continue to manage all of the email traffic generated and will continue the long term 'Call and Check' welfare calls that will continue for the foreseeable future for both Category A 'shielded' Category B 'vulnerable' and Category C 'other vulnerabilities'. This has required a significant commitment in terms of staff hours and general resilience both emotionally and physically.

At a time when processes and demands have developed at speed, the Team have managed to build links with SCC, regularly attending Welfare Cell meetings and numerous other conference calls pertinent to the current emergency including:

- Welfare Cell 1 ½ hours – daily up to week 6; 7 days a week and now twice weekly;
- Discharge to Assess – daily up to week 7; lead authority on behalf NWS partners;
- Medically fit for discharge – twice daily;
- Community Cell Calls – twice weekly, NWS partners;
- Staff Briefings – weekly;
- Councillor Briefings – weekly;
- Community Wellbeing Managers – daily including weekends;
- Contact Mechanism – numerous WhatsApp groups 24/ 7;
- S4S Escalation Cover – Mon- Sunday 8am – 8pm;
- Daily Calls Adult Social Care;
- Daily Calls with IT;
- Daily escalation calls;
- Significant requirement to map into partners updating both CCG, Health, Adult Social Care and GP surgeries.

Summary timeline of Support4Spelthorne

Week 1
Late February

- Information imparted through health engagement that plans in place for national interventions
- Started ordering of additional food stock for Meals on Wheels for 12 week cover
- Arranged preparedness for large scale home working for whole of Community Wellbeing
- Clarified advice on PPE and arranged for increased usage for vulnerable groups

Week 2
w/c 9 March

- SBC Community Wellbeing welfare core group set up
- All vulnerable staff sent to work from home
- New arrangements and procedures circulated for home visiting
- Eden database interrogated along with vulnerable person register to get ahead of welfare calls (1800 to known Independent Living Service users)
- GDPR assistance with unlocking the Electoral Register
- Community Centres closed

Week 3
w/c 16 March

- Emergency declared
- Strategic Coordination Group launched
- Key Worker Staff Travel arranged
- Surrey Welfare cell started
- VSNS role agreed (shopping and prescriptions)
- A2Dominion role agreed (Money Matters / Advice Plus)
- Discharge to assess model set up with NHS and SCC with Spelthorne champion
- 15,000 Hospital discharge request nationally, projection 200 per week for North West Surrey - approximately 75 for Spelthorne

Week 4
w/c 23 March

- Lockdown declared
- Community Wellbeing proposed a Spelthorne approach
- Travelodge closed, emergency accommodation needed
- Development of an eform approach to an ever unwieldy database
- MHCLG rough sleeper expectation of housing all rough sleepers by the weekend after the letter dated 26th March
- NWS initiative, Spelthorne led in relation to opening the Woking Travelodge for system use
- Heathrow Cottages agreed to cover emergency accommodation
- A2D agreed local lettings plan to convert general need accommodation to temp accommodation
- 'FOG' around responsibility of who doing what from external partners (uncertainty around Spectrum offer and Army logistical input)

Week 5
w/c 30 March

- Support 4 Spelthorne created and Hub opened in the Leisure Centre
- ICP agreed funding for 7 step down units
- Medically fit for discharge calls started
- First SCC download of Category A clients
- Large scale redeployment
- Woking Travelodge issue resolved
- Holiday Inn Shepperton offered and then removed as was offered only for Key Workers

Week 6
w/c 6 April

- SBC decision to use own database
- Second SBC cohort - sent another 600
- Early prisoner release briefing led by SBC due to lack of scoping
- Improved logistics at SBC hub
- Thames Lodge secured as block booked accommodation for Spelthorne and Elmbridge

Week 7
w/c 13 April

- MOW doubled (comforted by childrens cards and Easter eggs)
- Second Category A download complete
- Category B calls started
- logistical changes at SBC hub
- Local decision to circumnavigate protracted escalations
- SCC spreadsheet broken calls suspended except for Spelthorne Borough Council

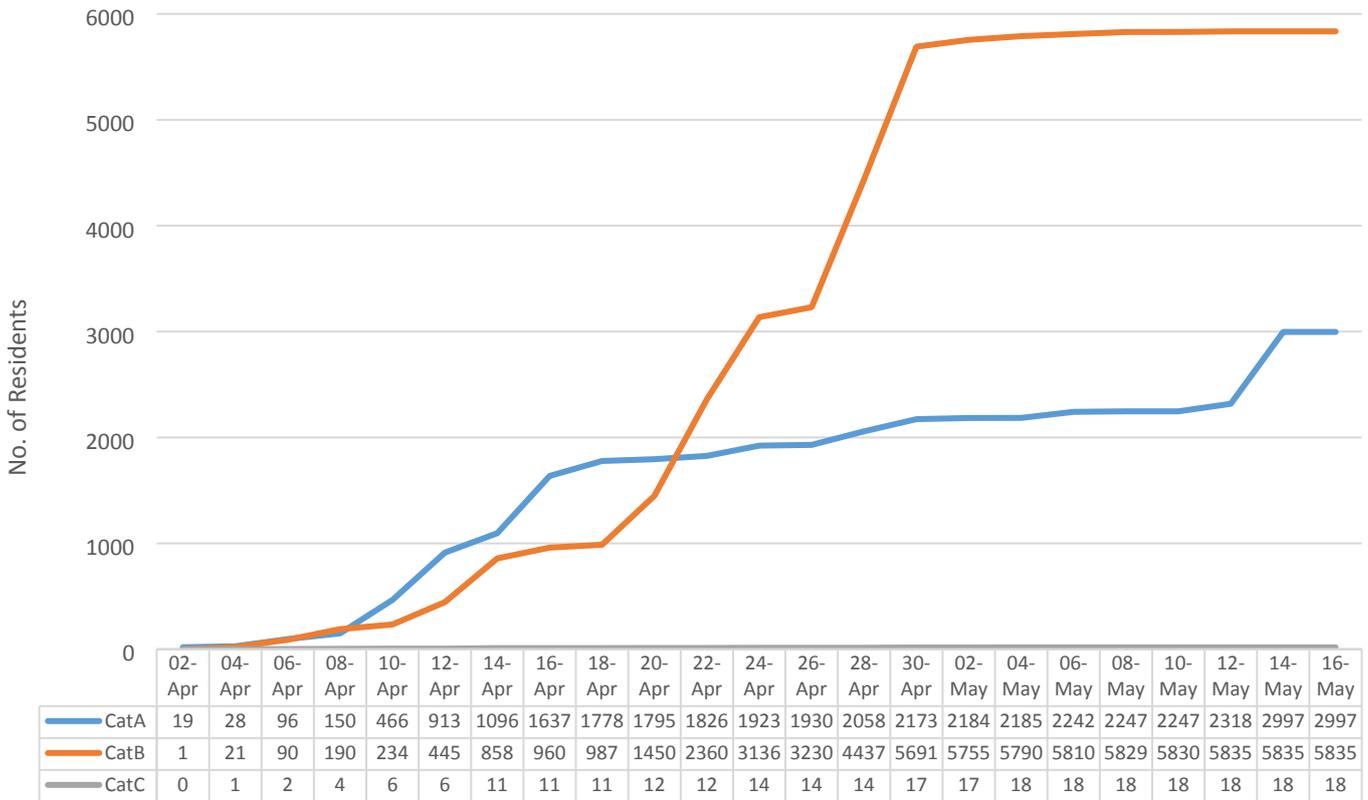
Week 8
w/c 20 April

- New business as usual evaluating visits, calls and checks
- Prioritising resources on a daily basis escalating and reporting
- Agreed reasonable proportionate steps for Category B's

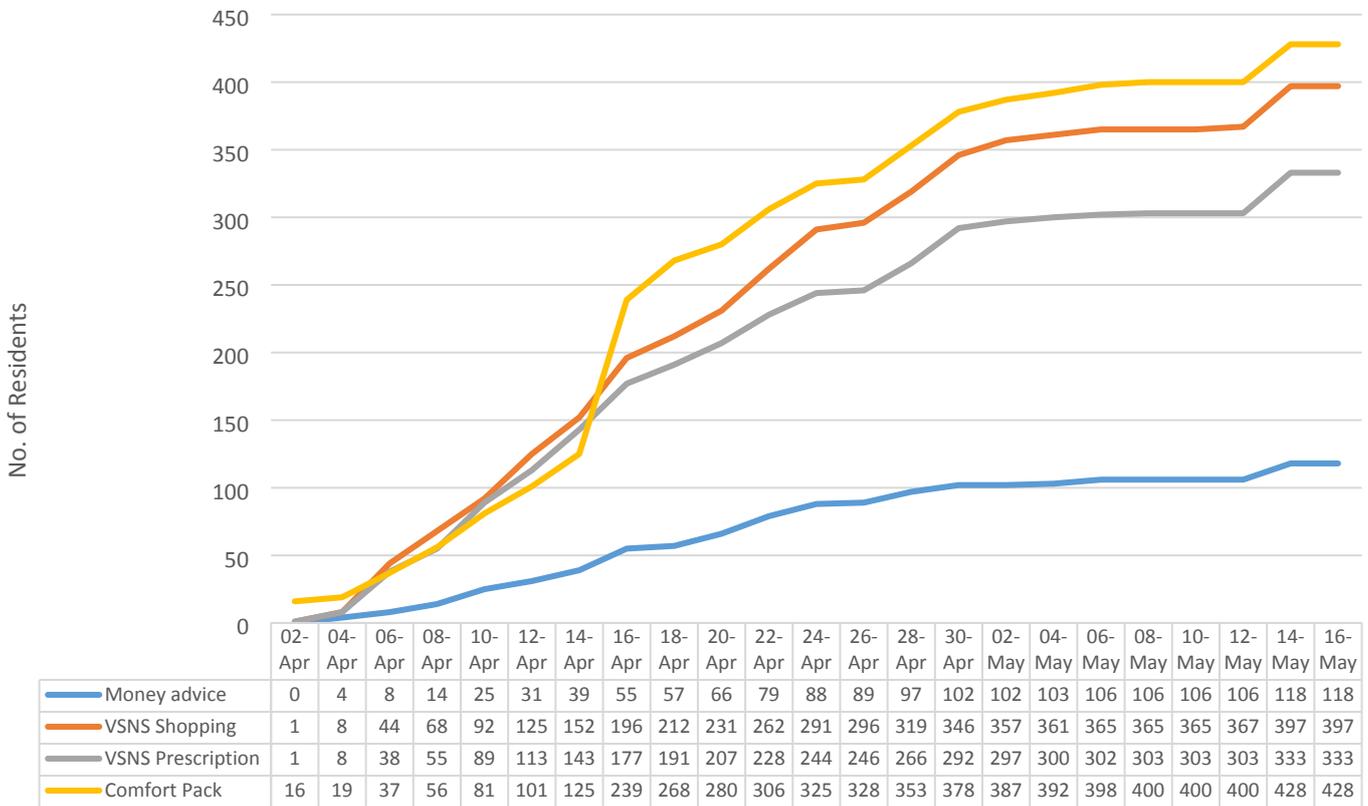
Week 9
w/c 27 April

- Escalation mechanism agreed for welfare checks and police visits
- All Category A calls completed over 2000
- All current Category B calls completed 5528
- Current confused messaging coming from daily Government briefings creating local uncertainty and local asks!

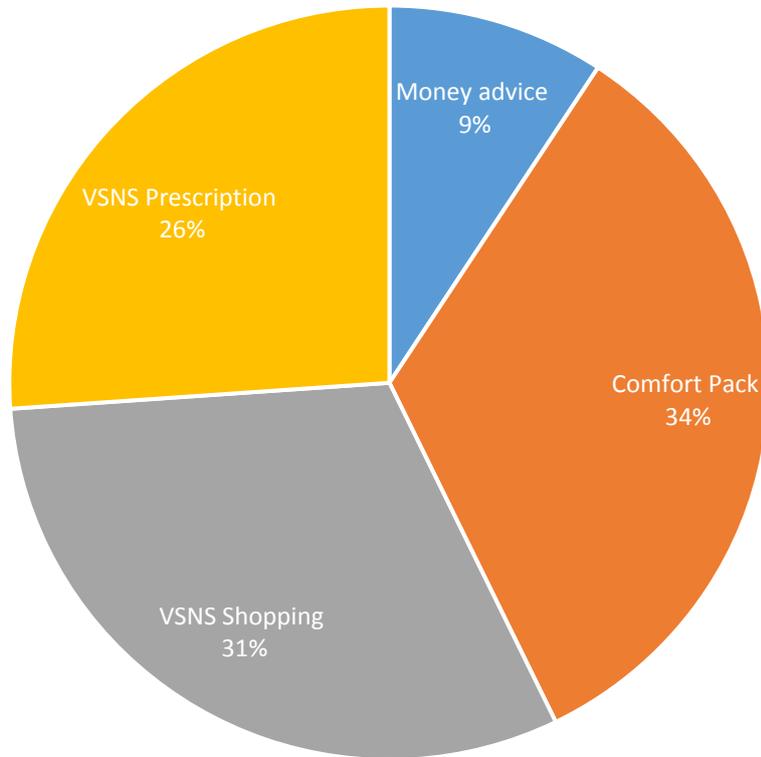
Welfare calls made to vulnerable Spelthorne residents



Support referrals made through Support 4 Spelthorne



Total Number of Individual Support Referrals



3.2 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT/LIAISON WITH VOLUNTARY SECTOR

COVID-19 has placed unprecedented demand on the third sector. The CD Manager prioritized supporting the third sector by:

- Increasing their capacity to respond to the huge increase in demand by the provision of equipment, modifications of buildings, providing financial assistance and assisting with partnership working.
- Increased resilience by assisting with succession planning, recruiting volunteers, sharing key information and providing emotional support.
- Created and cascaded leaflets, posters, social media and other key information to increase knowledge and improve signposting.
- Obtained, verified and shared data very widely within SBC
- Put kind donators in touch with relevant organizations to assist them and further improve their capacity and resilience.
- Improved robustness with checks and balances that include the creation of ID cards, a financial safety net for volunteers to increase and hold their commitment to volunteer and dealing expeditiously with issues and complaints.

- Worked on legacy creation and discussed with donators ongoing support beyond COVID-19.

Foodbanks and meal provisions

At the start of the pandemic, local foodbanks were already supporting hundreds of residents across Spelthorne with food parcels and surplus food donated by supermarkets and other suppliers. The Borough Council anticipated that the pandemic would result in a run on their services as the supermarkets struggled to meet demand and the increased financial pressures meant that many more would find themselves newly affected by food poverty.

Spelthorne worked with the food banks to increase their capacity to meet this demand by the provision of equipment such as fridges and freezers; modifications of buildings to improve electric supplies and the creation of storage and kitchen areas; providing financial assistance in the form of donations; and assisting with partnership working by introductions to large corporations that could assist. In addition, Spelthorne has supported foodbanks in increasing their resilience so that they did not burnout under the pressure, by advising and supporting succession planning, the recruiting of volunteers, sharing and obtaining key information and providing emotional support.

Since 23 March (when the data is reliable) a total of 123,276 meal equivalents have been supplied by the foodbanks broken down as:

- 272 from Manna Foodbank
- 1,136 from the Salvation Army
- 51,906 from Stanwell Foodbank
- 69,962 from The Community Foodbank at St Saviour's

Spelthorne values the essential role played by the third sector who have stepped up and reacted professionally and successfully to the huge and unprecedented demand which they faced, and continue to face, on their services in the wake of COVID-19.

Spelthorne wants there to be a legacy which builds on this fabulous community spirit which has seen hundreds of people volunteering to support their neighbours and strangers alike. The Council has instigated a volunteer expenses fund and continues to support the third sector and improve partnership working between them, the business sector and other key stakeholders.

3.3 HOUSING OPTIONS

Supporting the homeless, rough sleepers and the challenges with lockdown

In common with every other local authority, Spelthorne received a letter from the Government date 26 March 2020 asking the Council to house all local rough sleepers by the following weekend, and for these to be housed in self-contained properties, with drug users kept apart. This was a tall ask, as our team knew all 12 rough sleepers in the borough, and was aware that most had issues with addiction and other health problems.

When the lockdown came, confusing and unhelpful government advice resulted in local hotels closing their doors across the country. Travelodge, which the Council normally relies on for temporarily housing residents with a disability and for our 'out of hours' support, closed their doors with 3 hours' notice and meaning that the team had to accommodate three residents with a disability immediately.

In order to ensure an appropriate supply of accommodation to use for the local homeless, Spelthorne's officers convened a meeting with our neighbouring boroughs to look at block booking an entire Travelodge. The initial discussions centred on their branch in Woking, as Woking Borough Council had already started negotiations. In the end, this option proved logistically difficult, so after a week of not knowing the outcome of the Travelodge negotiations, the team decided to explore other options alone.

The Council were offered and accepted a five roomed airport Bed & Breakfast property under exclusive use. This not only supported the Council's effort to ensure a supply of accommodation, but also supported a local business whose usual customer base had dried up overnight.

The Council was also potentially offered the Holiday Inn in Shepperton but when this was discussed with the operator it was clear that they only wanted to open for key workers. More valuable days had been lost.

Finally, officers approached the Thames Lodge in Staines-upon-Thames and a suitable block booking was negotiated in conjunction with Elmbridge Borough Council.

Separately, the Housing Options (HO) team negotiated with A2Dominion to use some of their void properties as temporary accommodation. This had the advantage of being entirely self-contained so that COVID-19 positive customers could be isolated. Through the effective use of SBC's Facilities and Economic Development teams, the Council was able to procure and source donation of furniture and supplies to make these properties ready to move into.

It has been a challenge for the HO team to support their clients as they cannot make personal visits at present, but with the help of Spelthorne residents who report

sightings of rough sleepers through street link, they have been able to provide an effective service in the difficult circumstances we currently face.

This is also backed up by making regular welfare calls by phone to check on people and link them into the health services.

3.4 HOUSING BENEFITS

Main points on how the department has been affected by the pandemic
Housing Benefits (HB) are one of the Council's teams which traditionally deal with a large proportion of their clients through face-to-face meetings at the Council Offices for face-to-face meetings.

The HB Team have therefore had to adapt quickly and make some tough decisions in order to ensure effective business continuity during the current COVID-19 restrictions:

As an essential key worker service an early decision was made that:

- No staff could be redeployed to other areas, and
- The team could not accept redeployed staff from other services due to the level of complexity in their role.

It was necessary to set up, from scratch, the ability for the whole team of 20 staff to work from home, whilst continuing to process work during the transition period. The HB reception counter at Knowle Green normally deals with around 700 customers/month. The team therefore had to adapt to using other forms of communication (telephone calls, emails and letters) to keep in touch with clients.

This is traditionally the busiest time of the year for the team due to the start of the financial year. Despite the difficulties caused by the COVID-19 restrictions the team managed to submit the Council's housing benefit £25 million subsidy submission to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on time, with no extension needed on the deadline due to the pandemic.

The work of the HB Team has significantly increased as a result of the pressures faced by our communities as a result of the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This has included:

- An increase of over 50% in the number of telephone calls received from the public. The team have also experienced an extremely large increase in email communication from clients;
- Sending out over 800 council tax support application forms to residents who have never previously claimed council tax support before. On one day alone (14 April) the team sent out 101 application forms in the post;
- These application forms are now being returned which has led to a significant increase in new applications for Council Tax Support. During one recent

week the team received 63 applications compared to the average of around 23 per week – an increase of over 250%.

- If all these applications are returned this would mean an increase of over 40% in the team's working age caseload (excluding pensioner caseload).

It is clear that the pandemic is going to have a significant effect on the HB Team's workload and budget for some time to come. This is likely to include:

- An increase in council tax support granted to residents, which will not be completely quantified until much later in the financial year;
- An increase in Discretionary Housing Payment applications, with the number and size of the awards rising due to the increased financial difficulties of vulnerable residents in the borough;
- Debt collection for housing benefit overpayments will be affected, as the ability to collect overpayments will be reduced. The Council cannot currently actively pursue debt as it would normally do due to the financial difficulties residents are experiencing. In addition, the DWP have temporarily suspended arrangements which enabled the Council to obtain employer details of ex-claimants to pursue housing benefit debt, which is normally an important avenue of collection.

DWP and Universal Credit:

The DWP have had over 1.5 million new applications for Universal Credit since the beginning of March 2020 an increase of over 400% on the number that they would normally expect for the same period. Clearly similar pressures will exist for many Spelthorne Borough residents.

3.5 FAMILY SUPPORT (North East Surrey Family Support Team)

The majority of Family Support Programme (FSP) work involves face to face contact with children, young people and parents, and facilitating 'Team Around the Family' (TAF), multi-agency meetings. As a result of the pandemic, significant changes have been made to ensure continuity of service:

- All contact with families is now by telephone or WhatsApp video. Contact with parents is weekly and children are seen at least fortnightly, unless there are safeguarding concerns when weekly contact is made.
- Due to the increase (25%) in reported domestic abuse (DA) incidents in the UK, extra vigilance is demanded and DA guidance has been drafted for the team to ensure that existing and new families are safe. This includes, blocking telephone numbers when calling, as the perpetrator is more likely to be in the home and may answer the victim's phone; what to do if the perpetrator answers the phone; agreeing a 'safe word' with victims etc..
- TAF meetings are taking place by the use of Zoom where appropriate. When not possible, questionnaires are sent out to professionals to update on their

involvement with families, following which an action plan is drafted and circulated amongst professionals and discussed with families for agreement.

- 60% of the workforce are involved in making welfare telephone calls to residents, including two members of staff who are shielding.
- The team have a weekly Zoom meeting, often over lunch and a formal, monthly team meeting. The team have met for 'drinks and nibbles' after work (via Zoom) and will do this monthly with a quizzes, charades etc..
- Team supervisions continue to take place monthly by WhatsApp video/Zoom and external, clinical supervision is scheduled as usual to take place every 8 weeks.

Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

This has been the most challenging area in terms of continuity of service. The majority of families in the scheme have insufficient English to manage day to day activities/tasks without support and interpreting. Support from the Senior Family Support and Development Worker is intensive and time consuming during normal times. Most of the work has taken place over the phone but for one family it has been necessary to provide home visits (in the garden and observing social distancing), trips to the cashpoint and support paying bills online, as they lacked the skills and language to manage this. Two of the children have life limiting illnesses and require frequent emergency hospital admissions. The worker is unable to accompany to hospital appointments. If interpreters are not found, this is provided by the Support Worker over the phone.

During the crisis, a serious safeguarding concern meant the Family Support Worker accompanied the family to court to ensure they understood the process. Initial Child Protection Conference and core group have taken place by phone or Skype.

Intensive Housing Support

As with FSP, most work involves direct contact with service users, mostly single adults, and professionals. This part of the service operates solely in Spelthorne

The majority of work has taken place by phone or WhatsApp video, however, some direct work has taken place, observing social distancing. Home visits have involved accompanying service users to the cashpoint to withdraw money to ensure rent is paid; carrying out welfare checks to a family on a Child Protection Plan; and supporting a service user with an online Universal Credit application.

Social Work Student Programme

This is a Surrey-wide programme, managed by a Practice Educator (PE) employed full time within the North East Surrey FSP. As a result of the pandemic, this area of work has faced a number of challenges that have impacted students. Since the pandemic, some of the FSP teams in Surrey have seen a drop in referrals which reduced opportunities, particularly for one student.

As final year students, they are required to demonstrate readiness to practice by satisfying the Practice Educator that they have demonstrated competency in 9 standards. This requires direct observation of practice (x3) and frequent supervision

by the PE and on-site supervisors. As we were nearing the end of all placements, most work was completed, however, for 2 students alternative ways of acquiring evidence of competence has been necessary e.g. retrospective, informal observations.

The majority of students have been highly anxious about how they will complete placements during the pandemic, and support/supervision was stepped up to see them through to the end. With the exception of one who has taken time out, all are on course to pass their placements between April and May.

3.6 CUSTOMER SERVICES AND REVENUES

As the COVID-19 pandemic hit Customer Services (CS) were asked to consider how staff could transfer from working in the office to working from home where their Contact Centre software could not unfortunately be used.

With the assistance of ICT the CS Team transitioned onto the Skype for Business Platform and configured a basic telephony menu. As a result from Monday 23 March 2020 all contact centre staff were able to homework.

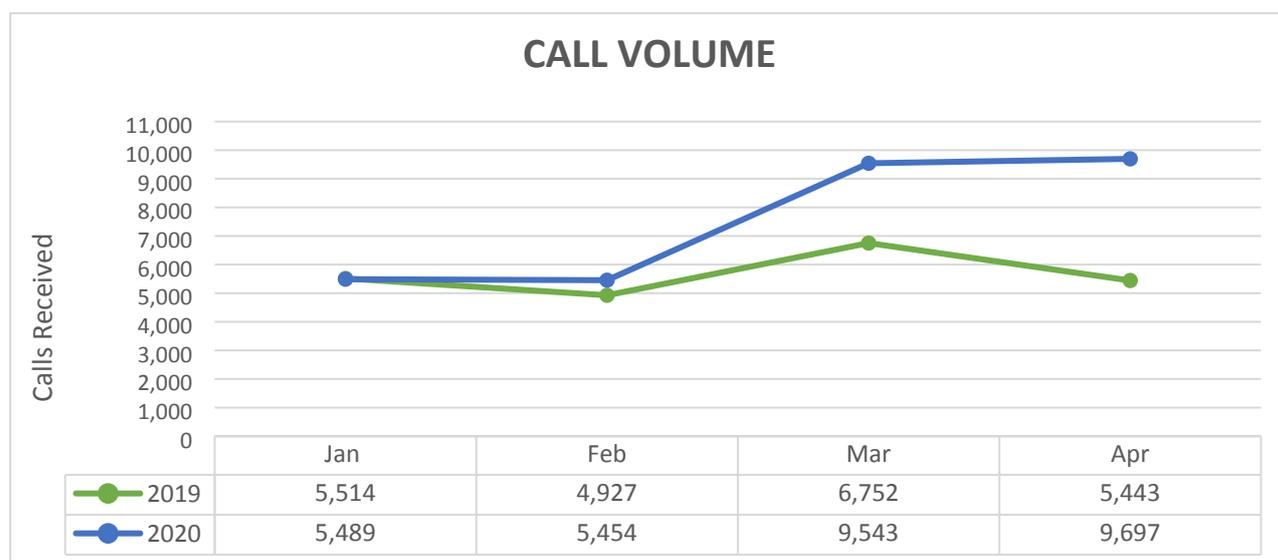
This did bring its challenges as:

- Skype does not integrate with all their systems – meaning that they lost some key functionality, reducing their typical efficiency in some areas, such as data pop-ups and synchronization across customer accounts; the team resolved this by quickly putting together user guides for Skype.
- Skype is not meant to be used as a contact centre and lacks many features and functions as with any telephony system but adaptations were made to allow CS staff to function ;
- Overall staff within the team lacked sufficient personal ICT equipment (laptops etc. at home) and had to be provided with desktops, monitors, keyboards, a mouse etc.. ICT were very helpful in providing staff with the equipment they needed. Where some staff already had devices at home – they gave their allocated work equipment to colleagues that did not. e.g. Dell tablets for apprentices were given to other staff;
- Moving from two monitors to only one proved challenging so staff were given the option to request an additional screen if they needed it. Other options were also discussed with staff and they were talked through how to set them up. For example – using a TV as a second monitor;
- The majority of staff's existing headsets were compatible with Skype and as soon as more headsets could be sourced Customer Services were given priority on the headsets ordered. Staff were advised on how to direct calls from Skype to their personal phones until headphones were available. Supplies were difficult to obtain because of the overwhelming national demand.
- Daily Output was moved immediately to Accelerated Mailing and document types are continuing to be added.

Customer Services – Call Volumes

Since the lockdown began the CS Team have experienced a significant increase in call volumes as shown in the graph below.

The calls being dealt with have at times been highly emotive and of a more sensitive nature, outside of the normal day to day calls, plus there have been technical difficulties homeworking without a contact centre. Other Council staff have been trained and re-deployed to help the CS Team answer the additional number of calls coming through at this time.



- Stats show all incoming calls for all Council services that have been received by Customer Services
- In March calls increased by 4,089 on the previous month (75%) and were 2,791 (41.3%) higher than the same period last year.
- In April calls were 4,254 (78.1%) higher than same period last year.

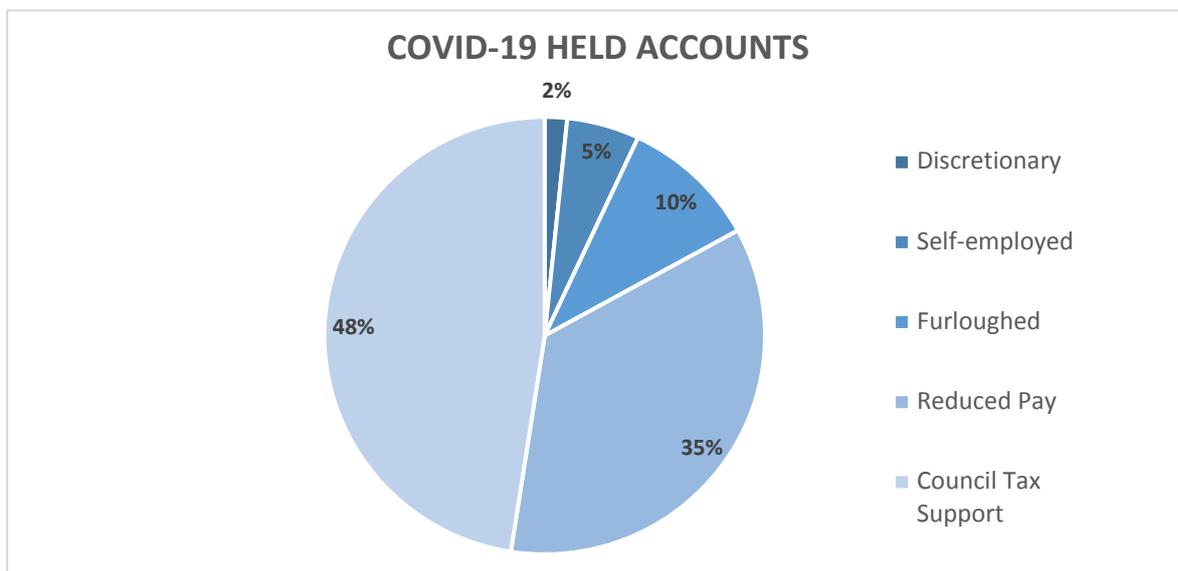
Deferred payments

Many of the team's customers have been asking to defer their Council Tax April and May instalments. The Council's decision was to treat every request for deferred payments on a case by case basis, which is in-line with the approach taken by neighbouring authorities.

Spelthorne acted swiftly and pro-actively in posting guidance on social media and the Council's website regarding the options available should COVID-19 impact on finances, and an online hardship form was created for customers to complete in order that their cases could be assessed.

As of the 4 May 2020 the team have held **664** accounts for Council Tax payers where COVID-19 has had an impact on customer`s income.

This graph shows the reasons accounts have been held:



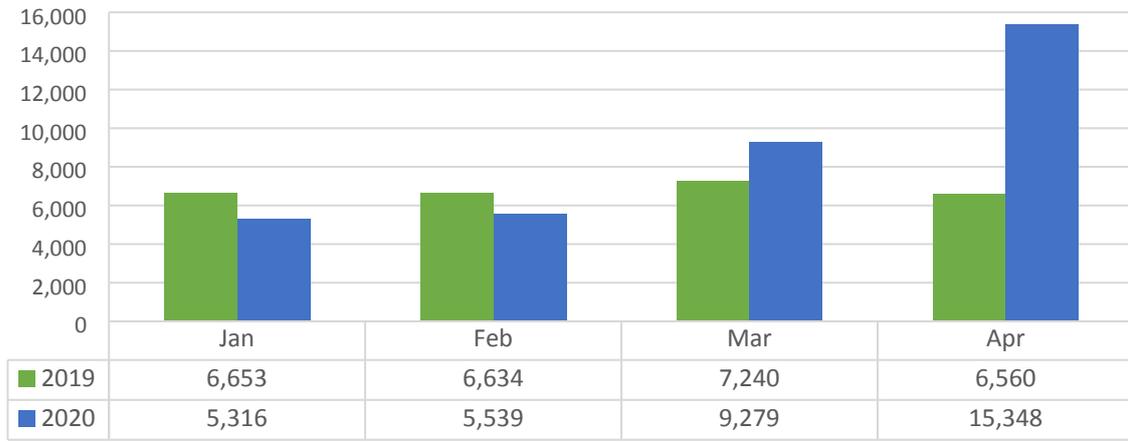
Volume of incoming post and electronic mail

The below graph illustrates the volume of work completed in 2020 compared to 2019. The increase has been astonishing and adds to the pressure that all staff find themselves in at this challenging time. They have all been doing an amazing job and continue to do so.

No recovery action has been taken since COVID-19, so the volume of work the team are currently experiencing is due to a range of other factors outlined below but primarily due to all of the changes they have had to implement coming from Central Government. e.g.:

- 1221 applications for grants to small and retail business;
- Hardship relief for Council Tax;
- Council Tax Support applications;
- Volumes of calls coming into Customer Services;
- Volumes via post and email.

COMPLETED WORK ITEMS



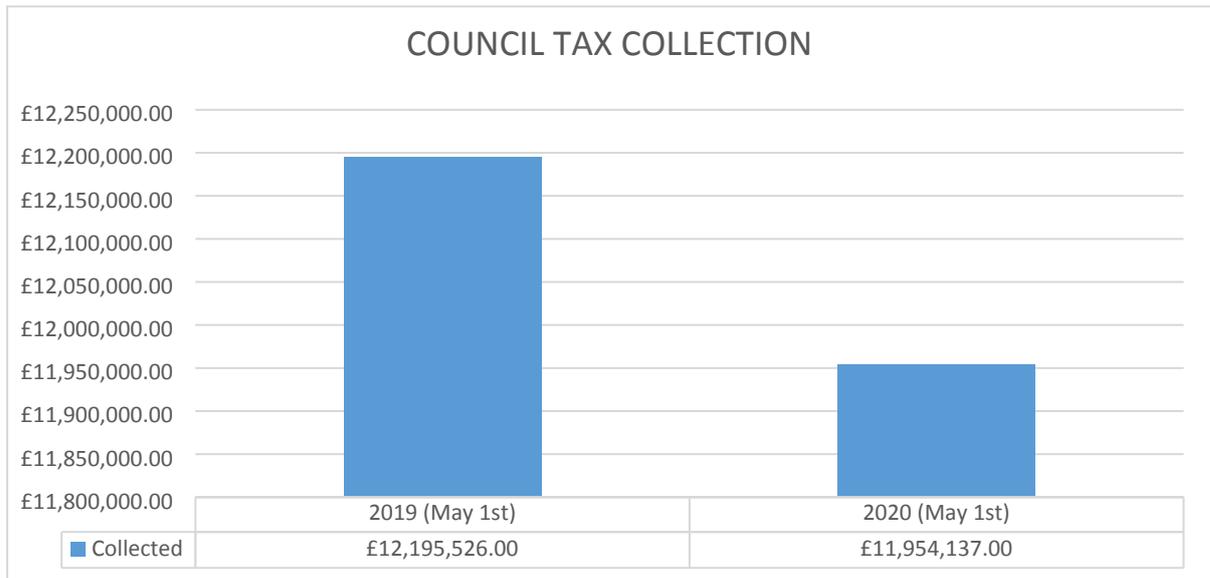
- 'Work item' refers to all incoming correspondence from all source types which has been picked up by an officer, processed and then 'completed'.
- March work items spiked 67.5% compared to the previous month. An increase of 28.1% for the same period in 2019.
- April work items have seen a massive 133% increase compared to the same period in 2019.
- We expect work items to always be decreasing against previous years as we undergo digital transformation in the service. Until March this had been working according to plan.

COMPLETED WORK ITEMS BY AREA



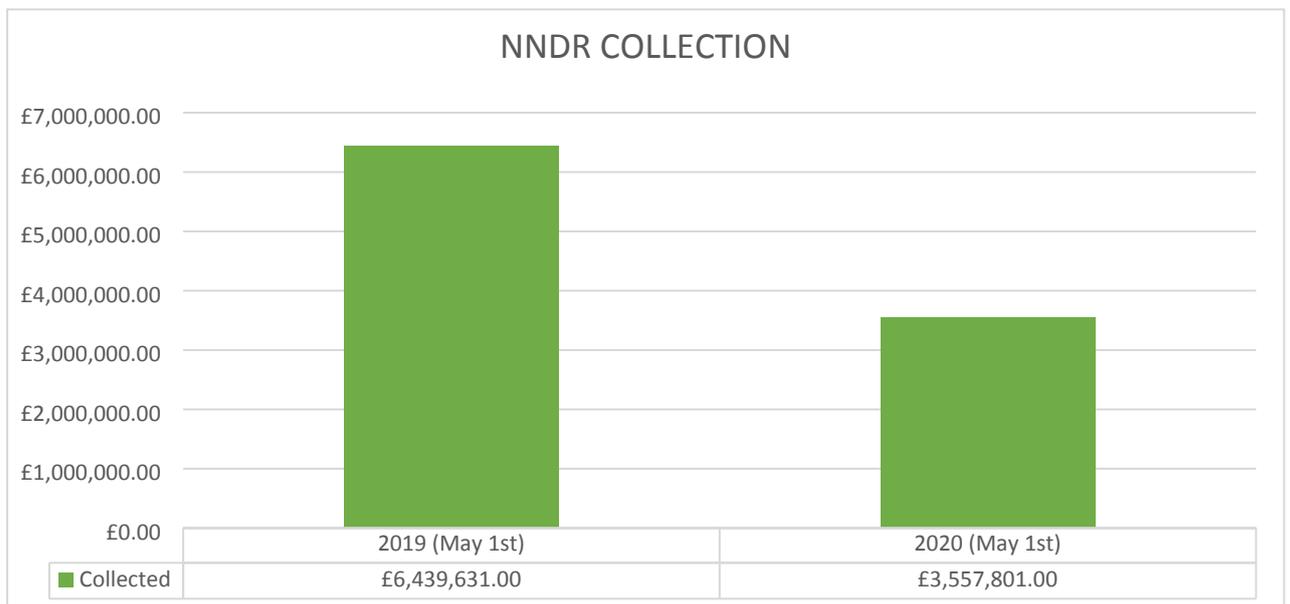
- Council Tax related inquiries accounted for 83% of all work items completed since the lockdown – an increase of 147% on the same period in 2019

Council Tax Collection



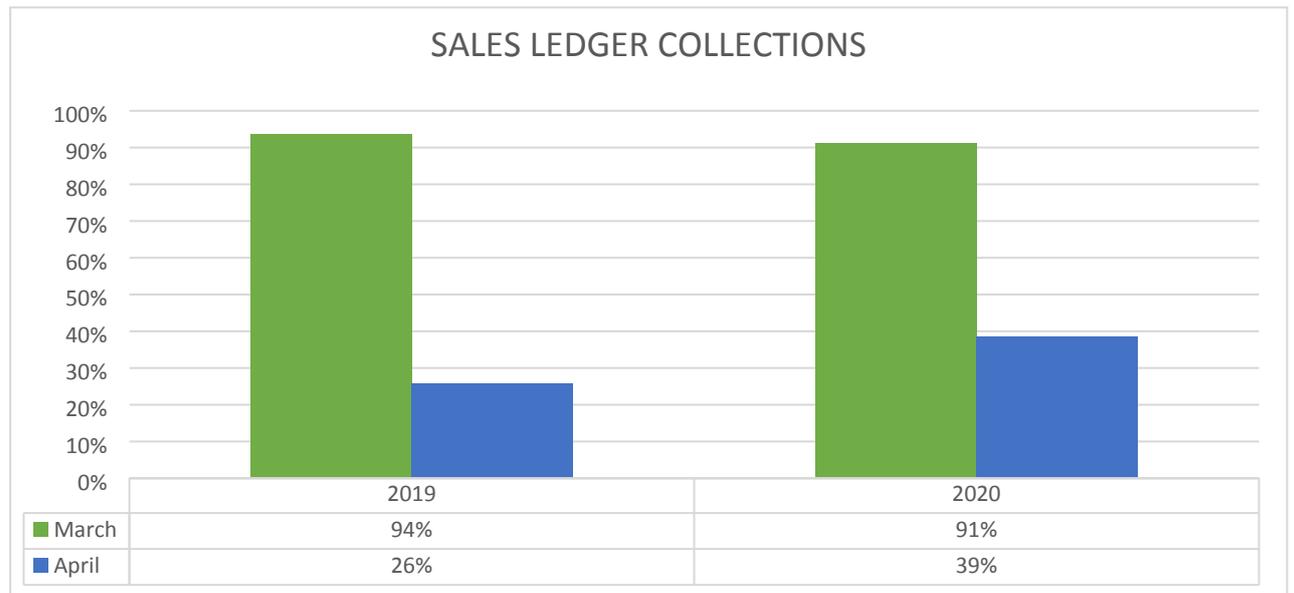
- Net collectable debit 2019 = £76,946,365.00
- Net collectable debit 2020 = £80,212,080.00

NNDR Collection



- Net collectable debit 2019 = £50,630,325.00
- Net collectable debit 2020 = £37,235,736.00

Sales Ledger Collection

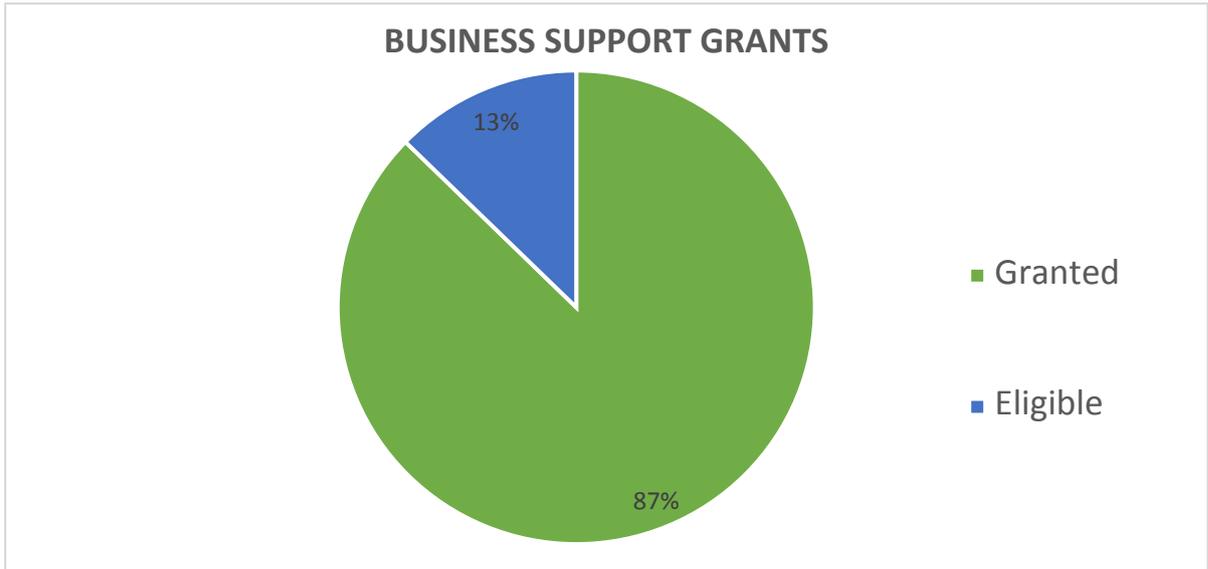


- Effect of outbreak seen in the final collection amount for March 2020, a reduction of 3% on 2019.
- Followed by increase of payments in April due to an increase of Garden Waste subscriptions which are POS transactions.

Business Support Grants

The CS Team responded quickly by setting up a webpage dedicated to the grants which included advice, guidance and three e-forms – one for each scheme criteria. On the same day the team also wrote to all businesses they believed were eligible advising them of the schemes.

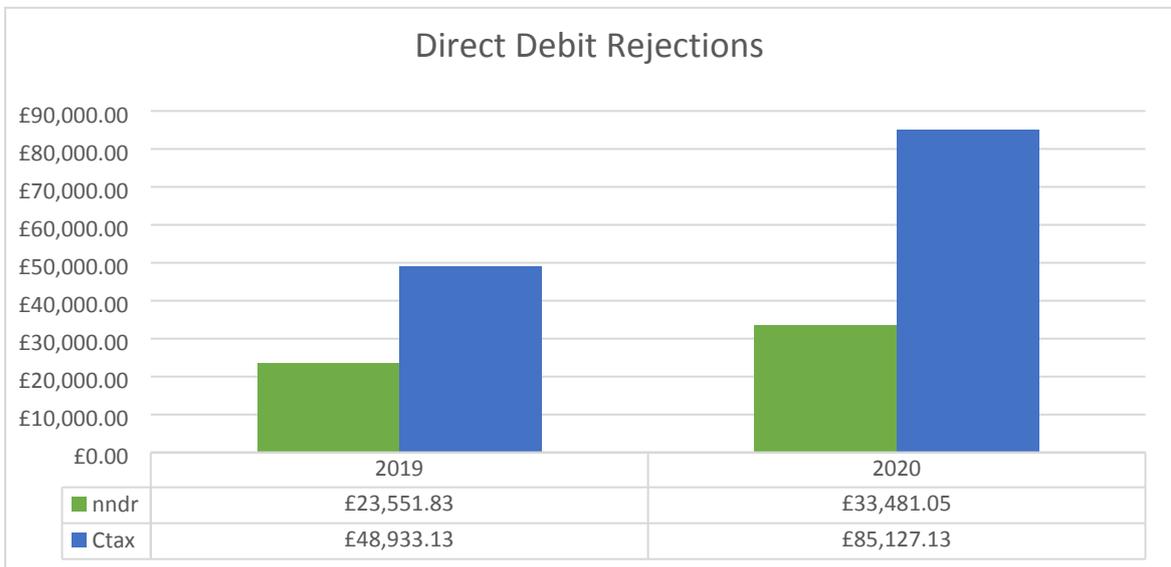
To date they have had over 900 responses. The following graph shows the percentage of Business Support Grants issued to those businesses eligible in Spelthorne:



- To date the CS Team’s work has ensured that the Council has awarded (as at 11/5/20) **£11.29m** of grants to 856 businesses in Spelthorne.

Sales Ledger

The Sales Ledger team have also reported an increase in Direct Debit rejections compared to the same time last year as illustrated below. This is believed to be due to people and businesses facing additional financial pressure or uncertainty.



- NNDR has seen a 42% increase of rejections compared to last year
- CTAX has seen an increase of 74% of rejections compared to last year
- The numbers for May are not yet complete.

4. MAINTAINING OTHER KEY SERVICES

4.1 NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

In delivering our response to COVID-19 the Service's main pressures have come from the initial guidelines in relation to shielded staff - i.e. staff with underlying health conditions, social distancing and staff over the age of 70.

These pressures were exacerbated when guidelines also stated that, where possible, all should work from home across the country. The Community Recycling Centres (CRCs) closed very early on in this outbreak, which created a major issue in terms of residents being at home creating more daily waste and also creating vast amount of waste from clearing out houses, sheds, gardens, garages etc. but with nowhere to tip it. The weather in the early stages of lockdown was also very warm and sunny and residents were in their gardens but with nowhere to take their green waste. This resulted in the Service receiving an unprecedented number of requests from new garden bin customers.

As a result of all of these factors Neighbourhood Services (NS) have been faced with collecting increasing tonnages week on week for all waste fractions.

Around the borough we have a number of sites where residents can drop off additional recycling, individual banks are provided for different recyclable items, these are known as our "bring sites". During lockdown these sites have become a place for mass fly tipping especially over the weekends. Some of this fly tipping can be directly related to residents clearing out houses where relatives have passed away, and also home renovations where new products have been purchased on-line during house renovation, with nowhere for the 'old' product to be disposed of. Further examination of the tipping shows that the majority is due to the mass sorting of cupboards, wardrobes drawers etc. This has created further challenges for our textiles contractors and collection crews.

Partially due to the warm weather conditions, but also the current social distancing restrictions, the NS Team have had calls from residents to close footpaths, roads and green spaces due to the large numbers of people taking their daily exercise in areas that they would not normally visit. Spelthorne do not have the authority to put any such closures in place. Any decisions on whether to close these roads, designated footpaths or rights of way would be a responsibility for Surrey County Council to take and manage. To try and mitigate the impact on locals living nearby the NS Team created and erected appropriate signage reminding people of the social distancing rules.

Waste and recycling collections

The NS Team have ensured that crew changes have been kept to a minimum, and have adhered to the closed bin lid policy with no extra side waste. This has helped to ensure that they can continue to deliver their core services. All relevant and

additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) has been provided in line with risk assessment reviews carried out at regular stages throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Staffing levels have allowed normal service levels to be retained and core services delivered. The team has operated with a relatively low number of absences due to COVID-19 and where necessary they have redeployed staff from grounds maintenance to cover refuse collection. In addition, on specific days they have provided some crews with an additional loader in order to cope with additional waste being produced due to residents being at home. Currently, all wastes tonnages are showing increases of approximately:

- 27% on Dry Mixed Recyclables (DMR);
- 80% on Garden waste
- 13% on Rubbish
- 5% on Food waste

Tables 1 and 2 below show the changes in garden waste domestic waste/DMR in recent months.

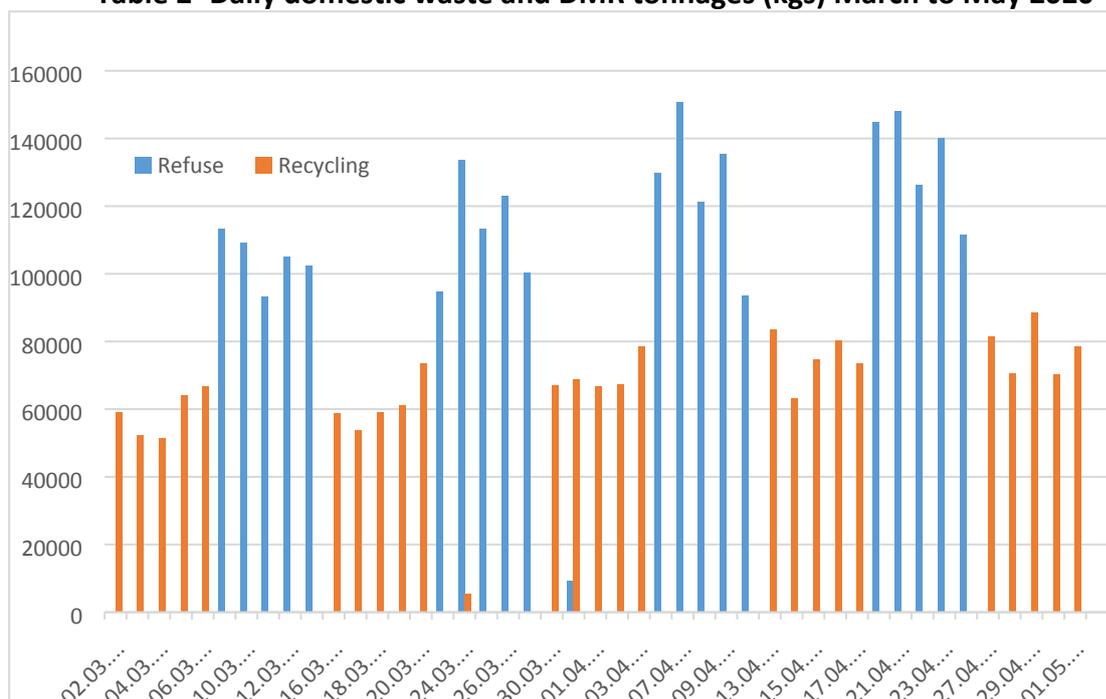
The increase in uptake of garden waste subscriptions has almost depleted the Council’s stock of garden waste bins and has put pressure on the NS Team’s bin delivery service. New bin stocks are on order but new customer orders may need to be delayed until such time as the delivery arrives later in May 2020.

Table 1- Garden waste tonnages February to May 2020

	20	0	0	0	20	0	0	0	20	0	0	0	20
Round 1	24.7	16.38	15.72	16.6	27.72	12.6	31.9	39.84	51.12	87.48	66.5	54.84	68.
Round 2	27.28	25.72	15.76	7	16.16	25.54	33.44	54.64	54	20.14	48.76	63.12	70.
Week Total	51.98	42.1	31.48	23.6	43.88	38.14	65.34	94.48	105.12	107.62	115.26	117.96	139

— Round 1
 — Round 2
 — Week Total

Table 2- Daily domestic waste and DMR tonnages (kgs) March to May 2020



Social distancing

Staff have been informed to maintain social distancing where possible. Where this cannot be undertaken measures have been put in place to ensure cleansing is a top priority. This includes provision of vehicle wipes, sanitizing gel, disposable gloves, and frequent changes of nitrile gloves. Regular communication and engagement with staff has been undertaken to help them understand that we have and will continue to work within Public Health England and Government guidelines and that there are strict criteria for self-isolation. This will be an ongoing pressure when restrictions are relaxed and staff are required to return to normal working practices.

We have created a lot of new business which has generated extra income as part of the very popular green waste collection service. However we also have significant losses of income due to cancellation of services such as bulky waste collections, skips and waste collection from schools, which remain closed.

Grounds and verge maintenance

Government guidelines required parks to be left open and all play facilities closed. Managing the closures of the facilities within the open spaces has been challenging as residents have continually chosen to create damage to access the closed-off facilities; a national issue as well as a local one. The Walled Garden in Sunbury, which is one of the borough’s most visited destinations, was also closed in the early stages of the outbreak for a number of reasons including anti-social behaviour (ASB) and social gatherings.

Whilst some grounds maintenance services have had to be reduced, there is a need to ensure that requirements as part of the agency agreement with Surrey County Council (SCC) are met. This includes the need to ensure sight lines along main highway routes are kept clear. This work has been hampered by the fact that lane closures for high speed roads have been cancelled by SCC, as road works are being prioritised. As a result long grass is now evident along the main routes which is creating customer complaints.

It is business as usual for floral displays and newly planted trees, summer bedding plants and trees need looking after and watering regularly. The Grounds Maintenance teams continue to carry out these functions both in the Council's nursery and around the borough.

Street Cleansing

Due to the Council's waste policies and the fact that CRCs have been closed some residents are choosing to dispose of excess domestic waste in street litter bins. These litter bins are being emptied regularly to keep on top of this issue as the domestic waste contains food waste, which has the potential to create animal pests and thereby creating littering issues.

Due to the lesser number of people shopping, eating out and generally socialising, the NS cleansing teams have reduced their daily schedules. These will gradually be built back up as and when restrictions are reduced.

Cemeteries

In the early stages of the pandemic the cemeteries department saw very few bookings despite the concerns that they were going to be overwhelmed. Information coming out of the LRF excess death cell indicated that the reason for the low numbers was because there were delays with the deceased in hospitals, body storage, mortuaries and post mortems. This is now resolved and the cemetery are now booking considerably more burials.

JET/Community Safety

The NS Team has seen an increase in ASB mainly related to fly-tipping and drug related issues. This is particularly disappointing for the JET as they have over a long period of time managed to decrease the number of fly tips in the borough, through being vigilant and prosecuting where appropriate. In April 2020 there was a total of 235 fly tips made up of household, commercial waste, construction, electrical, white goods, green and general other wastes. In comparison to the same period last year in 2019, where the JET officers dealt with 53 fly tips, this represents an increase of more than 400%.

The JET officers have also been dealing with the increase in excess waste being left in larger developments with bulk waste bins containers, and have also shown a presence in all areas of the borough which provides reassurance to our residents.

In order to ensure that the Council continues to support vulnerable residents and can undertake its statutory responsibilities for community safety, the Community Safety Team have been carrying out virtual meetings with our partners, including facilitating CHaRMM (crime harm and risk management) meetings. They have also been monitoring social media and assisting the police with intelligence in relation to social gatherings taking place during lockdown.

Parking Services

The Elmsleigh Shopping Centre closed on 24 March 2020, which resulted in the multi-story car parks needing to be closed to prevent direct access into the centre.

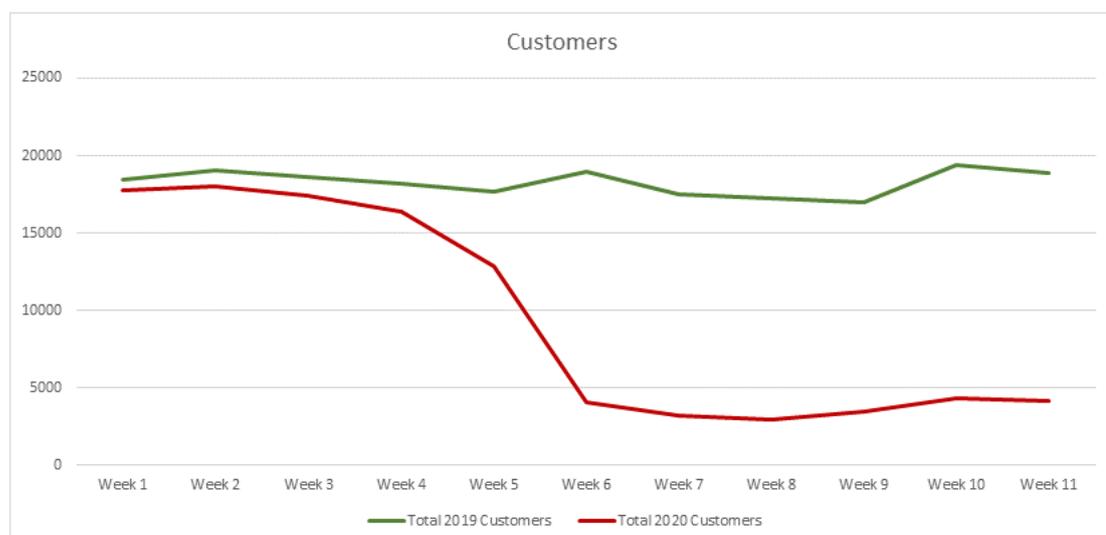
Due to measures agreed by Local Government Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, all councils in England and the Local Government Association all critical key workers were given a dispensation until the end of May 2020 to use council parking bays without time restriction or charge.

Although the hours of the Staines-upon-Thames parking office have been reduced, the Council’s Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) continue to patrol and undertake the important role of dealing with obstructive and dangerous parking on the highway. This has unfortunately resulted in them being subjected to an increased level of verbal aggression and abuse. This has not, however, deterred them from carrying out their duties.

Naturally with shops and retail units closed, there is a significant loss of income from our car parks, not just within our main town centres but also within our parks.

The gradual reduction in income is shown in the **Table 3** below:

Table 3 – Effect on the number of customers using Council car parks as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions



Staines upon Thames Market

The high street market mainly consists of retail stalls and as such were required to stop trading as soon as the government announced the closures. There are three market stalls who offer fresh produce (meat, fish and fruit/vegetables) and these were allowed to trade at zero rent as they were providing a much needed outlet for the community. The fruit and veg stall became so popular that they eventually set up a free delivery service for their produce. They reduced their operating days from 6 per week to 3 per week and the NS Team continue to review their service to our communities. The loss of the market stalls has created a loss of income from weekly stall rents. This will be ongoing until such time as the Government relaxes its guidelines on who can/cannot trade whether from a retail shop unit or market traders. The loss of income to date equates to approx. £20,000k per month.

Neighbourhood Services administration

There is also the split between those in NS who can and cannot work from home. It has been important to not only recognise those who have been redeployed but also those admin staff who, whilst not having a direct impact on the COVID-19 response (and not receiving the same level of praise) have kept other services going quietly in the background. This daily 'business as usual work' has in turn enabled the NS team to be on top of service delivery rather than struggling to keep up.

Spelride

Due to the nature of its clients (those being elderly and/or in poor health) the Spelride operation ceased very early in the pandemic and drivers were deployed to assist with increased demand of the delivery of Meals On Wheels (MOW), kitchen duties and also helping out in the Support 4 Spelthorne hub.

It is likely that for these older peoples services this is going to be a longer term issue, as it is likely that the Council's day centres will remain closed for a considerable period of time to protect those most vulnerable. We are actively seeking new initiatives for this group of people which we hope will be able to make use of drivers, buses, day centres and our parks. Ideas include personal shopping trips and park based exercise classes.

Some NS officers assisted at the hub by way of calls, visits, food parcel deliveries, shopping for food parcels, furniture delivery. They also used their creative skills to make up various items of PPE including aprons for staff visiting the most vulnerable residents in their homes.

Unlawful encampment

The Government issued advice in the early stages of lockdown in relation to the increased vulnerability of the travelling community due to their social living arrangements. On Monday 27 April 2020 the Council experienced an unauthorised encampment on private land in Stanwell. The NS Team worked with the land managers and acted on their behalf taking this issue to court,

based mainly on the increased ASB and ground damage created as a result of this group of people. The judge signed the order but rather than wait for us to remove them, the unauthorised encampment moved 300m down the road to another sports ground and again created damage to the grounds. After careful consideration the police chose to use their powers to evict them from this ground and as a result the unauthorised encampment left the borough on the afternoon of Saturday 2 May. This evidenced the fact that despite lock down rules, Government advice and guidance, the courts and police will still take action when relevant evidence is provided.

4.2 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Enforcement of business closures/social distancing requirements

The Government introduced two new pieces of legislation in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, firstly the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Business Closures) (England) Regulations 2020 on 21 March 2020, which was then replaced by the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 on 26 March 2020. Environmental Health (EH) departments were designated with authority for enforcing sections of this legislation, relating to the closure of and restrictions to businesses listed within the legislation. Powers were also given to the police and Trading Standards.

The impact of the responsibility for enforcing this legislation on the department was, and continues to be, huge. Normally the Environmental Health (EH) officers are aware in advance of incoming changes to legislation and receive training to ensure that they are ready and able to enforce these changes. The Council's EH Team officers had to adapt quickly and rise to this challenge. In collaboration with the Council's Legal Services Team our EH officers wrote a procedure and drafted template notices and letters for how they would enforce the legislation and they also consulted with organisations such as the Surrey Police and Trading Standards to ensure appropriate and consistent enforcement across Surrey and Spelthorne. Officers were provided training on these new procedures by colleagues via an internal conference call. This task was made more difficult by the replacement of the original legislation and the frequency in which guidance issued by government was updated.

The team also created information for the website, and liaised with the Council's ICT Team to create a new 'report it' form to enable the public to inform the Council of any concerns they had via our website. The team also worked with Communications on a publicity campaign including an e-news article, and inclusion on social media.

As of 13 May 2020 the team had undertaken 902 checks on businesses, including reactive visits following complaints or intelligence from Surrey Police or Trading Standards. Some of these checks were carried out in partnership with Surrey Police

and have taken place on evenings and weekends. These checks are continuing and advice is being given as appropriate to businesses.

Other additional Environmental Health work as result of COVID--19

The pandemic has led to increased work for the EH Service in a number of areas including:

- An increase in:
 - Bonfire complaints;
 - Noise complaints;
 - Complaints about accumulations and requests for pest control in relation to rats;
- Amendment and creation of new webpages to take account of COVID-19;
- Re-writing and creation of new standard letters and posters (for example social distancing, noise, bonfires) in light of the COVID-19 situation.

Redeployment

- Two team members were redeployed to help with the S4S Hub, where they assisted with the assembly and distribution of food parcels to our most vulnerable residents. The majority of the team's officers assisted with welfare calls, with many undertaking this work in addition to their existing workloads at weekends, including over the Easter break. The participation of officers with these calls placed an additional strain on the Service.

EH Business Support

The Service's Business Support Team are usually the first point of contact for residents or others with Environmental Health queries. In addition to an increased number of calls to the department, the team found themselves having to provide emotional support to people who were struggling, in addition to dealing with the problem the person originally contacted the team about. Two different callers were suicidal and resulted in officers liaising with the Police and Social Services to ensure these residents received the emergency support they needed in their time of crisis.

The team and other officers have been contacting all their suppliers, e.g. the Service's pest control contractor, out-of-hours contractor, and stray dog contractor, to establish whether they could still operate a service for the Council and what measures they have in place to deal with COVID-19. As a result it was necessary to suspend the stray dog service.

The team routinely attend the main office to check for post, post letters for officers working from home, and undertake any other office based tasks that are required to keep the service going.

Service Requests

The table below provides details of the number of service requests the Environment Health team has received since the Government announced COVID-19 restrictions on businesses and the public. For comparison it also includes details of the work received by the department during the same period last year.

Table – Changes in EH service requests as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic

	20/03/2019 – 30/04/2019	20/03/2020 – 30/4/2020
COVID -19*	0	69
Noise	53	87
Bonfires	11	51
Welfare Funerals	0	3
Accumulations	7	17
Pest Control requests	3	15

**Service requests related to COVID-19 work and includes allegations made against businesses trading in contravention of the new regulations, queries from businesses, employees and residents about the new restrictions and social distancing.*

Health and Safety update

Complaints about social distancing are considered under existing health and safety legislation. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has issued Local Authorities with advice on how this work should be done. Officers are investigating allegations received about concerns and have addressed numerous issues both informally (verbal advice) during patrols of the borough, and formally via written advice as required. As of 1 May 2020, 20 letters have been sent to businesses.

The team has also provided posters to businesses to help them comply with social distancing guidelines.

Food Safety Update

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has advised that all planned food hygiene visits should be deferred for a period of 12 weeks from 18 April 2020. The FSA has produced a list of priorities where it expects Local Authorities to take action and this includes:

- Food hygiene interventions due for Category A and B establishments (these premises are the highest risk business and are inspected at a frequency of 6 and 12 months respectively);
- Establishments still trading where enforcement revisits are due. Spelthorne has two businesses that were subject to enforcement notices prior to the lockdown and these will be prioritised for follow-ups;
- New businesses where the registration information provided raises concerns about a potential public health risk. The EH team are contacting all new businesses to discuss their plans and what controls they have in place.
- Businesses notifying the local authority of a change in activities. A number of businesses, including pubs, have changed their operating model to trade in compliance with the new regulations. The EH Team are in contact with these to ensure the new activities are undertaken safely.

- Urgent reactive work to address potentially serious public health concerns. As a result of one such complaint our officers identified a business with no hot water for hand washing. The team has served a food hygiene improvement notice requiring that the hot water supply be restored to the wash hand basin.
- Proactively checking businesses with Food Hygiene Ratings of 0, 1 or 2 to verify if they are trading and if they have started to operate delivery services or have introduced new processes to enable them to diversify their menu. At the beginning of the pandemic Spelthorne had 42 premises that fitted into this category. The team has been working through this list, initially by phone but where concerns remain and the business is still trading, site visits are being carried out in accordance with social distancing and personal hygiene rules. As a result of these visits our officers have served two hygiene improvement notices both on food retailers without hot water. One business applied for a re-inspection and this was carried out under strict controls. The business was re-rated as a 4. It has been noted that many food businesses with a rating of 2 or less are not allowed to trade on platforms such as Just Eat and Deliveroo. During the crisis these platforms have become a vital tool for businesses to reach their customers and the EH Team have received queries from businesses as to how to improve their rating and become eligible to join these platforms.
- Proactive surveillance of local changes, such as setting up of community groups preparing meals, or established businesses changing what they do, such as pubs providing takeaway food. The EH Team has been in contact with all the food banks in the borough to offer advice and support.

In addition to the priority work identify by the FSA, the EH Team will also be responding to imported food referrals from the Imported Food Office at Heathrow. Such referrals are generally made when consignments of controlled goods (for example food of animal origin from certain countries identified as high risk) fail to go through the required controls at the airport and have been moved to a warehouse in the borough.

During this emergency period the EH Team have also had one request for an export certificate for a manufacturer within the borough. Where possible our officers will continue to process such requests as it ensures that such businesses can continue to operate.

Infectious Disease update (non COVID-19 related)

The EH Service continues to respond to infectious disease notifications as per the agreement with Public Health England. The majority of these notifications related to organisms known to be transmitted via food and water. The team have been receiving notifications of Campylobacter, Hepatitis E and E. coli O157.

PHE are currently leading the response with regards the investigation of COVID-19 cases. They have advised that they may request EH assistance with tracing contacts in the future, but at the moment the team's officers are not involved with this work.

Noise

Restrictions confining people to their homes and where available, gardens, have meant that there is little escape from noise, but also that some are more inclined to make noise either through DIY activities, hobbies, loud music or TV. Background noise levels are quieter at this time meaning that additional noise is more apparent. Tolerance levels are less when residents are already suffering from stress, fear and anxiety as a result of the pandemic. A considerable number of people are having to work from home, including children, so are more disturbed by noise. Furthermore, key workers, working long hours under very stressful conditions value and need the chance to have peace and quiet and unbroken sleep when resting at home. The restrictions have resulted in an expected increase in noise complaints which the team have been responding to.

The Government's instruction that construction works should continue to support the economy and assist in meeting the housing demand has resulted in a significant increase in the number of construction noise complaints which officers are having to deal with.

New standard letters have been created and the Council's noise webpage has been updated to reflect the change in advice to take account of the impact of the restrictions to residents.

Visits have continued where possible to witness noise and the team are in the process of setting up a Noise App which will enable residents to download and send to officers their own noise recordings. Letters have been hand delivered in recognition that the postal service is under strain and delays are inevitable.

The out of hours service continues to operate to witness noise out of hours and provide reports for the team to enable cases to be progressed.

The team are currently considering a Section 61 prior consent application regarding proposed major works to the A30/A308 which are due to start shortly (the Crooked Billet roundabout planned works, part of Wider Staines Sustainable Transport Package) where there may be a significant impact on local residents. We are ensuring that the contractors will be taking appropriate measures to mitigate noise.

The team are preparing a case file for a prosecution on a noise case where despite service of an abatement notice and several warnings, the perpetrator has continued to behave in a way that has significantly affected neighbours.

The team continues to work with Mediation Surrey and encourage people to try mediation to help resolve disputes between neighbours. The service is continuing despite the restrictions, albeit without face to face meetings, and the service has been extended to assist with family issues (including supporting young people and their families) during this time. The team have worked with the Communications

Team to ensure that this service is publicised, recognising the increased benefit of mediation during this time.

Bonfires

An increased number of people are spending more time de-cluttering and clearing their homes and working in their garden to keep active during the current COVID-19 restrictions. This, along with the temporary closure of local Community Recycling Centres, has resulted in an increase in waste being produced and many have taken to burning this. The impact of bonfires at this time could be significant since the COVID-19 virus is a respiratory illness, and as such, smoke inhalation could have serious consequences to anyone suffering from it.

The EH Service's response to bonfires has therefore increased with officers visiting on each occasion they are notified that a bonfire has been lit during working hours and giving verbal and written advice to perpetrators. This has so far been generally successful in getting people to change their behaviour and put out or refrain from having further bonfires.

The Council's out of hours contractors have agreed to extend their service at this time (at no additional cost) and respond to bonfires at evenings and weekends and provide the same verbal and written advice to perpetrators.

The team have worked with pollution control officers to create new standard letters and the advice regarding bonfires on the Council's website has been updated. Pollution control have also instigated a publicity campaign urging people to refrain from having bonfires, including an e-news article and posts on social media.

Welfare burials

In anticipation of the expected increase in welfare burials as a result of deaths from COVID-19, the need to adapt the process for staff safety, to speed up the process and account for changes in ways of working at this time, officers have reviewed and adapted the welfare burial procedure. Officers are currently working on 3 welfare burials in line with this adapted procedure.

Housing

The Council's duties for taking action in relation to serious and immediate risks to health and safety of persons in their homes have not changed. Officers are continuing to respond to new complaints about housing conditions and progressing existing complaints, but are prioritising those where there is likely to be a significant impact to the resident.

Consideration is being given to the fact that landlords may face difficulties sourcing appropriate contractors to carry out necessary works at this time and, if appropriate, a temporary interim measure will be agreed.

Officers are adapting ways of working so as to avoid undertaking visits where possible and asking both occupants and landlords to provide photos, videos, email

documents and even considering contact through FaceTime, Skype, What's App, Zoom, etc..

When time allows, officers will be producing a list of local reputable contractors that have put appropriate procedures in to place to ensure social distancing measures are taken, and that can be called upon to attend where emergency works are required.

Work continues to gather data for the government on tower blocks in the borough. The extension granted by the Government to complete the data return due to COVID-19 has enabled further, more meaningful data to be obtained.

Social distancing is a particular issue for those living in houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and makes inspections of these at this time particularly challenging. Routine inspections of HMOs are therefore not taking place at this time.

Information for tenants and landlords (including advice on social distancing) has been drafted to pass on to our Communications team to update the website and to include in other communications such as E- news.

HMO licence applications are still being progressed and where inspections of licenced HMOs are due to check completion of works or compliance with conditions, officers are requesting that landlords provide evidence by way of photos, videos, receipts, certificates, etc..

Accumulations and pests

The team are continuing to receive and respond to complaints about accumulations of rubbish in the borough and pests (rats and mice). There has been an increase in both which is presumably due to the closure of the local Community Recycling Centres and residents producing more waste whilst restricted to home. The fact that less people are around also adds to the risk that more fly tipping and rat activity will occur.

Information and advice is being drafted for a publicity campaign to make residents aware of the increase in vermin and to dissuade them from taking actions that will attract vermin such as feeding birds and inappropriate disposal of rubbish.

Planning and licensing consultations

Officers are continuing to respond to planning and licensing consultations (including some major development applications) in relation to noise and light, since construction works are continuing to support the economy and assist in meeting the housing demand.

Caravan sites

Officers are continuing to deal with complaints relating to caravan sites in the borough and site licence matters.

Licensing Update

The Licensing Team continue to provide a service to the trade and residents while working from home. Despite the departure of one member of the team in January 2020 their work has included:

- Temporary renewal of the licences for 14 drivers, 17 vehicles and two operators. Four drivers have deferred their licences;
- Continuing to work with Surrey Police about enquiries regarding licensed premises;
- Reviewing taxi licence fees;
- Working with the Commercial team with regarding the deferral of animal licensing inspections and the continuation of checks on higher risk licensed premises;
- Dealing with two applications for licensed premises.

Pollution Control

The Principal Pollution Control Officer left the organisation on Friday 1 May 2020. Prior to this she was working reduced hours. Although this has impacted the team's ability to meet the requirements of their routine work they have continued to:

- Respond to planning consultations either new or existing. Many developers are keen to get projects off the ground or keep them going.
- Support the residential team/ business support team with complaints re bonfires and general smoke emissions as well as instigating a publicity campaign and creating of new standard letters and new information on our website advising people to refrain from having bonfires at this time.
- Monitor air quality. Many studies are currently being undertaken nationally and internationally to establish whether lockdown as had an impact on air pollutant emissions. The team's tubes continue to be changed on a monthly basis and will do whilst the laboratory we use for analysis is able to issue and analyse these tubes. The consultants used by the team continue to service our automatic monitoring stations which are very important in capturing changes in air quality during time. Press enquiries with regards the impacts of lockdown on air quality have started to come in.
- Statistical analysis on the 2019 air quality monitoring results is being finalised and will feed into the Annual Status Report that is currently being drafted for submission to DEFRA by their June 30 deadline.
- The team are in the process of assisting the Pollution Prevention and Control contractors used by the Council in the preparation of the annual risk assessments for the permitted processes in our borough, which will then feed in to issuing the relevant fees letters for each installation.

Corporate Health and Safety

The team have been busy, with one member having been redeployed. Their achievements include:

- Completing an audit of the corporate safety management system (SHE system). This involved reviewing 206 Risk assessments;
- Developing a 12 month plan;

- Reviewing 151 Display screen equipment (DSE) assessments received from staff members working from home;
- Producing guidance for staff to help them navigate the SHE system, including the completion of three help-sheets to enable: Signing onto SHE system, Extracting risk assessment and converting it to Word documents (ready for generic risk assessments) and DSE access on SHE portal;
- Continuing to work with the Asset Team on the west wing development, going through documents and attending online meetings;
- Continuing to support other teams with general H&S enquiries and the SHE system (i.e. log in resets and requests).

General Considerations

The entire EH team is now based at home. This is a completely new arrangement for many and it has had its challenges with one team member having to source an internet supplier during the lockdown. Many of the team have had to become familiar with new technology to host and attend meetings and receive training.

Many officers are parents to children of school/nursery age and are trying to balance childcare and home schooling with an increased workload. Furthermore, some officers have caring responsibilities for elderly and vulnerable relatives and are trying to balance their work with providing the required support for them. Many officers are working early mornings, late evenings and weekends as well as part time officers working on non-working days to ensure they meet their work commitments and to make welfare calls.

Staff shortages in the team (including an officer that resigned at the start of the lockdown) has put additional pressure on the rest of the team.

It cannot be ignored that many officers are also facing the inevitable anxieties and fear for their loved ones (some of whom have already lost loved ones), that this pandemic situation has caused. Furthermore, officers are at times having to deal with very difficult calls from residents and businesses who are particularly struggling at this time, including calls from two residents who were suicidal. This does make circumstances challenging for those officers that have handled such calls.

On the 5 May The Sun newspaper ran a false allegation that the Council's EH Team had written to a resident about noise from his participation in the weekly 'clap for carers'. This was absolutely not the case. The team had written to the resident concerned about other noise from his property at different times of the day, a fact which was made clear to the journalist involved. This story has unfortunately had a negative impact on a team that has been working so well and so hard to deliver essential services to the community at this difficult time. The Council is in the process of submitting a complaint to the IPSO (Independent Press Standards Organisation) about this matter.

New risk assessments have had to be undertaken to take account of the additional risk to staff of COVID-19 and the team and they have had to adapt the way they

undertake some of their functions, for example by obtaining information from residents, businesses and landlords via photos, videos, FaceTime and setting up the noise app to minimise the number of visits required in line with government advice.

The EH team continue to prioritise essential work and visits, but this will mean that there will be a huge backlog of work, including routine food hygiene inspections, routine health and safety work, routine housing visits and routine licensing work which will still need to be completed when resources permit. The team will continue to review how they adapt the service and plan for resuming their 'normal' service after the pandemic in line with changes in government advice and guidance.

As a team whose role it is on a day to day basis to deal with public health, Environmental Health are well placed to respond to the challenges they have and continue to face in helping to protect the residents of Spelthorne by communicating, advising and enforcing.

4.3 PLANNING SERVICE

PLANNING DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

Reaction to the COVID-19 Pandemic - New Ways of Working in Planning Development Management

The Planning Development (PD) Team had to completely change their way of working following lockdown to ensure that they could continue to carry out their planning duties. All Planning Development Management (DM) officers are working from home with some very limited work elsewhere. The virtual planning application system for processing planning applications (Idox Enterprise) was completed and trialled a few days before the COVID- 19 lockdown. This has been invaluable to enable the team to undertake home working successfully.

Planning Officers are not undertaking site visits at the present time. With any new applications, they are now requiring applicants to submit photographs in accordance with new written guidance. These have been put on the front planning page of the Council's website and under the section which outlines the documents required with a planning application.

With current planning applications where the officer has not yet been to the site, case officers have been requesting photographs along the same lines as new planning applications, if required. In addition, other resources can be used as appropriate, including previous site photos and notes (if any) and Google Earth and Street Scene screenshots.

All delegated decisions are made remotely by the Principal Planning Officers under delegated authority.

The planning support officers in DM are able to work from home for the majority of their work. Working remotely, they are able to register planning applications received electronically, upload all documents, plans and electronic letters from third parties onto the website after sensitive data is manually redacted, carry out consultations requested by the case officers and issue planning decisions. All decisions are automatically uploaded onto the Council's website together with the officer's report.

The planning support officers also receive planning appeals and upload the documents onto the website. All neighbours who wrote in originally will receive a letter advising of the appeal and what they can do. However we have been advised by the Planning Inspectorate that most appeals have been put in abeyance for the time being and the Planning Inspectorate is exploring different ways of moving forward. Nevertheless, in the meantime, we are still receiving correspondence from the Planning Inspectorate.

Other electronic correspondence, including requests for pre-planning application advice and other letters and correspondence is logged in the normal way and forwarded onto the planning officers.

The weekly list of planning applications received and validated are continuing to be sent to all councillors and many other groups on either a Wednesday or Thursday.

At present, one full time Senior Planning Enforcement Officer and one part time Planning Enforcement Officer are undertaking site visits, where essential. The other part time Enforcement Officer is working on current enforcement work and new complaints. The Senior Planning Enforcement officer erects statutory site notices when required. The team is managed by a Principal Planner.

Urgent matters relating to trees are initially being dealt with by the Planning Enforcement Officer in consultation with the Tree Officer. The Tree Officer visits sites once a fortnight in relation to tree applications, works to TPO trees, trees in conservation areas and trees affected by planning applications.

The team's Historic Advisor is working remotely and is contactable by email and phone. He has extensive knowledge of our borough. As a fall back, if an urgent matter arises, one of the team's Principal Planning Officers, who has experience with historic buildings, is able to visit the site if necessary and give advice.

There are some areas of work which still require printing and scanning and which need to be done from the Council Offices. These include all neighbour notification letters, letters advising residents of an appeal where the writer does not have an email address, printing statutory site notices, printing of any hard copy planning applications and any documents received in hard copy. The DM Team are also exploring with other sections the possibility of an external company undertaking printing (and possibly scanning).

Planning Committee

The Regulations on how to proceed with remote planning committees were received in early April 2020. As a result, the first completely virtual planning committee took place on Wednesday 29 April 2020. Two 'dry runs' with the Planning Committee members took place on the Monday and Tuesday evenings prior to that date and several other practices were undertaken with officers and some members.

After some technical issues on the first dry run which coincided with major Virgin Media problems nationwide, the Committee meeting itself ran exceptionally well. The DM Team, Legal Service and Committee Services have since reviewed the process and will be making some small adjustments to further improve the process at the next Planning Committee meeting later in May.

Major applications

The Council has had to review and consider how it deals with major planning applications during the COVID-19 crisis. Officers are writing to all applicants who have submitted a major application asking them to agree to a deferral of the scheme at the present time. The Planning Service is looking to try and defer majors until the Council has the ability to deliver some form of a physical planning committee meeting with social distancing in place. Applicants are fully entitled to reject such a request, in which case the Local Planning Authority will need to move to determine the application (or if not the applicant can appeal).

As a Council we are minded to accept that for Spelthorne Borough applications we accept delays to formal determination. However, the groundwork will continue by the Planning Team until they get towards the point of determining the application (e.g. representations, consultee responses, negotiations and requests for extra information if required).

As an authority, the matter is being kept under active review (both in terms of planning committee and major applications).

Redeployment

In Planning DM, 12 out of 18 full and part time officers have been re-deployed on a part time basis in COVID-19 response activities. The activities have included welfare phone calls and visits, customer service calls and food parcel deliveries. This has had and will continue to have an impact on the Planning DM's workload. Officers have been seeking an extension of time to planning applications where possible to avoid poor management performance. Some officers have built up a number of hours due to additional working at weekends and public holidays and this has affected the part-time staff disproportionately.

Planning Workload

Planning applications continue to be submitted every week. Following lockdown, from 23/03/20 to 26/03/20, 106 planning applications have been determined and 91 applications submitted. Officers are continuing pre-application discussions, although

the numbers have reduced. However, there have been two large major pre-application meetings which took around six hours of each officer's time, plus preparation time.

The preparation for the first virtual planning committee took a huge amount of officers' time, many times more than is usually the case.

Planning Enforcement Officers are continuing to receive complaints requiring investigation, including undertaking site visits. Additionally, two injunctions were served on a site in Shepperton following virtual court hearings. Planning Enforcement was heavily involved with this work.

When working virtually, Planning DM work generally takes longer with increased emails, Skype calls and telephone calls. A number of interim guidance notes and updates, including amended guidance for applicants have been prepared and placed on the planning page of the website. Additional legislation has been received which has needed assessment. Numerous internal guidance notes have been prepared for officers.

Finance

During the first month, April 2020, the planning application fees are slightly above budget although this includes one major planning application fee which would artificially positively skew the income. The pre-application fees are slightly under budget. However, officers have successfully completed one planning performance agreement and a further one is under discussion.

4.4 STRATEGIC PLANNING COVID-19 IMPACTS

Strategic Planning have not been required to do any extra work in relation to their normal daily duties as a result of the pandemic and they have not seen increased demand or new requests for assistance from residents or businesses.

The whole team, with the exception of one member of staff, have been redeployed during the COVID-19 crisis. As a group, they worked to pull together data from a variety of disparate sources (Government, surgeries, CCG, our own lists of vulnerable residents) into one place to assist the S4S Hub. This enabled the Council to get a true picture of the extent of Category A and Category B residents. Along with ICT, the team prioritized calls to ensure that the most vulnerable were contacted first. This was an intensive two and a half week piece of work. The team then moved on to deal with welfare calls and delivering food parcels.

Redeployment has meant that the work of the team has ceased entirely with the exception of some administrative tasks, and work on logging consultee responses to the Local Plan consultation which took place last year. Work is still being undertaken by consultants on several pieces of technical work. Information has been provided to members of the Local Plan Working Party virtually to allow key decisions to continue to take place.

The team was well placed to deal with COVID-19 pandemic as they are used to dealing with complex issues via remote interdisciplinary meetings. Twice weekly meetings have been set up to deal with the work programme (this was at least daily when work was being undertaken on the data) and to ensure clear communication. All work is held and logged centrally and is easily accessible. WhatsApp has been used to ensure the team keeps in touch more informally.

4.5 BUILDING CONTROL

Maintaining business as usual:

Having been made aware that the Government had determined to make 'building work' an essential service which could be continued during lockdown, it was necessary for the Building Control Manager to ensure that Spelthorne continued to provide a meaningful Building Control (BC) service throughout the borough. In order to deliver this the following measures were put in place:-

- All members of BC staff were provided with sufficient IT equipment to enable them to work from home and all were encouraged to do so wherever possible. This enabled (and continues to enable) all staff to answer and make telephone calls with absolutely no detrimental effect on the service users. By enabling this it has been possible to continue to provide an uninterrupted and seamless BC Service despite the COVID-19 restrictions;
- The BC Team continue to provide a duty surveyor on weekdays during the hours of 8.30am – 10.30am and 3pm – 5.30pm to answer calls and e-mailed queries from service users and the general community;
- Unlike many other Building Control providers throughout the county, and the country in general, Spelthorne continued to attend construction sites to carry out site inspections from the earliest stages of lockdown. Such inspections are carried out where social distancing and hygiene guidance can be guaranteed by site operatives/property owners; but where such measures cannot be guaranteed the team have been prepared to consider the submission of photographic/video evidence to confirm the adequacy of building works. This approach has since been endorsed by MHCLG in their nationally issued guidance on 21/04/2020.
- Throughout the period Spelthorne's BC Service has continued to accept all Building Regulations applications and all are being determined within normal timescales.
- Throughout the pandemic the BC Team has continued to provide a 24 hour emergency service to the community in the event of the reporting of any dangerous structures within the borough.

Keeping the team informed:

Having identified the need for the BC Team to work in a different way the following measures were put in place to ensure that all members of the team were kept informed and in-touch with the remainder of the team:

- A WhatsApp group was set up, which all team members were signed up for and actively using. This ensured that everyone was aware of what the team was doing, who was working/on duty, etc.. This has been useful to ensure social distancing is guaranteed when a member of the team has been required to visit the BC office at Knowle Green to collect files, etc.. This has worked out to be a great tool for the team and its use will be continued when things return to 'normal.;
- Weekly Skype meetings are held with all of the team in attendance. This has worked well, allowing everyone a say in how the team is working and engendering a great team spirit;
- The Building Control Manager speaks to all (working) members of the team on a daily basis to ensure that they have adequate work to deal with and to keep them up to speed with any circumstances relevant to them.

Making the best of the situation:

From the earliest days of the developing situation it was clear that much of the day-to-day Building Control work was reducing as the number of incoming applications slowed significantly, together with the volume of requests for site inspections. The team also suffered from one of their two technical assistants contracting the COVID-19 virus and this member of staff continues to be absent from work until at least mid-May. To ensure the maximum use of the remaining BC staff the following measures were utilised:

- The Building Control manager discussed the situation with the team and several members of staff immediately volunteered to assist in providing assistance to members of the community through the S4S hub. These offers were subsequently accepted by the welfare team and for several weeks (until 4/5/2020) three members of the BC surveying team assisted with making/receiving telephone calls to vulnerable residents as well as delivering comfort packs.
- Having lost the working hours of three members of the surveying team the remaining BC Team members continued to provide a service to our customers and community. In view of the reduced workload the reduced staffing complement were sufficient to cover all of the incoming workload, again with no detrimental effect on service users;

The number of incoming Building Regulation applications has recently started to increase, as have the number of requests for site inspections. With staff now returning to the team having worked for the S4S hub they now have the capacity to deal with, what will hopefully become, a surge in new applications.

4.6 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Support for businesses

The Economic Development (ED) team has 1.6 FTE's and therefore, of necessity, the officers have had to focus on key interventions where the Council considers it can have the most immediate impact. As a result of the work the team undertook in the aftermath of the 2014-15 flooding event, officers know that it is critical to ensure that information and communication starts to flow as soon as possible. In times of crisis, businesses need to be able to get information and make direct contact with the officers for assistance. Work during the height of the COVID-19 has been targeted in the following areas:

- Provided support for businesses wanting information on how to access Government grants. A number of businesses contacted were not aware of the grant or thought it was a loan. Several have now successfully accessed the £10k or £25k government grant due to the positive intervention and assistance of officers (e.g. a hairdresser and florist in Sunbury)
- Chased progress with grant payments for several businesses, some of which were in time-sensitive situations and were not getting answers from their enquiries.
- Now working with the business rates team to chase up those businesses who qualify for government grants but have not yet submitted a form.
- Starting to contact businesses where information on their form is outstanding in order to accelerate receipt of payment.
- Designed a business survey very early on in the crisis to communicate with local businesses (of all sizes) and better understand their needs and concerns. This has fed into the prioritization of work.
- Kept the Council's website updated daily with news for businesses, with links to Government websites.
- Provided input and reviewed the Business E News developed and issued by the Council's Communications team.
- Provided direct links to businesses who have contacted the Council on what Government support is available, for those who were unsure of their entitlements. This has included the availability of loans as well as payments to the self-employed.
- Helped local businesses by advising them on how to diversify their business to online sales, in order to mitigate the impact of the closure of their physical premises.
- Set up a new 'delivery' area on the Spelthorne Business Forum website that promotes businesses that deliver goods to customers, to encourage trade locally so that businesses can support each other.
- Provided on-going support for local businesses who do not qualify for grants or loans. This includes a number of businesses who have been category winners of the Spelthorne Means Business Awards (e.g. new start-ups, those without premises who hire venues).

- Used the social media training provided by the Council for businesses to assist local companies. One local printing business has launched a successful rainbow sticker campaign, which has saved their company from going into administration as they were not eligible for any Government grants and would otherwise have fallen through the cracks.
- Organised a series of webinars for our local businesses on subjects they have highlighted as of concern, i.e.:
 - Government grants/furloughing
 - Sales, health & wellbeing
 - Online marketing
 - Working from home
- Email sent to around 1000 businesses with the link to the business support pages and grant application link.
- Spoken to several larger businesses in the borough who are part of our Key Account Management System to understand the immediate impact on them (and their local supply chain). In particular we have focused on those involved in the airport, cargo and logistics who have been affected.
- Reviewed the Government guidance to establish which groups of businesses are not receiving any support – there are seven groups which are not. They will need to be considered as the team develop a recovery plan.
- Assessed various national, regional and Local Enterprise Partnership reports in order to get a clear picture of the macro-economics in order to inform our local situation.

This work has been achieved at the same time as redeployment. One of the members of the team was trained up to deal with enquiries about SPAN alarms (but has not been required to undertake any visits as this work has been dealt with by the Independent Living team). That member of staff was then redeployed to undertake delivery of food parcels for a three week period, three days a week. The other member of staff (who works part time) was redeployed to assist with delivering the step down units for hospital discharges. Whilst the housing team secured the units and the assets team have been coordinating the trades on site, the Economic Development Officer spent a lot of time liaising with local companies and businesses to ensure that as far as possible we 'bought local'. White goods, electrical items, furniture and carpets have been secured from a local company in Staines-upon-Thames. Bedding, towels and toiletries have been bought locally from a food retailer and donated by a major retailer in Staines-upon-Thames and an airline.

4.7 ASSETS

ASSETS COVID-19 IMPACTS

There has been no new work requirement by Government or the Council for the Assets team as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However the pandemic has had a

significant impact on the level of the workload within the team, and has required a very different approach to the investment and municipal portfolio, in particular.

The COVID-19 crisis has had a significant impact on business, with offices and retail units being closed and staff working at home, being furloughed or being made redundant. This will impact on cashflows moving forwards, and officers will ensure the impact is kept under constant review. 'Lockdown' coincided with the March quarter rent collection. With a £1bn property portfolio, it was critical that the income was received. In order to do this, the workload of the team has increased significantly. Three members of the team, plus the manager, have been focused almost exclusively on maximizing rent receipts. In a normal quarter around 25% of their time would be allocated to rent collection at quarter end. During March and April this has increased to a minimum of 75% of their time.

Central Government announcements around how landlords should be treating business, and rent collection in particular, has had a significant impact on how the team have approached March quarter. Very early on in the COVID-19 crisis the Government advised that landlords would not be allowed to forfeit leases for non-payment of rent. It has been widely reported nationally that a number of companies have taken this as a 'green light' not to pay their March quarters rent, as landlords cannot force them to do so, regardless of the strength of their balance sheet.

In light of the importance of the portfolio to the financial health of the authority, the Council has radically altered the way that it deals with rent collection within its investment portfolio:

- It has set up a weekly rent review meeting (covering investments, retail and municipal). This meeting includes senior politicians, Management Team and the Assets Team;
- All requests from tenants are being considered on an individual case by cases basis;
- No blanket policy was put in place in terms of concessions that would be 'offered' to tenants;
- Where appropriate considering 'win-win' initiatives (e.g. leases can be re-structured with rent free periods in return for removal of impending break clauses to provide longer term benefit to the Council in return for short term easing of cashflow for the occupier)
- The March quarter day, i.e. rents falling due on 25 March, followed a quarter of near normal business operating (i.e. COVID-19 had not impacted their business at that stage) and therefore we have worked from the standpoint that tenants would largely be in a position to pay;
- The principle of whether a tenant 'can't pay' or 'won't pay' has been applied. A large percentage of the portfolio is focused on the office sector. Whilst buildings are physically closed, the companies are still operating remotely. They therefore have a large degree of in-built resilience;
- Robust one-to-one engagement with those who in the opinion of the Council were taking a stance of 'won't pay'. This has included frequent direct

conversations at director and board level, setting out in particular the Council's unique position as a landlord (e.g. not an institutional investor – the income goes direct to support provision of Council services and our housing delivery programme). This has borne fruit in a number of instances where organisations have agreed to depart from the norm they have pursued elsewhere;

- Where tenants have clearly demonstrated that they can't pay (and this has been assessed by the property managers and is deemed acceptable) then the focus has been on securing service charges. This has primarily been in connection with a number of the retail units in the Elmsleigh Centre;
- Developed a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating system (watch list), drawing on a number of data sources, to help make informed decisions on recovery of rent arrears including a final guarantor rent deposit spreadsheet;
- Updated covenant strength against payment records for all tenants;
- Undertaken weekly cashflow modelling and stress testing on the investment portfolio to assess the resilience of the accrued sinking fund;
- Cashflow quarterly income for a five year period based on (1) current position (2) base case - default only (3) base case – default and deferment (4) worse case – default and deferment, including refurbishment costs to ensure that even in the worst case scenario that the Council has sufficient sinking funds to insulate the Revenue Budget and council taxpayers from adverse impacts;
- The Elmsleigh Centre was sharply impacted by COVID-19. The lockdown was immediate and mandatory except for a couple of key stores. Tenants were strongly pressed to meet their March quarter payments, however retailer concerns about future trade and footfall even after lockdown is lifted, caused them to focus on preserving their businesses. The majority withheld rent. Government has restricted any meaningful landlord actions for nonpayment, however the Council has not waived any rental and these remain on the ledger to be revisited at a later juncture. Through considerable negotiation with senior personnel in the retailer companies, the Council has managed to collect circa 60% of the March quarter service charge, and expects to improve on that figure by the end of the quarter period. The team has also worked to reduce costs and expenditure at the Centre during this quarter to mitigate the impact of short payments; at the same time ensuring the Centre remains fully compliant, and therefore in a position to reopen without delay once the government imposed lockdown on retail is lifted.

Government guidance was updated on 23 April introducing a temporary ban on landlords from issuing statutory demands and winding up orders (called a 7 day letter); and preventing the use of the Commercial Rent Arrears Recovery procedure (CRAR) where rent arrears are less than 90 days overdue. The Assets Team are actively reviewing the approach the Council now needs to take. Whilst statutory demands can still be issued, the authority cannot progress them. This is a further challenge to securing outstanding rent from tenants. The cost implications are that the Council are unlikely to recover monies in a number of cases.

The Council's sinking fund currently stands at approximately £20m. With the onset of the COVID-19 emergency in March 2020, the Council has had to pro-actively engage with some of its tenants and discuss their cashflow issues. At the time of writing, **more than 90% of the March quarter rent due on commercial assets has been received, and of the 10% outstanding all but 3.6% has been addressed through rent deferral plans** agreed between the Council and the tenants. Retail is in a more precarious position. Notwithstanding this, at the time of writing the Council forecast **to realistically recover 29% of rent, and 71% of service charges, by the end of this Quarter period, a combined total of 39%**. In a time of crisis this is testament to the huge amount of time and effort put in by a team of highly qualified and skilled staff. To put this in some context, major private sector landlords with substantial retail focused portfolios have reported weaker collection statistics on the March quarter of 29% (Intu) and Hammerson (37%).

While balance sheet value post COVID-19 has largely remained at acquisition levels, net income has been significantly increased through leasing and pro-active asset management during the Council's ownership. Despite this initially strong position, the Council recognises that COVID-19 poses the most extreme economic stress test for more than two centuries. Obviously we do not yet know how long the pandemic will impact and when/how the lockdown will be wound down. The Council will continue to keep under active review its sinking funds projections. With even the most adverse of these scenarios, the sinking funds are sufficient to offset potential drops in rental income. This means that the Council is confident that the its sinking funds are sufficient to insulate the Council's Revenue Budget and in turn council taxpayers from any potential reductions or delays in commercial rent received adding to the Revenue Budget gap. The contribution from commercial assets towards the Revenue Budget is protected by the sinking funds.

As a result of our investments, we have improved the financial resilience of and increased service delivery resources in areas such as homelessness and independent living. This has enabled the Council to pro-actively and rapidly move in response to COVID-19 to meet the needs of its vulnerable communities without reliance on Government funding in advance. As an example, even though it is not our role, we have put in place arrangements for our staff to contact 93% of Category A (shielded) residents in the borough and arrange food parcels and welfare support for those in need.

The Government announced on 10 May its 'conditional plan' to begin lifting England's Coronavirus lockdown (Our Plan to Rebuild: The UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy). Government has set out a two-step process whilst we are in what is being called Phase 2: smarter controls. We are now moving into step 1. Government has advised that for the foreseeable future workers should continue to work from home wherever possible. This advice will apply to virtually all our investment tenants (bar a few small food retailers in some of our offices).

Subject to assessment of data and a review of whether the Government's five tests are being met, the Government have indicated that non-essential retailers will be

able to open from 1 June subject to them meeting the COVID-19 guidelines. This will enable our retailers in the Elmsleigh Centre to reopen and the Centre's management team is working up a detailed exit plan and liaising closely with retailers in preparedness. However, it has been made exceptionally clear that if the infection rate increases then both these measures may be delayed or even reversed.

Municipal assets

The Council owns a large number of municipal assets which provide services to residents and businesses in the borough. Within this portfolio the Council holds a number of buildings and pieces of land which are leased out to community organisations (such as Stanwell Moor Village Hall, Bagster House in Sunbury and Dramatize in Ashford). As a Council we ensured that all these facilities were closed as soon as relevant government guidance was issued. A significant number have been directly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Halls, for example, rely on bookings and this cannot happen as gatherings have been banned. Others rely extensively on charitable funding to supplement their income and this has diminished considerably. These organisations have a valuable place in our community and will be increasingly relied upon once we move out the other side of the pandemic.

Where requests have been received from lessees, officers have considered them on an individual case-by-case needs basis. This has included consideration of payment plans (for example moving from quarterly to monthly), rent deferrals, rent holidays and reduced rents. A new process has been set in place to ensure that these are considered quickly and effectively at both officer and Councillor level. Revised arrangements are now in place for a number of tenants. The Council are keeping the matter under active review, and considering all requests that are submitted to it.

As an authority we have taken specific action in order to assist those parts of the community most directly impacted by the crisis. Stanwell is one of our communities which, for a whole host of reasons, currently relies in Food Bank provision more than other parts of the borough (the numbers of food parcels are referred to elsewhere in this report). Stanwell Food Bank currently occupies Stanwell Pavilion. However, the space is not very well configured and this limits the effective delivery of the Food Bank service (which will continue long beyond the end of the COVID-19 pandemic). As a Borough we are therefore undertaking some internal alterations to the building (at our own cost and not that of the voluntary organisation) to enable this to happen.

Development

In terms of the development work, Central Government made it clear that it expected development and construction work to continue (whilst ensuring social distancing/hygiene measures are met) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been very clear from the outset that the country needs to be in the best position possible in economic terms once the pandemic subsides. Development and construction are central drivers in achieving this. This view was re-enforced by the fact that the government defined construction staff as essential workers (alongside NHS, health and local government staff).

Government advice (Gov.uk update dated 27 March 2020) is that 'Construction Sites have not been asked to close, so work can continue if it is done safely.' The Government advice also references the Construction Leadership Council Guidelines. All Council development sites are fully adhering to the Industry Guidance for Building Sites during COVID-19 (produced by the Construction Leadership Council)

The effect on this side of the Asset Team has been twofold. Firstly the development team have continued in their work of bringing forward planning applications for consideration by the Local Planning Authority. Two applications have been or are about to be submitted during this period. The first is for a significant residential development at Thameside House in Staines-upon-Thames, and the second is for a residential schemes at Victory Pace in Ashford. Together they will eventually deliver around 250 units of much needed housing in the borough. The latter will bring forward 115 units of key worker accommodation (with a Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and Ashford and St Peter's Hospital Trust, which gives NHS staff first refusal).

Secondly the Assets Team has a number of projects under construction, namely at White House in Staines-upon-Thames (single person homeless accommodation), Harper House in Ashford (temporary accommodation), West Wing of the Council Offices (affordable rental housing) and at Ceaser Court in Sunbury (affordable rented and private rented). Not only was it important to keep this work going from a construction (and employment) point of view, it was critical to keep moving these projects forward in terms of housing delivery. The first two scheme have secured between them over £3m of funding from Homes England (HE). Whilst HE have said they are sympathetic to any delays as a result of COVID-19, as a Council we need to ensure that these developments are not delayed. The project manager has therefore undertaken twice weekly inspections of all the active construction sites and liaised with our contractors on a daily basis to ensure the safety of the their teams is maintained by ensuring that social distancing measures are in place. This proactive work has enabled all the Council's construction sites to continue to operate throughout this pandemic except for a two week delay on one of the sites during April – which is now back up and running.

As a Council we also have a small active residential portfolio (at Churchill Way and the Bugle). The Facilities and Estates Manager has been in regular contact with our tenants to see if any are suffering from COVID-19 symptoms and whether particular measures need to be put in place. We are also reminding tenants about the need for social distancing.

Adapting the way the team has worked

A number of the team are already used to working in a virtual project team environment (development staff in particular) and using conference call facilities (Skype, Zoom and MS Teams). To some extent, for these members of staff it has been an extension of usual activities. The business support staff have had to adapt to using all the systems remotely.

Implementation and development of the Blue Box Property Management System has continued.

There is a formal team conference call weekly as well as individuals catch up calls on issues as and when required. WhatsApp is used for general team interactions. The workload of the team is managed in the usual way but we are ensuring that issues around investments and income are accelerated very rapidly. Weekly rent review meetings are held to ensure there is visibility on issues and immediate action is taken to resolve.

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis the team have maintained business as usual and adapted to a significantly increased workload on the investment and municipal assets front in particular.

Workloads

Workloads have increased substantially for the property managers, who have been focusing on rent receipt. Significant amounts of time have been spent speaking directly to tenants so that they understand this authority's position. Negotiations clearly take time and persistence. The team have also had to accelerate and develop more sophisticated modelling scenarios to ensure that the Council fully understands the implications of non-payment of rent in order to take proactive action to respond.

There has been an increase in work on the municipal portfolio with requests for rent deferrals. Officers have had to do this alongside the huge increase in work in the investment portfolio. Sorting out accruals remotely has taken longer, but this has largely been due to a significant increase in all our development and investment activity.

Staff redeployment

The work of the Assets team is critical to the Council, especially in relation to ensuring that we receive the income from our investment portfolio. Nevertheless a number of staff have been redeployed during the COVID-19 crisis. Two members of the Business Support team have been undertaking comfort calls for Category A and B residents and delivering food parcels.

The Assets Team also includes Facilities Management (FM) and Office Services. The Office Services Assistant has been undertaking calls for the Customer Services team. As well as keeping Knowle Green open and running safely, the FM staff have been involved in setting up and assisting at the Support 4 Spelthorne Hub. Finally the Facilities Manager has been leading on ensuring that the step-down units for hospital discharges are ready to take residents (involving minor works to bring the units up to standard, carpets, furniture and white goods).

4.8 LEISURE SERVICES

How the pandemic has affected the team's ability to deliver normal services

In view of the COVID-19 restrictions all leisure events and activities that were due to take place have been cancelled or postponed, including:

- The Launch of the Fitness Trail in Staines Park;
- The Resource Centre Scrap Store was closed and events such as Art Open Day and Art Workshops;
- Walking for Health and Cycling for Health schemes;
- Para Sport Club and Boccia Club at Spelthorne Leisure Centre;
- Xplorer family activity events in parks;
- Specsavers Surrey Youth Games training sessions and event;
- Staines 10k has been postponed and has been moved to October (subject to no restrictions);
- Summer concerts in the Walled Garden and in the Lammas;
- Social event for carers and those that they care for at Spelthorne Leisure Centre.

As the above events and activities were cancelled this has significantly affected the team's ability to deliver their normal services.

All Leisure Services (LS) staff were set up to work from home. Three out of the five members of the team have assisted with the Support4Spelthorne initiative by making and receiving welfare telephone calls, delivering comfort packs/making welfare visits and assisting with the administration of the above. One full time and one part time member of staff could not be redeployed due to parental responsibilities. These staff have been working on the strategic and forward planning aspects of their work. Examples include preparations for forthcoming project work and a strategy for improving sports playing pitches. They are also dealing with the day to day enquiries from the general public and local and national governing bodies. Two members of the team are currently on maternity leave.

Work continued remotely on a number of aspects of the team's work, including:

- 486 arts activity packs and simple activity instructions have been posted to children and adults by the Resource Centre Team. They also post two new activity ideas each week via Facebook.
- National and local campaign information has been posted on the website and social media. The information included topics such as taking part in sport, physical activity, arts and heritage activities whilst in lock down.
- The team have shared information from agencies such as Sport England about grants available to support clubs who may be struggling financially and have also liaised with several National Governing Bodies for sport.

New requests for assistance

The team have been approached by a few sports facilities/sports clubs who lease or have a license to use Council facilities/land. They are requesting lease/license payment 'holidays' due to the sudden restrictions/reduction in their income. The team have been liaising with colleagues in several sections to discuss a plan of action.

Leisure Centres

Spelthorne Leisure and Sunbury Leisure Centres have been closed under Government guidance. Spelthorne Leisure Centre has been used as a base for the distribution of the Support4Spelthorne Comfort Packs and for staff undertaking resident welfare checks.

The Leisure Centres donated plastic over shoes to the Intensive Care Department at St Peter's Hospital.

The project work has been continuing for the proposed new Spelthorne Leisure Centre.

5. SUPPORTING STAFF AND SERVICES

5.1 ICT

The ICT service has seen major demands placed upon it since the Council first started to move into alternative working practices due to Government restrictions to control the COVID-19 pandemic.

When the decision to close the Council offices was made, members of the team responded quickly to ensure that arrangements were put in place for staff to work at home. From a Business Continuity perspective, the Council, like many other organisations, has had to rapidly enable officers and Councillors to work from home on a large scale. A significant proportion of the Council's officers are classed as key workers and so are expected to attend their normal places of work and carry out their roles if it is not possible to carry out their jobs from home. The ICT Team has therefore had to balance the needs of those workers with those that can/are required to work from home.

This has led to a significant increase in workload for the ICT team, with the headline achievements including:

Preparing/enabling teams to work from home

- Prepared and distributed around 300 items of home working kit before lockdown and prepared a form and database to track distribution of that equipment;

- Prepared dozens of additional workstations and countless other items such as screens and keyboards for staff to collect and use at home;
- Continued to procure items, such as headsets, to improve the quality of experience for home workers;
- Provided extensive one to one support calls for staff and councillors to get them used to home working and online meetings. This is still ongoing and will be expanded on in the coming weeks;
- Produced and distributed documentation for staff and councillors to help with home working and online meetings;
- Supported the introduction of virtual Council meetings;
- Moved the customer services contact centre onto a Skype response group;
- Created response group reporting, to facilitate departmental management of remote staff;
- Arranged and prepared for an increase to the Council's internet bandwidth, to help with additional traffic;
- Virtualised the Council's telephony gateway to provide greater disaster recovery (DR) resilience;
- Set up additional CCTV to cover the security of the vacant ICT office;
- Created an online form for Housing Benefit claims do assist with the increased number of claimants;
- Created forms for Grant payment schemes;
- Created various other forms for reporting of staff related COVID-19 matters;
- Refined the VDI template for speed and efficiency.

Supporting the Support4 Spelthorne hub

- Created a solution for the Welfare cell – forms, telephony, database, dashboards and reporting – to allow contact and follow up actions for vulnerable citizens in the borough and provided extensive support and updates for this and constant reactive uploading of data;
- Sourced and collated data off all our databases to find all vulnerable residents using Electoral Roll information and UPRN information (NB. the use of the data raised issues relating to data protection and privacy notices which have been addressed along Information Commissioner's office guidelines).

Ongoing monitoring and development

- Monitored and reported back on network usage on a daily basis;
- Made preparations for moving staff onto Office 365 to enhance home working capabilities and have created a group of champions to trial it;
- Begun to prepare for moving our main telephony platform from Skype for Business to Teams.

In order to ensure platform stability it has been necessary for members of the team to be logged in at very early hours, before staff, and maintenance work has been pushed into late evening and weekend work, so as not to interfere with the Support4 Spelthorne welfare cell (on some occasions not starting until 8/9pm and finishing as late as 3am).

The ICT team has been affected during this period by the loss of some staff for significant periods of time due to COVID-19 infection. This, coupled with the significant workload faced by ICT, has meant that leave has had to be cancelled and overtime and weekend working has significantly increased for some of the team.

Despite all these challenges, home working is now being implemented successfully and Skype for Business is now being regularly used for meetings and contact with staff. The ICT service has ensured its Helpdesk has been available throughout to assist staff and Councillors in operating remotely.

5.2 HUMAN RESOURCES/PROTECTING OUR STAFF

The Human Resources (HR) team have supported managers and staff by providing updates, guidance, FAQ's, e.g. on annual leave and risk management in relation to the emerging situation and legislation. This has at times been problematic due to the evolving situation with information often changing on a daily basis. The team have adapted or created policies, for example a redeployment policy to meet current needs, and consulted with UNISON as part of the Council's employee relations and the changing requirements placed on staff in this long term emergency situation.

Statistical reporting on COVID-19 staffing absence and at risk groups has been collated by HR and updated on a regular and often daily basis as the reporting requirements have changed as the situation has evolved.

Sickness Log			
Shielded/Vulnerable Group			
Date	Category A & B WFH	Category A/B Not WFH	Total (inc WFH & not WFH)
13 March to 12 April	42	9	Total for period 13/3/20 - 12/4/20 is 51
w/c 13 April	42	9	Total for w/c 13 April 2020 is 51
w/c 20 April	42	9	Total for w/c 20 April 51
w/c 27 April	41	9	Total for w/c 27 April 50
<i>Please note: This data has been gathered from information given by managers or staff completing an Isolation form.</i>			
COVID Symptoms			
Date	COVID symptoms WFH	COVID Symptoms (SICK)	Total (inc Sickness & WFH)
13 March to 12 April	2	23	Total for this period(13 March to 12 April) is 25
w/c 13 April	2	5	Total for this period(w/c commencing 13 April) is 7

w/c 20 April	1	5	Total for this period(w/commencing 20 April) is 6
w/c 27 April	0	2	Total for this period(w/commencing 27 April) is 2
Rolling total		32	
Self-Isolating due to Family Member (14 days)			
Date	Self-Isolating due to family member and WFH	Self-Isolating due to family member and not WFH*	Total
13 March to 12 April	6	8	14
w/c 13 April	2	1	3
w/c 20 April	1	0	1
w/c 27 April	0	0	0

The information has been essential for providing an up to date picture on affected staff for both internal and external reporting and to assist with workforce planning.

The HR Team have been working to enhance the existing staff wellbeing support package in place as they have had to be very mindful of the difficult situations the Council's employees have had to face. Mental Health support can be accessed through a number of routes namely Mental Health First Aiders, online and telephone counselling. The team have been working with third parties including Able Futures and Minding Your Business to provide additional support and information to staff. They are also in the process of setting up an assistance fund which can be accessed confidentially by employees who find themselves in financial difficulty.

The COVID-19 emergency has coincided with one of the busiest times of the year for the HR team with annual statutory returns, financial year end, pay award implementation and casework management including Employment Tribunal assistance. HR has continued to provide support to the organisation as well as releasing 4 staff to be redeployed on a part time basis to assist with the welfare calls, Customer Services and Independent Living support. HR continue to look at new ways to manage casework to ensure a fair and consistent approach in line with adapting best practice. The team are working as flexibly as possible and holding meetings and hearings remotely wherever possible and it has meant that some non-urgent work and cases have been put on hold.

For those staff that are unable to attend work either through illness, or the need to self-isolate due to members of their household having COVID-19 symptoms, or if they are part of the 'shielded' group, HR have provided an absence policy that provides them with normal pay during this period. Where feasible, staff have been encouraged to ensure they work from home if they have an underlying health conditions such as diabetes.

The HR Team have adapted the iTrent HR System to meet the new reporting demands and they continue with technical projects already started pre-lockdown. Complete remote working has presented challenges for submitting all claims electronically with a diverse workforce and moving away from traditional paper based methods. Going forward one of the technical projects relates to electronic document management.

HR have worked with colleagues across Surrey and other national agencies to collaborate wherever possible on a constantly changing emergency situation and have worked as representatives on the Surrey Workforce Cell and Surrey Testing Cell.

It is very apparent that the current situation has presented challenges and new ways of working for many staff. The HR Team have developed/are developing new projects to support staff learning and development, such as the implementation of a new learning management system that will incorporate key health and safety modules, including a COVID-19 support module.

As further requirements and guidance are released by the Government, LGA and ACAS, and we begin to understand the longer term implications on some employees, the team will continue to review how HR practices will need to adapt to support managers and employees.

The team has adapted incredibly well to the constantly changing requirements and worked flexibly to ensure that essential service provision has been maintained. They have pulled together in a positive way during uncertain and difficult times and their managers are very proud of them

Redeployment

As mentioned in part 1 key services needed support to ensure we were meeting the needs of essential services and so staff were asked to complete a form identifying their skills and capacity. As a result we developed a co-ordinated approach to redeployment.

The number of staff that have offered their help to support services with an increasing work load due to COVID-19 have been greatly appreciated. As this has drawn on a significant number of people in the Council the HR Team have developed a redeployment policy which makes it clear to managers and staff what the redeployed role means, to try and avoid conflict with 'business as usual' activities, which in some areas continue to be busy.

Of the Council's 420 staff at Knowle Green, the Depot and other sites, 263 work in teams which provide a critical service. Of the remaining 157 staff, 109 have now been redeployed to managing the COVID-19 response, making welfare calls, delivering food parcels or handling the increase in calls to Customer Services from residents. Going forward there may be continued pressure on some service areas which may mean that some non-critical services could have to be put on hold or

suspended for a time, especially as it is still unclear how many staff may be affected by the virus in the future until a vaccine is found.

Future

As this current situation will continue for some time managers have been asked to consider how they will resource teams going forward to meet both the demands of COVID-19, but also returning to some form of normality in due course. As part of the recovery process feedback has been obtained on how staff have taken to more homeworking and worked differently, in order to identify both the positives and negatives. This will enable us to take any learning forward to help maintain performance and develop resilience over the coming months. This will help the Council ensure it can maintain the extra work related to COVID-19 and as near to 'business as usual' as possible.

COVID-19 is, and has been for 12 weeks a difficult and potentially anxious time for everyone as we are in a unique set of circumstances. The lockdown, the curtailing of our social activities and many staff working from home can have impacts on their health and well-being. The HR Team have therefore ensured that they have notified staff of help available and have asked managers to check in with staff on how they are doing. As this is a long running event it could take a toll on staff so it is essential to look after everyone and ensure they have timely breaks.

The Council is very proud of how its staff have responded to COVID-19 as it is an anxious and challenging situation. Many of our officers are working to continue delivering critical services to ensure our residents receive the services they need. They have demonstrated real commitment in continuing their work.

Information Governance:

The Council's Data Protection Officer (DPO) has been monitoring Government and Information Commissioner's Officer advice and guidelines for information governance as these have been issued regularly. The DPO has looked to reducing the burden on essential services by putting some FOI requests on hold and assisting teams by undertaking as much work as she can to complete the documentation required where any additional data protection work has arisen.

Progress with Information Asset Register work has been very limited due to services not having the resources to attend virtual meetings – either because they are an essential service or because staff have been redeployed into essential services.

The DPO continues to give monthly training to new starters and gives advice when requested.

The number of FOIs received has decreased. For any FOI requests relating to essential services requesters are being advised that their request is being put on hold as the council is prioritising supporting residents essential service areas, so cannot currently provide the information.

Additional COVID-19 work:

There has been an increase in work on data sharing; initially requests for advice as to what additional data could be shared between services within the council and requests for assistance in persuading/reassuring other organisations where the council was asking those organisations to share data with us. The additional data sharing and the new ways of working (e.g. video conferencing,) have necessitated additional documentation to demonstrate compliance (as required by GDPR). The DPO is completing as much documentation as possible so that the essential services can continue to do their important work. The DPO continues to monitor ICO/Government guidance and the level of this has increased during the COVID-19 situation.

The Data Protection Facilitator has been redeployed to Customer Services to provide administrative support.

Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)

- PPE
 - Followed all guidance as this has been released/changed over time
 - Advice from Surrey Public Health

For staff on the frontline the Council has taken steps to ensure that staff have had the correct personal protective equipment (PPE) in accordance with guidance from Public Health England. This has been challenging as this it has changed over time. On the basis of more recent advice from Surrey Public Health the Council has ensured that meals on wheels staff have gloves, aprons and a surgical mask when visiting clients where they have to place the meal in front of the client. This helps to protect the client as they fall in the vulnerable categories. It also provides staff with the confidence that when they are dealing with medically discharged patients requiring meals on wheels services, they are protected too.

In order to ensure the safety and health of our staff, the Council has taken as many precautionary steps as possible to reduce the risk to their health in carrying out their roles. This has included closing our Knowle Green Council offices and day centres and enabling officers to work from home where possible. We have taken steps to ensure that where staff have to attend a place of work or are providing frontline services to the public appropriate social distancing measures are in place. The Council has also provided appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) in line with PHE guidance including hand sanitisers, gloves aprons and surgical masks. The offices have seen increased cleaning, especially of door handles and surfaces to minimise contamination risks to staff.

Root and Branch

The work of the root and branch team has continued to ensure the team continues with projects to improve the working of the Council and this has been adapted to both assist the teams to adapt and capture learning points from the current working situation. This included asking team managers to complete a short e-mail questionnaire outlining how things had been for them during the lockdown.

Key areas of work have included:

E-forms:

The e-forms project involves updating the physical forms to ensure completeness of data being collected, updating their format to be more user friendly and providing these forms on the customer website in a downloadable format and also as an e-form. Discussions were held with Customer Services (CS) managers to prioritise 9 forms from nearly 50 CS forms. Due to the busy period, discussions with the CS managers were limited and only one form has been updated so far and is currently being converted into an e-form. Work is to start on the next form although COVID-19 has slowed the progress of this work stream.

Hybrid printing:

Co-ordinated demos have been given to the Planning, Housing Benefits and Environmental Health Admin teams to showcase the benefits of the hybrid print solution. The specification and tender documents are being worked on as the ability to send documents and letters out via a third party would greatly reduce the need for in-house printing by staff, which during lockdown has been the main reason for some staff coming in one or two days a week.

Environmental Health team:

Discussions have been held with the residential team to map processes. Access to the T-drive has meant that process mapping could progress using documents the team had already prepared. During the lockdown period, the team was managing tasks using an Excel spreadsheet. The team discussed with the manager the use of SharePoint and also indicated that the process maps would help the team in the future when developing workflows to manage team/individual tasks.

A licensing process map has been developed for new taxi drivers. The team have also suggested the use of e-forms for licensing and are currently liaising with licensing team and ICT on this.

Spelride:

Spelride database testing and reporting was undertaken in the last month, but as the service is currently on hold, a decision was made to proceed on implementing the new solution at a later date. The team are also looking at how scheduling of routes can be undertaken so the use of manual methods can be avoided.

Recovery:

The root and branch team will also be instrumental in supporting the recovery process and co-ordination of associated projects.

To keep in touch a WhatsApp group was set up for Committees, Information Governance and Projects, which all team members were signed up for and have been actively using. This ensured that everyone was aware of how the team are and there have been weekly 'bring you lunch' sessions via WhatsApp, Skype and Zoom. This has proved to be a great tool for the team and its use will be continued when things return to 'normal'.

Meetings are held individually or with parts of the team to check on work programmes for data protection and root and branch as well as checking on how the team are coping with the current situation. Two members of the projects and information governance teams have been redeployed to assist initially with the welfare calls and more recently customer services.

Data Capture

The team have continued to manage their workload well having scanned in a considerable amount of material prior to lockdown, which has then enabled them to work from home in terms of indexing and uploading into relevant systems. However, it is reaching the point where the team need to undertake more scanning work so will need to be in the office. Social distancing measures will be applied. Once material is scanned indexing work can be undertaken working from home.

Additionally one team member undertakes template work for planning development to meet their new system requirements and this work continues. Another team member is reviewing documents loaded before their time in the data capture team, which were incorrectly labelled. Correcting these will help officers in the future save time when they are looking for the plans.

The two person data capture team along with a member of land charges have made badges for the volunteers assisting with welfare issues.

Given the small size of the team this has been a challenging time for them but the project officer responsible has kept in touch on a regular basis to ensure they are managing.

6. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE / COMMITTEE MANAGEMENT

6.1 CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

The immediate impact on Corporate Governance related to the changes in legislation which were required to enable the Council to continue to operate and make decisions whilst the country was in lockdown at the end of March. The Government published a draft bill on 19 March 2020 but it omitted to address the question of how meetings would function if Councillors could not attend in person in the traditional manner. This was rectified and the Coronavirus Act received Royal Assent on 25 March. However, it was then necessary for further regulations to be put in place in order that Council meetings could be held remotely. These came into force on 4 April 2020.

The Council had already decided to cancel meetings and then to close the Council Offices to the public. Working with the Committee managers, we then had to

consider the operation of the new rules together with the ICT implications in order to hold two Extraordinary Cabinet meetings on 8 April.

The next meeting was the Planning Committee meeting on 29 April, which is a meeting to which the public has access. It was therefore necessary to produce protocols on remote meetings and to rehearse the meeting in order that it would run smoothly on the night. This is a new way of working for members as well as officers.

It was also decided that meetings would not be held unless there was significant business that needed decisions to be made. Officers' time became very limited as the production of reports starts many weeks before their publication.

The holding of the Extraordinary Council Meeting itself will also involve a considerable amount of time and effort by many council officers.

Preparation for the Annual Council Meeting has also commenced with the consultation of all Borough Councillors.

Legal Services

The Council's need to respond effectively to this emergency has had a substantial effect on the work of the Legal team. At an early stage, the service undertook a thorough assessment of its workload to identify the type and volume of new advice required to support teams across the authority, as well as identifying the 'business as usual' workload that had to be given priority (for example, transactions where the Council was contractually bound to complete or deliver within the next 2/3 months).

Areas of new work have been varied and time consuming for the team. The following is an example of this type of work: -

- 1) Litigation/Planning/Licensing
 - i) Reactive advice on business closures during the pandemic, including advice to the Licensing team
 - ii) Advice and support in respect of prohibition notices and prosecutions under the new Health Protection Regulations
 - iii) Advice on various planning breaches e.g. breaches in relation to establishments that are converting to providing takeaway services during this period without permission
 - iv) Advice on queries raised in respect of the Community Infrastructure Levy payments during this time
 - v) Advice and support to the Housing team
- 2) Contracts
 - i) Advice on the contractual position in respect of the Council's main contracts (including on the force majeure provisions and the rights and liabilities under the contracts for the development programme), and in the light of Government advice

- ii) Advice on the Leisure Centre Management contract, potential loan agreements with the current contractor and the contractual arrangements for the use of centre
- 3) Property
- i) Advice and support on rental payment terms over the Investment, Retail and Municipal portfolios
 - ii) Advice and documentation in respect of any agreed rent concessions
 - iii) Advice on new Government regulations and guidance in respect of the failure of tenants to pay rent, including the pursuing guarantors
 - iv) A review of the rent deposits held by the Council and the terms under which they are held
 - v) Advice on the terms of a fixed term company let with A2Dominion to permit the Council to use properties during the pandemic
 - vi) Advice and support for Knowle Green Estates Limited

This is not an exhaustive list of additional advice and support that has been required from the team but provides a good overview of the type of work undertaken during this period.

As a result of the above new workload, managers have had to undertake a complete review of the team's 'normal business' workloads in order to prioritise what needed to be delivered during this time and what work would have to wait. This exercise was completed early on and is kept under review by the team. 'Normal business' priorities centre on:

- 1) The need to support the Council's income through its investment portfolio
- 2) Providing continued advice and support in respect of the Council's ongoing development programme
- 3) Supporting other teams with the need for continued compliance with the Council's statutory duties
- 4) Specific COVID-19 legal advice

The service uses a well-established electronic case management system and has been 'paper light' for many years. The investment and development of this system over the years has put the department in a good position to be able to work from home effectively during this time. We continue to identify other improvements and new software, such as an electronic signatory system, to further improve our service delivery.

There are 13 members of staff in the Legal team. 8 staff members have been redeployed which equates to just over 61% of the team. Some deployments have been almost full time, while others have provided support as and when they can. This is essential work but provides significant pressure on the team's ability to deliver the areas of new work created by the pandemic, as well as the priorities identified for 'normal business' purposes. In light of this, there is no doubt that the service's ability to continually deliver is due to the hard work and commitment of the team, working flexibly to support the needs of the Council and often working way beyond their normal hours and working patterns. The level of commitment and

goodwill in the team has been outstanding. Where appropriate and necessary, external legal support is being sought from law firms from the Council's framework. This provides an essential back up both in respect of the volume of work, but also the complexity of some of the advice required in these unusual times.

Procurement

With only one member of dedicated staff in the procurement team (the recruitment of a Procurement Officer had to be halted due to lockdown), work has continued on all procurements currently out to the market and also those in the pipeline, to ensure that the Council can continue to procure works, goods and services required to ensure that services can operate and continue to deliver. There has been no reduction in the workload in this service due to COVID-19.

Two Procurement Policy Notices have been issued by the Government, the first regarding ability to extend or vary current contracts, if required, for the response to the pandemic; and the second regarding the assessment of the 'risk profile' of suppliers and the support that can be given to those suppliers for example by a change in payment timings. This risk assessment work has commenced.

Electoral Services

Electoral Services (ES) were in full-flow preparation for the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections scheduled for 7 May 2020. The immediate impact of the pandemic to the ES Team is that the poll is now postponed and will take place in May 2021. Legislative changes have been made postponing the elections.

In view of this, the ES Team had to notify all relevant support staff of the situation; all external premises and internal room bookings that had been arranged had to be cancelled and booked for next year; and print suppliers had to be notified. Various changes to the database had to be made due to election cancellation, as this would affect registration processes. Invoices relating to the cancellation have been actioned. The election paperwork for ballot boxes has been prepared for next year with updated information.

During this time Electoral Services are dealing with business as usual, registrations, removals and continuing to update the credit agencies, government departments and members as required. They are also taking the opportunity to tidy the database, checking old information and deleting as necessary; entering telephone numbers and adding dates of birth to ensure the database is reflecting all required information to assist with electoral processes when Canvass Reform commences later this year.

Various surveys have now been requested to assist benchmarking of services. These have been requested by Cabinet Office, the AEA and the Electoral Commission.

Whilst the ES Team have been able to deal with many processes, any post received at the Council Offices is being dealt with on an ad hoc basis. One officer usually visits the office once a week or a fortnight to deal with the post and scanning of forms that we receive. This can then be actioned at home. Registration processes are therefore taking longer than usual, due to not being able to deal with this on a daily basis in the office.

Due to the financial situation, the team have seen an increase in the request for Confirmation of Residency letters. These are being emailed now, free of charge. The fee for this service has been waived at present due to the current circumstances. The effect of this on the Council's income will be minimal as the fees for this service normally only amount to a few hundred pounds a year.

The ES Team has been quite depleted in the last 6 weeks with three of the staff taking or making welfare calls 2-3 times a week and then sometimes at the weekend. The Electoral Services Manager has been doing some work for Community Wellbeing and whilst this has now dramatically reduced, it was, in the first few weeks, taking up a couple of days a week. Fortunately, there are very few election related enquiries from the public at present.

Preparations for the Canvass Reform are continuing and the introduction of new procedures and processes are expected very shortly. At present the Cabinet Office suggests this will still go ahead but it is expected that the processes will be updated to reflect the current situation in that staff will not be able to make house visits. The ES Team will also be dealing with changes to software and this will be more difficult working from home, as the usual training methods are not available and group discussions will be needed. Although this can be dealt with via Skype to a certain extent, it presents difficulties for a new major project with new procedures and new software where a lot of discussion and training is required. Any difficulties will be addressed as they arise.

Internal Audit

Internal Audit are monitoring the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, offering advice and insight to add value. A paper has been prepared and discussed with the Corporate Management Team during April setting out observations, risk considerations and wider implications for organisational resilience. This is still in development and will feed into further reporting on COVID-19 risks to the Audit Committee.

It was not possible for the March Audit Committee meeting to take place, although all scheduled audit reports had been prepared and issued to Members of this Committee in accordance with the statutory deadlines. Regulatory reporting to the Audit Committee is planned to continue.

The commencement of planned audits for 2020/21 has been temporarily suspended pending further developments, as all Services have faced increased pressure on capacity diverting their attention to dealing with the effects of the COVID-19

pandemic. The team have continued to progress and finalise audit work already underway as far as possible, albeit some delays are being encountered. They have also reprioritised focus in evaluating new and emerging risks in the current environment, which will continue to impact on future audit work. Extended remote working also required a review and adjustment of control processes for some fundamental systems. As a result of remote working, auditing at a distance has been used increasingly to deliver aspects of the service in order to minimise disruption to colleagues.

There has been increased demand for audit involvement in advisory work on risk and control implications, as new processes have been established within tight timeframes to respond to the changing environment. In other areas processes and systems continue to develop as part of the corporate response effort. The focus has been to ensure that effective control processes and mitigation measures are taken on board by management, proportionate to manage associated risk. This has taken into account that fraud and cybercrime have unfortunately become more prevalent in the pandemic crises, which have wider implications.

One member of the Audit team has been redeployed to help with welfare calls and assistance is also being provided to the procurement function to support the corporate emergency response effort.

6.2 COMMITTEE MANAGEMENT

Committee Services response to COVID-19

The requirement for social distancing due to the pandemic has meant that Council meetings could no longer take place in person. Committee Services has therefore had to put in place arrangements to hold virtual meetings and help Councillors with the technology to do this. This initially required Government legislation and guidance, which has been implemented along with Committees and ICT providing one-to-one guidance for Councillors to assist in getting used to the new arrangements.

The additional work the team has been required to undertake has included:

- awaiting government regulations, considering their impact and changing our arrangements accordingly
- making arrangements to work from home
- additional note taking at daily remote V-BEC meetings
- getting to grips with using Skype for Business for meetings
- researching and discussing with other local authorities their approaches to virtual meetings and learning points from meetings held remotely
- preparation of guides for Councillors on using Skype
- consideration of how to deal with different styles of meeting virtually, e.g. Cabinet, Part 2 items, Planning with public speakers, Council and Annual Council

- consideration and preparation of different guidelines and protocols for various styles of virtual meetings
- one-to-one assistance for Councillors, alongside the IT team which has involved holding individual test meetings with all the members of Planning Committee and follow-up calls (sometimes more than one) with those who have needed additional assistance
- setting-up audio webcasting to meet the legislative requirement for the public to hear meetings as a minimum, which involved understanding and using new technology and running tests with colleagues before going live
- Two evening rehearsals for Planning Committee ahead of the meeting

This work resulted in successful meetings being held, of Cabinet on 8 April 2020 and Planning Committee on 29 April 2020.

As a result of limited officer capacity due to staff involvement in the Council's response to the pandemic, the Management Team in conjunction with the monitoring officer came to the view that only urgent business could reasonably be accommodated at planned council meetings for the next few months. The following communication was therefore sent to all Councillors:

*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*

Committee Services are now dealing with the uncertainty of the arrangements required for the few meetings currently scheduled depending on post lockdown guidance and are looking at all possible alternative arrangements, e.g. socially distanced meetings. The team have also achieved this despite being short staffed as recruitment had to be put on hold for a third team member after lockdown.

6.3 ACCOUNTANCY

COVID-19 and the subsequent UK lockdown coincided with a busy period for the Accountancy Team, with the end of the financial year for the Council. Closing of the accounts and other accounting/reporting tasks have not been reduced during this period, although some deadlines have been extended.

Additional resources were required to ensure additional NNDR data is integrated with existing systems and payment runs for Creditors have been increased from twice a week to five days a week to support grant payments to businesses.

The team has been heavily involved in monitoring the financial position of the Council and has in the meantime continued to support Services with other aspects of their work, including purchase orders etc.

The team have adapted to working from home, with a rota in place for essential office working tasks, regular team Skype meetings and increased phone contact with officers throughout the Council.

Due to the timing of COVID-19 coinciding with closing of accounts and essential payments/creditor team work, the team could only provide very limited redeployment assistance. One officer was made available for redeployment, a new starter who could not help substantially with closing, although that person has not yet been asked to redeploy and has therefore been able to take on other significant projects.

Additional pressures the team have had to respond to as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have included:

- Requests for new corporate cards (5) and increases to limits (6+) solely because of COVID-19 emergency spend, plus dealing with problems with existing cards e.g. that were not 'working'. Administration for new cards, is onerous and protracted so interrupts the flow of other work
- Communicating on coding/setting up COVID-19 codes
- Reporting on costs
- Increased payment runs and reconciliations
- Treasury management issues due to changes in expected income in the Council's cashflow plan
- Difficulties of trying to produce full year end statements whilst trying to deal with other issues

7. COMMUNICATIONS

Communications – from crisis to connections

The challenge: to communicate effectively and quickly with a wide range of stakeholders – from residents, employees, Councillors, businesses, to 'at risk' groups and charitable/voluntary organisations and partners in the Borough. Things were and still are changing hour-by-hour and with each change came a new and often complex communication demand.

With an already effective communication strategy for Spelthorne, the key was to efficiently deal with and manage the many complications COVID-19 presented whilst diversifying and implementing the full strategy, testing it to its maximum.

Key approaches were identified for both our internal and external communications strategy:

- Communications must be timely, clear, transparent and frequent
- Communicate the facts and say it simply
- Give people clear information and offer reassurance where necessary
- Ensure we have two-way communication channels in place
- Communications need to be backed-up by effective action
- Leaders to be visible, provide clarity and reassurance
- Communications to reflect competence and empathy
- To use a mixture of written and visual communications
- Identify stakeholders to communicate with and partners we can utilise

External Communications

By undertaking a simple analysis, the Communications team were able to quickly identify how best to utilise our current communication tools. Because of recent work achieved on our social media strategy, it was possible to engage with a wider audience. The team quickly developed branded imagery that would be used for our regular updates during the COVID-19 crisis (including updates for businesses, finance, independent living, waste and recycling, parking, playground closures and other service updates) which offered consistency for the reader.

The Communications team knew that the challenge would be (and continues to be) how to best reach those more vulnerable residents and those not digitally connected. Another large threat at the beginning was 'fake news' or misinformation, scaremongering and wrong information.

Opportunities to use and share partner information was a strong advantage, particularly at the beginning of the crisis. The team used what was already there and supplemented it with anything 'Spelthorne' specific, making sure it was in-line with credible best advice and practice.

Communication partners Included:

- National Government
- Public Health England
- Surrey County Council
- Surrey Police
- NHS
- Spelthorne Beat
- Visit Staines
- Mental health resources, e.g. Mind
- Mediation Surrey services
- Sight for Surrey
- Get Surrey

External stakeholders identified:

- Residents
- Community support groups
- Charities and food banks
- Emergency services
- Resident associations
- Spelthorne Business Forum
- Local businesses
- Visit Staines
- Multi-Information-Agency (Surrey CC, Surrey Police, District and Boroughs, NHS)
- Joint Waste Solutions

Key Communication actions

Community support:

- Communicating our hub 'Support 4 Spelthorne', a combined Council and community effort to support residents in the response to COVID-19
- Creating a brand/ logo within 2 hours for 'Support4Spelthorne'
- Online campaign #support4spelthorne launched to share details of the hub – the hashtag has been shared by residents and organisations across the Borough to ensure residents are signposted to the support they need
- Writing letters, emails and postcards for the community team to contact vulnerable residents in the Borough
- Using a targeted approach to ensure the Council reached those residents that potentially need support e.g. letter drop to residents that use our assisted waste service
- Utilising local community and voluntary groups as well as Residents' Associations and Councillors to deliver leaflets to areas and individuals using these groups' local knowledge
- Use of traditional media 'Support4Spelthorne' press release in The Surrey Advertiser
- Listings of hub details on Radio Jackie website and Radio Wey
- Campaign – 'Be a positive part of your community' – posters on community noticeboards, hard copies delivered to food banks and Councillors and accompanying social media campaign
- Partnership with Voluntary Support North Surrey (VSNS) communicated using the front page of the website – sign-posting residents to support and details on how to volunteer in the community
- Ensuring messages on domestic abuse and how to get support were communicated regularly and effectively: The Mix (offering virtual support to people aged 13-25), Surrey against Domestic Abuse ('Isolating Not Isolated' – a mixture of hard hitting images and videos) and Women's Aid messages

- Radio interview with Portfolio Holder Cllr Buttar on BBC Radio Surrey on support for victims of domestic abuse; national police campaign 'Silent Solutions'; and support available from Spelthorne community hub.

Advice to residents

- Communicating quickly and efficiently on office closures – poster created, printed and placed on the outside of the buildings, noticeboards, ticker on website - all with contact details and alternative payment options/links to online web forms
- Four video messages from the Leader of the Council, scripted and filmed internally
- Cyber scam and fraud advice – press release and online messages
- Press releases and advice on staying safe in your own home
- Collaborative messaging on social media from our channels and 'Spelthorne Beat' (local Surrey Police channels)
- Information on waste and recycling collections
- Shared content and videos between Borough and Joint Waste Solutions
- 3 ENews 'Coronavirus' special publications with additional PR resulting in increased subscribers
- Daily news sent out on 'My Alerts' a subscription software for residents
- Joint (cross party) Leaders' statement on response and actions from Spelthorne
- Response 'infographic' designed covering all aspects of services response and achievements shared internally and externally
- Advice from key Council services all requiring targeted communications, press releases, posters, graphics, letters, web pages and social media posts. Topics covered include:
 - Playground and facilities closures
 - Community safety
 - Refuse collections
 - Recycling advice
 - Leisure activities
 - Environmental health, bonfires and noise advice
 - Advice for allotment holders
 - Physical and mental health
 - Free parking
 - Business rates, advice, support and closures
 - Financial updates and council tax advice/FAQs
 - Contact the council
 - Who to follow on social media
 - Updates from Sign for Surrey
 - Updates from Voluntary Support North Surrey and foodbanks
 - Latest news updates
 - Bereavement advice
 - Event cancellations
 - Cycling and walking for health

- Staines market
- Citizens advice
- Health and Government advice shared centrally:
 - Symptoms of coronavirus
 - Self-isolation rules, social distancing
 - Lockdown guidance
 - Stay home, save lives, protect the NHS
 - PPE
 - Employment/furlough guidance
 - Testing
 - Catch it, bin it, kill it campaign
 - Job retention scheme
 - National news – PM’s hospitalisation, Queen’s speech

Advice for businesses

- Communicating swiftly and proficiently the Government support packages available through a number of channels to our local businesses
- Mindful of our ‘Spelthorne Means Business’ brand and relationships with many local businesses fostered by our Economic Development team as well as with our stakeholders – e.g. Spelthorne Business Forum, Visit Staines :
 - A clear and dedicated business web page – driving grant enquiries to an online form
 - Business ENews special sent to subscribers and relevant stakeholders
 - Championing small businesses in the area by encouraging people to ‘buy local’ while following social distancing measures, e.g. Staines market and Visit Staines daily updates on store openings
 - Communicating with the local business community directly and through social media channels to raise awareness of the grants, loans and rates relief available from the Government through the local authority

Leisure and well-being

During the ongoing crisis, the Communications team did not forget the valuable role that Leisure Services provide for many residents in the Borough. With Leisure Centres closed across the country and strict social distancing rules in place, we looked at alternative ways to get the Borough active and involved with exercise and learning targeted to different groups and circumstances, including:

- Weekly craft challenges shared to social media and on the website from the Leisure team
- Simple and fun activities for children
- Rainbows to download from website and colour in
- Hashtag #spelthornerainbows campaign encouraging residents to share their pictures of rainbows and chalk drawings on social media and tag us in

- Press releases shared directly to residents, on social media and web on following topics: Easter activities, stay well at home, tips and advice on mental well-being, isolation tips, collation of educational resources (e.g. virtual zoo and museum tours)
- Active Surrey health campaign #stayinworkout particularly targeted to over-65s
- 'Join the Movement' campaign – promoting exercises to do at home with all the family
- BBC Bitesize TV channel – encouraging home-schooling ideas
- Sharing content from libraries – members can still access all of their digital resources
- Capture Spelthorne photography competition: marketing strategy aligned with social distancing advice. i.e. if you are out on your daily walk why not take a photograph and enter.

Website

We knew the Council's website was well-placed to communicate effectively with the wider public as earlier in the year this was reviewed for its accessibility by an independent league table and scored the highest in Surrey.

The team were quick to use the homepage buttons, ensuring prominent messages were at the forefront. A clear 'ticker' was placed at the top of each page detailing the closure of the Council offices which directed residents to contact details for each service.

A dedicated web page was set-up and updated daily with clear subject matters:

- News updates
- Financial advice
- Surrey Information Point
- Advice and guidance
- Food banks
- Premises that now must close
- Business support
- Employees
- Noise advice
- Health advice
- Community support
- Business rates

As part of the web strategy, a total of number of 62 separate web pages had to be created and/or amended.

For the 6 week period from mid-March to the end of April, the website received 214,472 separate 'unique users' who viewed a total of 272,740 different pages.

In particular the 'Coronavirus' main page had over 16,000 unique visitors, with 20% of those users accessing our business grants advice page.

Social Media

There are 4 social media channels that we have been using - Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram (Instagram and LinkedIn were both launched in summer 2019).

Social media became an indispensable source of information during this crisis – primarily for its speed, two-way channel offer and engagement. With 'business as usual' disrupted and audiences struggling with the challenges of rapid changes in their work and home lives, social media has provided a major outlet for connection and conversation during a time when many are feeling isolated and have moved to a virtual footing.

It also provides a collective community space for residents, with content often being shared directly from our pages to the more populated community chat groups in the Borough e.g. Staines & Ashford Talk.

We have also used social media to reach out, help others (through our community hub) and make a real difference to people's lives by responding quickly to comments and direct messages and putting any vulnerable residents in direct contact with the relevant teams.

Throughout the highs and lows of the COVID-19 crisis, social media has allowed us to quickly back up any actions taken by the Council with a clear piece of communication – whether a simple graphic, video, link to web page or a longer written piece of communication.

Campaigns including #supportforspelthorne #stayinworkout #spelthornerainbows #businesschampions have engaged and offered inspiration to the community during these unprecedented times and the platforms have helped build connections with residents and businesses.

A particular success was sharing our 'thankyou' gallery across the platforms – photos of often unseen frontline Council workers, including our park officers, hub team, housing officers and welfare team and combining these images with the trackable COVID-19 Gifs #stayhome and #thankyou. In particular, photos and videos of our waste crews have created the highest number of 'shares' and 'likes' volumes ever seen before. Alongside the photographs were some images of the thank you letters, social media posts and emails the Council has received from appreciative residents.

Across all of our social media platforms our audience and engagement has grown. Statistics detailed below show the uplift for the same period year-on-year and the 6 weeks prior to the start of the crisis. The percentage increases reflects the workload

undertaken by the Communications team and underlines the importance of using the channel as a key communication tool for the Council.

Number of followers (mixed overview of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn)

Current period: w/c 16 March – 26 April 2020	6 weeks prior to crisis: w/c 20 Jan – 29 February 2020	% increase on 6 weeks prior	Same period last year: w/c 18 March – 28 April 2019	% increase on 6 weeks prior
11,232	9,820	14%	6,800	65%

Number of posts (mixed overview of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn)

Current period: w/c 16 March – 26 April 2020	6 weeks prior to crisis: w/c 20 Jan – 29 February 2020	% increase on 6 weeks prior	Same period last year: w/c 18 March – 28 April 2019	% increase on 6 weeks prior
647	358	81%	152	326%

Engagement (mixed overview of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn)

Current period: w/c 16 March – 26 April 2020	6 weeks prior to crisis: w/c 20 Jan – 29 February 2020	% increase on 6 weeks prior	Same period last year: w/c 18 March – 28 April 2019	% increase on 6 weeks prior
11,384	8,985	27%	1,320	762%

Of note: content shares on Facebook year-on-year increase of 750%

Overall likes and reactions (mixed overview of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn)

Current period: w/c 16 March – 26 April 2020	6 weeks prior to crisis: w/c 20 Jan – 29 February 2020	% increase on 6 weeks prior	Same period last year: w/c 18 March – 28 April 2019	% increase on 6 weeks prior
7,460	1,540	384%	535	1,294%

Content clicks (mixed overview of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn)

Current period: w/c	6 weeks prior to crisis: w/c	% increase on 6 weeks prior	Same period last year:	% increase on 6 weeks prior

16 March – 26 April 2020	20 Jan – 29 February 2020		w/c 18 March – 28 April 2019	
88,950	29,494	202%	12,200	629%

Councillor communications

An essential part of our communications strategy was also Councillor engagement. By equipping Councillors with relevant, factual and timely information this would allow Councillors to play leadership roles within their own communities to support and reassure their residents.

All Councillors have a vital role to play and are well placed to act as ‘key message carriers’ and to offer support where possible to the community through this difficult time.

By ensuring regular communications with Councillors, the team knew they could act as a bridge between the Council and the community by actively sharing our messages and information - whether to reach a vulnerable person in need of a care package or a local business requiring business grant funding.

The Council established a mechanism to ensure Councillors were informed of Spelthorne activities and any County and national developments:

- Written updates twice a week and virtual mid-week briefings
- All COVID-19 related press releases included a quote from the relevant Portfolio Holder were emailed to Councillors prior to wider release, including:
 - Support4Spelthorne
 - Council services advice on refuse collections, playground closures, council tax and parking
 - Key support messages on domestic abuse, keeping well at home and scam alerts
- Posters and graphics emailed with offer of hard copies to be printed and delivered to doorstep
- A number of hard copy posters and leaflets were distributed to Councillors, including:
 - Infographic summary of Spelthorne’s response so far
 - ‘Be a positive part of your community’ with the key message to reach out and connect with your neighbours
 - Support and volunteer poster with details of food banks, helplines and how to volunteer
- Active engagement on our social media channels were encouraged with details on campaigns, what channels the Council uses and examples of engagement from residents
- Important web updates shared, including the homepage with links to Voluntary Support North Surrey

- Daily 'top line' written briefs from Surrey County Council were also emailed to Councillors

Regular videos from the Leader were shared on our You Tube channel and social media and a joint leaders' statement was issued; this collective cross-party effort offered further reassurance during a time of crisis.

All Councillors were invited to contribute to our 'V for Victory' campaign as part of our virtual celebrations for VE Day 75. Despite lockdown, Councillors shared photographs and videos with the Communications team and those that were unable to do so accepted offers of doorstep assistance. These images supplied all became part of the online photo gallery and commemorative video which was well received by the community when it was released on the 8 May.

Internal communications

Spelthorne Borough Council was one of the first Boroughs in Surrey to move to a virtual footing. Homeworking was effectively established and continues to be maintained during the crisis. For internal communications and in this new era of working from home during the COVID-19 lockdown, maintaining communication between co-workers was more important than ever.

The challenge became ensuring employees felt part of the team and instrumental in playing their part of the overall response. Keeping in touch with colleagues across all services with regular communications between individual employees and team members and also on the broader scale as a Spelthorne team. Employment engagement and safety was identified early as the top key communications action in dealing with the virus.

Our role was to communicate to staff so that they were fully aware of the situation, making joint plans and responding to the situation in hand.

Communications included:

- Thank you message from the CEX and the Leader shared to all staff on email, Spelnet and LinkedIn
- Thank you photo gallery on website and social media
- Regular Spelnet and email messages offering advice on:
 - COVID-19 updates
 - Health and safety working at home
 - PPE requirements
 - Mental health help available
 - Staff re-deployment
 - HR advice
 - COVID-19 FAQs
 - Annual leave during crisis
 - IT advice

Weekly verbal and written briefings were also held by the Management Team with an invitation to all staff members to virtually listen and ask questions directly to the team. These provided visible internal leadership, with detailed briefings which covered the whole spectrum of the Council's response and services allowing the wider workforce to see the 'big picture'. These briefings were also an opportunity for staff engagement and often offered reassurance to staff who may have concerns and worries surrounding their role.

During these briefings, staff were also encouraged to play an active part in the Council's response by following our social media channels, sharing news and sending photographs of themselves and colleagues working as part of our 'frontline' thank you gallery. Staff were also asked to participate in a number of successful campaigns separate to the Council's response to COVID-19, including our virtual VE day celebrations.

The team also shared a first-hand account of an employee who contracted COVID-19 who has since recovered.

Business as usual

Since the start of the COVID-19 crisis the Communications Team have all worked incredibly hard, utilising and growing different skills across the team. Alongside the immense amount of work detailed above, the team have also continued to issue communications for a number of services and in the background we have ran a number of key projects:

- Community safety consultation and analysis
- Leisure centre consultation extended, additional promotion and analysis
- VE day virtual preparations – video, photographs, social media campaign
- 'Capture Spelthorne' photography competition
- Business plan competition
- Committee information/council meetings
- Housing PR
- Roadworks
- Vacancies
- Spelthorne in Bloom
- Bulletin magazine planning

Summary

To summarise, the Communications team have worked efficiently and with speed to create and initiate a number of communications from the beginning of the crisis to the current ongoing situation. Internal relationships have been strengthened between the Management Team, Councillors, partners and across all services ensuring maximum productivity.

Engagement has increased across all digital platforms and a sense of community and connection has increased between the Council and its residents.

Lessons of course have been learnt and communications will continue to be reviewed and adapted throughout this period. Many ideas implemented will be taken forward to continue the growth and success of the Communications team for Spelthorne Borough Council.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial implications

The Council's Budget for 2020/21, set at the Council meeting on 27 February 2020, was agreed before the impacts of COVID-19 on the UK became apparent. It did not therefore take into account the significant financial impact now faced by the Council responding to COVID-19, including the significant effects the pandemic will have on this authority's income and expenditure.

Whilst the Government has stated that it intends to fully compensate councils for the impact of COVID-19, it is currently unclear whether this promise is just in relation to costs incurred or whether it would also cover loss of income. To date, relative to the scale of impact, the Council has received very limited financial support from central Government to offset effects on its budget. Support received so far has included:

- **Emergency Grant allocation 1 of £34k (equivalent to roughly 34 pence per resident).** This was below the average of 45p per resident issued to districts and boroughs across the country. In comparison, county councils received an average of £25 per resident, with SCC receiving £21 per resident
- **Rough Sleepers funding allocation of £6,750**
- **Emergency Grant allocation 2 of £986,000 (equivalent to around £10 per resident)**

Therefore the total COVID-19 Emergency funding allocated so far to Spelthorne is approximately £1.027m. It should be noted that the very large increase in allocation size between the first and second tranches (going from 34p per resident to £10 per resident) is reflective of a similar increase for English districts and boroughs. This follows provision of financial analysis of impacts by councils, officer lobbying through bodies such as Society of District Council Treasurers (SDCT), and political lobbying through the District Councils Network.

Through the Local Government Association, Surrey Leaders, Society of District Council Treasurers and the Surrey Treasurers Association, the Council has continued to make clear to the MHCLG and HM Treasury the scale of the financial impact on the Council and the case for additional funding.

As will be outlined below, this level of additional funding so far received is significantly less than the total anticipated financial impact on the Council.

Officers are continuously tracking the financial impact on the Council of COVID-19. Additional codes have been set up to identify COVID-19 expenditure and an income and expenditure impacts model has been set up to calculate the financial impacts on the Council across a range of pessimistic to optimistic scenarios with respect to length of lock down. An account of COVID-19 related expenditure has been kept so that the items are readily identifiable to facilitate reimbursement either by Central Government or Surrey County Council. To date, Surrey County Council has agreed to make a £9,000 contribution towards additional rough sleeper temporary accommodation costs.

The Council has been focused on responding quickly to residents in the highest needs and made contact with Category A (shielded) residents and, where they had a need, provided initial food parcels. Supporting Category A residents is actually the responsibility of upper tier councils i.e. Surrey County Council. The Council, along with other Surrey districts and boroughs, are therefore in discussion with Surrey County Council (SCC) to agree the reimbursement of Category A costs.

Whilst we now have the Government's Three Step "Our Plan to Rebuild" it is currently uncertain as to how long the current lockdown restrictions are likely to last. We have modelled a number of scenarios, based on various different Government announcements, as follows:

- best case scenario – lock down restrictions will last for 3 months
- mid-case scenario – lock down restrictions, in some form will last for 6 months
- worst case scenario - lockdown restrictions, in some form will be in place for up to 9 months

The above assumptions are being kept under regular review. In contrast it should be noted that the MHCLG is asking Councils to provide assessments of financial impacts on the assumption that social distancing etc. lasts until the end of July and that thereafter they should assume finances in line with original budget.

The table below give an estimate of likely costs to be incurred under each scenario::

High Risk Expenditure Area	Annual Budget Variations			Comments
	Pessimistic	Realistic	Optimistic	
	£'000	£'000	£'000	
TM Borrowing Costs	400	200	0	Equally may be opportunities to fix if gilts drop
Bank charges	7	0	0	
Burial costs				Figures are net of projected income based upon annual costs to SBC. Identified need to procure 54 additional housing units. A negative optimistic is impossible as we are already seeing increases. Based on approx. £4k per property to bring from lettable to habitable (beds, floor coverings, etc.)
Homelessness (emergency accommodation)	365	142	47	28 Based on annual budget for HB £400k
Homelessness (furnishings, property works)	210	84	28	40 Increasing amount we will have to credit to council tax support in form of support. Not covered by hardship fund. And not covered by subsidy payments.
Housing Benefits DHP	200	80	40	52
Housing Benefits Council Tax Support	260	156	52	10
Increased PPE, sanitisers etc	36	22	10	3 Additional £211 per week
Increased cleaning costs	10	7	3	All of our community centres have been closed. Loss of bookings, Will be some loss of income from booking by County's high needs clients
Independent Living additional costs Community Centres				Headsets, wireless adapters and keyboards to enable staff to work from home
Additional ICT costs to enable staff to work remotely, laptops, headsets etc	4	4	4	Likely increase in welfare burials needed. Usual level of cost recovery reduced due to risk limitations on accessing premises for searches at this time potential closure of businesses due to financial failure
Burial costs	25	15	8	105 Category A for April = £25k to be recharged
Pollution control - authorisation of operations	3	2	1	27 3 SLM staff £9k per month
Food distribution if not reimbursed- not in budget	315	210	105	
Leisure centre being kept open- cost included in food distribution above	81	54	27	
Additional staffing costs including overtime	96	64	36	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE AT RISK	2,011	1,039	361	

In addition to the additional costs being incurred, like many other organisations, the Council is witnessing a significant reduction, and in some cases, total loss, of some of its service income streams. The main areas impacted are listed below:

- On 27 March 2020, the UK Government announced that councils were required to make parking free to key workers. However, car park usage and income had already fallen significantly following the 'lockdown' announced on 24 March. As a result, a total loss of income for a period of time has been predicted, whilst the bulk of expenditure associated with car parks, such as business rates, insurance still has to be incurred
- It is anticipated that across a range of services including Planning, Building Control, Local Land Charges, Staines Market and Spelride fees and charges, income will fall significantly in 2020-21 (by approximately £800,000 in the mid case scenario)
- Forgoing the Council's share of monthly income split on the authority's Leisure Centres: £132,000. Note the Leisure centre operator initially requested additional financial support towards the cost of leisure centre staff. Council did offer to make a short term bridging loan to assist the operator until Job Retention Scheme funds were received but in event the operator decided it did not need the support
- Loss of municipal rental income: £130,000
- Potential Reduction in income from Elmsleigh rents £600,000 – most retailers are looking for rental holidays, we are seeking to ensure deferrals instead to ensure that actual write offs are much less than this

- Investment returns on pooled funds in which surplus cash has been placed is anticipated being lower for 2020-21 – based on information from our advisors (Arlingclose) this is estimated to reduce income by £600,000
- Reduced court costs recovery estimated £105,000
- In contrast, the garden waste collection service has been maintained and continues to bring an income to the Council. Similarly recycling income levels are being maintained

A risk analysis of the potential income reduction against 2020-21 budgeted levels is shown in the table below based on the scenarios outlined above on page 89, along with a total combined cost and loss of income.

	Annual Budget Variations			Comments
	Pessimistic	Realistic	Optimistic	
	£'000	£'000	£'000	
Car Parking - Pay & Display	981	590	263	Impact percentage for Pessimistic based on current 91.32% income loss for 6 months, then followed by 3 months of 46.57% that was observed prior to the formal lockdown, and the last 3 months being normal income. Realistic impact percentage based on 91.32% loss for 3 months, 46.57% for 3 months and full income for the last 6 months. Optimistic impact based on 2 months of 91.32%, followed by a further 2 months of 46.57%. These averages are concrete, but the original 75%, 50% and 25% could be kept for consistency across all streams.
Parking permits and season tickets	143	95	58	Impact rate for Pessimistic based on 100% loss of income for 6 months, and a 75% easing impact on the 7th month, leading to 5 months of full income. Realistic impact based on 3 months of full income loss, followed by 2 months of 75% easing, then 7 months of full income. Optimistic impact rate based on 2 months of full income loss, then followed by 1 month of 75% easing and 9 months of full income.
Civil Parking Enforcement	264	176	88	
Planning Fees	474	316	158	Existing planning applications still being processed, but will dry up
Building Control Fees	205	123	82	During early stages of "lockdown" number of incoming applications dropped to zero. In recent weeks number of applications has increased and it's hoped this will continue in the following weeks and months such that current reduction in income will be short term.
Local Land Charges income	116	78	39	Existing search requests still being processed, we anticipate that sols and search agents will get ready now for when lockdown eased then market will dry up
Licensing income	128	68	43	Closure of gambling premises & pubs, along with other businesses will put financial pressures on these businesses, some of which will not survive. Some have already asked for refunds due to not being able to trade.
Market	188	125	63	
Public Halls	14	10	5	
Parks	54	36	18	
Spelride	55	36	18	
Flowers Display	38	38	38	
				Large developments which have not started will slip however we do not apply MRP until scheme complete. If existing schemes are delayed then will be some reduction in MRP
Leisure Management Contract	198	132	66	
Municipal property	157	131	87	
Retail- Elmsleigh	1,000	600	400	
Investment Income - pooled funds	800	600	400	
Business Rates Growth	150	60	0	
Council Tax Court Costs	131	105	79	summonses will be issued late in year and costs raised but collection will be impacted into 21/22 so a reduction in 20/21 of approx £75,000
TOTAL INCOME AT RISK	5,095	3,318	1,904	

The potential combined loss of income and additional costs being incurred are material to the Council's budget and financial position. It can be seen that COVID-19 financial impacts are greater on the income side than the expenditure side. This is

also reflective of districts and boroughs, which tend to rely on fees and charges income for a greater portion of their budget. As a result, districts and boroughs are likely to be proportionately hit harder by COVID-19 than other types of local authorities.

An estimate of the likely range for the Council of the net adverse financial impact in 2020-21 is from £2.2m to £7.0m. Note: this excludes the cash flow impact of business rates and council tax shortfalls (which will feed through the Collection Fund and impact in 2020-21 on SCC, the Police and Crime Commissioner and HM Treasury, as well as SBC). The Council's Net Budget requirement for 2020-21 is £12.6m million. As a percentage of the net budget requirement, the potential combined loss of income and additional costs could be between 17% and 55%. The Government expresses local authority spending in a term known as 'core spending power' which represents the Government's settlement funding assessment, council tax income and new homes bonus income. The Council's core spending power for 2020-21 is £10.8 million therefore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic ranges from 20% to 66% core spending power.

The table below summarises the net potential range of impacts on the Council's 2020-21 Revenue Budget

	Pessimistic	Realistic	Optimistic
Net Revenue Budget £12.63M	£'000	£'000	£'000
Net impact on 2020-21 Budget	7,106	4,358	2,265
As percentage of Net Budget	56%	34%	18%
Less Contributions Received to date			
Government Emergency grant & homelessness SCC	-1,027	-1,027	-1,027
A) Rough sleepers	-9	-9	-9
b) Category A residents	-150	-50	-25
Less reduction in Elmsleigh sinking fund set aside	-1,000	-600	-400
Less application of contingency within Project Delivery Fund	-500	-500	-500
Net Estimated impact on Revenue Budget	4,420	2,172	304
As percentage of Revenue Budget	35%	17%	2%

The above table shows that after external funding and reimbursements received or committed to date, and after reduction in contribution to Elmsleigh sinking fund and use of £500,000 contingency within the Project Development Fund, the net hit on the Budget is now in a range from £0.3m (2%) to £4.4m (35%)

The MHCLG on 28 April announced that the implementation of the Fair Funding Review and the move to 75% Business Rates Retention planned for 2021-22 has been deferred for at least a year. Both of these changes had been identified in the Council's Outline Budget as potentially adding to the authority's Council's budget pressures in future years. The Council is seeking clarification as to whether this means the move to negative grants (£750,000 for Spelthorne) is also being pushed back a year. If negative grants are postponed as well, all of this will remove an

anticipated budget pressure of £1.5m in the 2021-22 Budget, which will help offset potential council tax and business rates Collection Fund impacts in that year.

Council Tax collection: The Council is likely to see a reduction in Council Tax income over the next few months due to the challenging financial circumstances faced by many of our residents, as reflected by the number of new claims for Council Tax benefit and the number of households in the Borough receiving support from foodbanks (which are currently providing 20,000 meals per week). It is possible that relative to other Surrey districts and boroughs, our working population may have been more heavily impacted as a result of the significant proportion of residents who depend on Heathrow for their employment. Universal credit claims are up 400% nationally reflecting the pressure many people are under to make ends meet during this crisis.

Impact on collection fund

In addition to the direct impact on the Council's General Fund, the Council is likely to see a reduction in Council Tax income over time due to a potentially significant increase in people requiring support from the Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTSS). Individuals who have lost their job or seen a significant reduction in their salary may be eligible to receive LCTS. It is likely that most people will qualify if they qualify for Universal Credit. The loss of Council Tax income will initially hit the Council's collection fund in 2020-21 rather than the general fund. However, if the loss of income results in a significant deficit on the collection fund then the Council's share of the deficit will need to be charged to the general fund in 2021-22.

As at the beginning of May, the Council Tax collection rate compared to the same stage a year ago is down 90 basis points (£350,000). Officers have estimated that the collection shortfall on Council Tax for the year could end up at £3m to £5m, of which SBC's share would be 11%, SCC's 76% and Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner's 13%. Ultimately the shortfall would be adjusted in 2021-22 Budget through a Collection Fund adjustment. If there were say a £5m shortfall the Council's share in 2021-22 would be approx. £500,000. However, initially it does potentially mean a higher cashflow impact for the Borough Council if SCC and PCC, as major preceptors, expect the Borough to pay over their full shares of Council Tax income as originally scheduled. Surrey Treasurers are currently discussing measures to manage this cashflow impact using a collective cashflow support arrangement.

The Surrey Treasurers commissioned LGFutures to provide some analysis on the risks to Surrey councils of reductions in business rates income, and have modelled a range of scenarios. Unlike Council Tax there is a floor below which income will not drop as a result of the national safety net mechanism. The floor in terms of maximum loss of retained income for Spelthorne would be if there was a 25% reduction in underlying business rates income. For Spelthorne the maximum reduction in business rates income the Council could experience relative to its budget estimate is £2.5m. This impact can be managed as a result of the additional £3m the Council is putting into the Business Rates Equalisation Reserve at the end of 2019-20.

There is a similar potential cashflow effect with respect to any business rates collection shortfall. However, to a considerable extent this has been addressed by the Government telling councils that they can defer by six months the Treasury's

central share (50%) instalments, which were due to have been paid over in April, May and June. There is still an issue with respect to the 10% share due to be paid over to SCC.

There is also a cashflow impact, this time favourable, arising as result of the Government paying section 31 grants upfront in 2020-21 to offset the business rates income no longer due as a result of the decision to allow 12 months exemptions to retail, leisure and hospitality sector business. This will result in £5.2m more funds being retained by Spelthorne in 2020-21 but £5.2m less being retained in 2021-22. So the Council will set aside the additional £5.2m this year and carry this forward to offset in 2021-22.

The Government has allocated a hardship fund for those households that are struggling financially as a result of COVID-19. The Council has received £588,000. Those households that are already on LCTS but still pay a contribution towards their Council Tax will be provided with an additional £150 of support. This will be applied automatically to individual accounts, so that the adjusted amounts were included in the April direct debit instalments. Revised bills will be sent to individual households in due course reflecting the lower amounts due. In addition, funding has also been provided to make short term discretionary payments to those that are affected by the Local Council Tax Support Scheme and are struggling financially. This funding is being distributed on a case by case basis as people contact us with their difficulties.

The Government initially announced a range of measures to support business, and therefore the economy, with 12 months business rate relief granted to those businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure industry. Grants of £10,000 are available to small businesses whose rateable value was so low as to be receiving Small Business Rates Relief; for businesses in retail, leisure and sector who have rateable value under £15,000 grants of £10,000 are available; and grants of £25,000 are available to retail, leisure and hospitality businesses whose rateable value is between £15,001 and £51,000 (subject to a state aid cap of 800,000 Euros). The number of business that qualify for relief is 1,125. We have received £15m from central Government, of which £9m has so far been distributed under the scheme.

On 2 May the Government announced further funding of £619m to enable Councils (our anticipated funding is approx. £756,000) to make further discretionary grant funding to support a range of businesses who were not eligible for the initial schemes. These businesses include:

- Businesses in shared office premises
- Permanent market traders with fixed asset costs
- Charities in small properties
- Bed and breakfast businesses

Councils have the discretion to make grants of £25,000, £10,000 and below £10,000. The Government has acknowledged that it is going to take a while for councils to set up appropriate application processes for these additional grants. Spelthorne officers are in discussion with colleagues across Surrey to ensure a broadly consistent policy

approach across Surrey. At the time of writing of the report, the detailed guidance had not been issued by Government.

The Council had business continuity plans in place, which have been put into action. The Council has sought to identify and manage emerging risks associated with COVID-19 and Internal Audit have reported to Corporate Management Team on new processes and risk, using guidance from Mazars.

Contractual issues: Guidance from Government has been issued on how to treat our suppliers from the Leisure Centre to construction contracts in order to try and keep the economy going. We have reviewed our supplier contracts to take this into account.

Councils are making monthly financial impact returns to Government. The first return influenced the outcome of the allocation of the second tranches of emergency grant.

Commercial Income

The preceding sections have focused on direct impacts of COVID-19 on the Council's net Revenue Budget of £12.6m. The next section will focus on the impacts to the Council's rental income stream of approximately £51m per annum from commercial investment assets. As has been previously highlighted, the Council has always pursued a policy of robustly assessing the financial health of tenants, and their guarantors, when considering previous asset acquisitions. Additionally the Council models over a 50 year period for each asset future lease breaks, lease ends to identify future potential liabilities with respect to voids, rent free periods and capital refurbishments (net of dilapidations). This approach has resulted in the Council building up sinking funds with a combined value of £20m as at the end of 2019-20. This will help provide a cushion to protect the Council's Revenue Budget and council taxpayers against any potential reductions or delays in commercial assets rental income. In effect, the sinking funds protect the contribution the commercial assets make towards the Council's Revenue Budget.

The scenario modelling above is assuming no net adverse impact on the Council's Revenue Budget with respect to the Council's commercial assets rental income. This is a reflection of:

- a. the quality and location of the assets,
- b. the strength of the tenants, and
- c. the quality of the Council's internal team and advisers who have pro-actively engaged with tenants

The Council has received the vast bulk of the commercial rent due for the March 2020 quarter. Of the few tenants who have not fully paid their rent, the majority have agreed rent deferral plans. Officers have refreshed the sinking funds scenario modelling to look at a range of worst case COVID-19 scenarios for the next 5 years which indicates that the sinking funds are more than sufficient to cover a range of potential worst case scenarios.

Senior officers, along with the Leader and relevant portfolio holders have been meeting on a weekly basis to monitor the position with respect to commercial and

retail tenants. As a result of this focus and pro-active engagement, the Council has been able to significantly increase the level of rent collected. At the present time, of the commercial rent due on the March 2020 quarter day (which totalled £11.09m), 90.1% has been received to date with £1.1m outstanding. Of the £1.1m outstanding, rent deferral plans are in place covering the receipt of a further £0.703m (6.3%), leaving £0.398m (3.6%) for which agreement is not reached. With respect to this latter amount, discussions are ongoing and we are making progress around deferral arrangements. Excluding two very small tenants, accounting for 0.2% of rent roll, there is only one tenant who has not yet made any payment. The table below summarises the position with respect to the March quarter rent.

Total Rent received for March 2020 quarter	£9,990,783	90.1%
Deferral plans agreed	£703,122	6.3%
Deferrals still being discussed	£397,646	3.6%
	£11,091,552	100.00%

The Council has increased its level of monitoring of the financial health of tenants, their guarantors and parent groups and is using a range of measures including analysis from Deloitte, Dun and Bradstreet and Delphi data from Experian.

Unsurprisingly, the Public Accounts Committee is interested in the impact of COVID-19 on local authorities' commercial investments. The Council on its own initiative has submitted evidence to the Committee this month. This is consistent with the approach the Council has always taken of pro-actively engaging with the likes of the NAO, MHCLG, LGA in order to explain its approach to commercial assets and risk mitigation.

The Government's policy decisions around suspending tools available to landlords to exert pressure on tenants who are not paying, is making collecting rent more challenging particularly with respect to retail tenants.

Town Centre Regeneration

In contrast, the income modelling does assume there will potential impacts with respect to the retail income at the Elmsleigh Centre, in Staines-upon-Thames, the main retail town of the Borough, for which the Council bought back the long leasehold in February 2020. The Council's rationale for buying out the long leasehold (it already owned the freehold) was not as a commercial income asset intended to generate a revenue income stream to support the Council's Budget, but in order to drive the long-term prosperity of the town centre and to manage a diversification of use away from retail in the area, including additional residential developments. These plans will now be accelerated as a result of COVID-19 which has demonstrated the need to reduce reliance on retail.

One of the challenges is that nationally, most retail chains have decided not to pay landlords for the duration of the lockdown, regardless of the strength of their balance sheet. The Government's announcements designed to support tenants have

reduced the legal powers the Council currently can apply as a landlord. The Government measures do not sufficiently differentiate between those tenants who are struggling and cannot pay and those who could pay but will not.

As outlined in the section on Assets above (section 4.7) the Council is pro-actively engaging with retail tenants and is seeking to agree rent deferral plans. The Leader and officers have had positive discussions with senior national representatives of some of the retailers, which have achieved some positive movement.

It will be noted from the above, that the estimated net impact on the Council's budget arising from Elmsleigh in 2020-21 could potentially be approximately £400,000 to £1,000,000. The Council had been anticipating in 2020-21 a net surplus of £1.4m on the Elmsleigh Centre, to have been re-invested in the site, so a loss up to this level can potentially be absorbed, without impact on the revenue budget. Clearly the scale of impact will depend on the length of the retail lockdown and how that lockdown is phased out. Positively the Government has now set out a plan for re-opening the broader retail sector. As commented in the preceding section, the position is being kept under continuous review.

As already outlined, the rationale for the investment in Elmsleigh Centre was not to generate a significant revenue stream from retail to support the Council's budget, but a primarily a move to regenerate Staines-upon-Thames. COVID-19 has reinforced the need for such a measure, amongst other reasons, in order to protect the future tax base of the Council and the Council will be looking to accelerate its plans for residential development and moving additional community facilities into the site.

Financial Support for businesses

Business Grants: The Government has now provided the Council with the guidance necessary to deliver the grants to businesses. Officers have identified the 1,125 businesses that qualify, and have made payments to date totalling £11.3m to 856 businesses. On 1 May the Government announced that it would be allowing greater discretion to councils as to businesses they awarded the funds they had already received, including to charities.

Additionally on 2 May the Government announced a further £619m nationally (anticipated SBC allocation £756,000) to provide funding for discretionary support for a range of businesses not eligible for the initial grant funding.

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs): On 2 May the Government announced £6m funding nationally for BIDs recognising the important role they will play in the recovery of towns. It is anticipated that the allocation Spelthorne will receive is £16,000, which we will pass on directly to the Staines-upon-Thames BID.

Business Rates Relief: In addition to the grants, businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors have been awarded 100% relief from business rates for 12 months by the Government. Officers have identified around 1,125 businesses who qualify for this 100% relief, totalling £14 million. The collectible business rates for Spelthorne Borough for 2020-21 was £48.4million; therefore the reliefs awarded as a result of COVID-19 pandemic represent 29% of our business rates.

Overall Revenue Budget

The Net Budget requirement for 2020-21 has clearly changed since the setting of the budget in February 2020. A Supplementary Estimate of £4.5m is now considered prudent.

The administration of the various grants and reliefs provided by Government for businesses and individuals has caused a significant increase in workload for the teams involved, who are working hard to ensure that the financial support is paid to those who need it as quickly as possible.

Government grants: To help with the costs and loss of income, the Government has initially awarded the Council a £6,750 rough sleepers' grant, and a general non ring-fenced grant of £34,000 to cover the impact of the pandemic across all services. A further tranche of funding has also been given and Spelthorne has received £986,000. As commented above, the costs and loss of income are significantly in excess of the grant awarded so far.

The Council has already received the following funding from Government:

- (a) £588k for the payment of the council tax hardship fund;
- (b) £15 million upfront payment for the business rates grants; and
- (c) An initial £14 million Section 31 grant for the business rate reliefs.

The Council is required to complete a weekly reconciliation for MHCLG on the grants received and those business rate reliefs and grants paid out to individuals and businesses.

Options for mitigation of the financial impacts on the Council

The worst case net adverse impact is potentially approximately £5.9m i.e. worst case scenario of £6.9m hit on Revenue Budget less approximately £1m Emergency Grant funding.

The main options for mitigating the financial impacts of COVID-19 include:

- A) Continue to lobby Central Government for additional funding in recognition of the impacts on Councils and their ability to deliver services. The Council is continually to actively work with other councils to lobby hard for additional funding. The political leadership of the Council is continuing to lobby Government.
- B) Look to make offsetting savings and efficiencies where possible including applying headroom within the Projects Delivery Fund of £0.5m built into the 2020-21 Revenue Budget.
- C) Potentially apply capitalisation to some of the costs and financial impacts to enable the Council to borrow and fund on a long term basis.
- D) Linked to the above, use capitalisation flexibilities to cover costs from capital receipts and consider whether it is appropriate to make any targeted residential sales.
- E) Make use of reserves to close the gap

Reserves: When the 2020-21 Budget was reported to Council on 27 February 2020, officers anticipated the level of available general and revenue fund reserves to be around £14 million. Of this, £1m is in the unallocated general fund reserve and the remaining £13 million is in earmarked reserves, excluding sinking fund reserves of approximately £20m set aside to protect the Council's commercial assets income.

Although the Government has made two grant allocations, significantly increasing the allocations made in the second towards districts and boroughs, it is unclear whether there will be any more allocations and we are not assuming there will be any more additional funding. **It is therefore recommended that the Council allocates an emergency budget of up to £4.5m**, funded from earmarked reserves (approximately 43% of the balances) to fund the worst-case scenario potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hopefully the final outcome will be a lesser impact. The reserves will only be drawn down if the loss of income and expenditure incurred is not offset by further Government grant support. In this scenario, officers will also look for cost savings to partially offset the impact on reserves. However, it should be noted that depending on the scale of the shortfall in Government funding, it might be unlikely that sufficient cost savings can be found in-year to bring the Council's expenditure back in line with its budget.

It should be noted that the more the Council draws down its cash reserves, the less it will earn in future years from investing those cash funds with financial counterparties.

As a general guide, CIPFA unofficially suggests 5% is a reasonable level of General Fund reserve to provide a cushion for councils for unexpected events. The Council's current net services budget is £21m which suggests a General Fund reserve of £1.05m. Spelthorne's General Fund reserve is currently £1m, but in addition we have specific reserves for equalisation of performance on business rates, interest rates and insurance. With a reduction of £4.5m, the Council would still be able to retain all these contingency funds. If reserves fall to insufficient levels, which in this context is not anticipated, then the Council will be advised to budget to rebuild the reserves to a sufficient level over the medium to long term. It is quite unlikely that sufficient cost savings will be able to be found in any one year, and so it may take a number of years to rebuild reserves.

It should be recognised that if the Council had not been generating significant commercial income streams it would have not been in as a strong and as resilient position to respond to the challenges of COVID-19, for example in having staff to redeploy into supporting shielded residents.

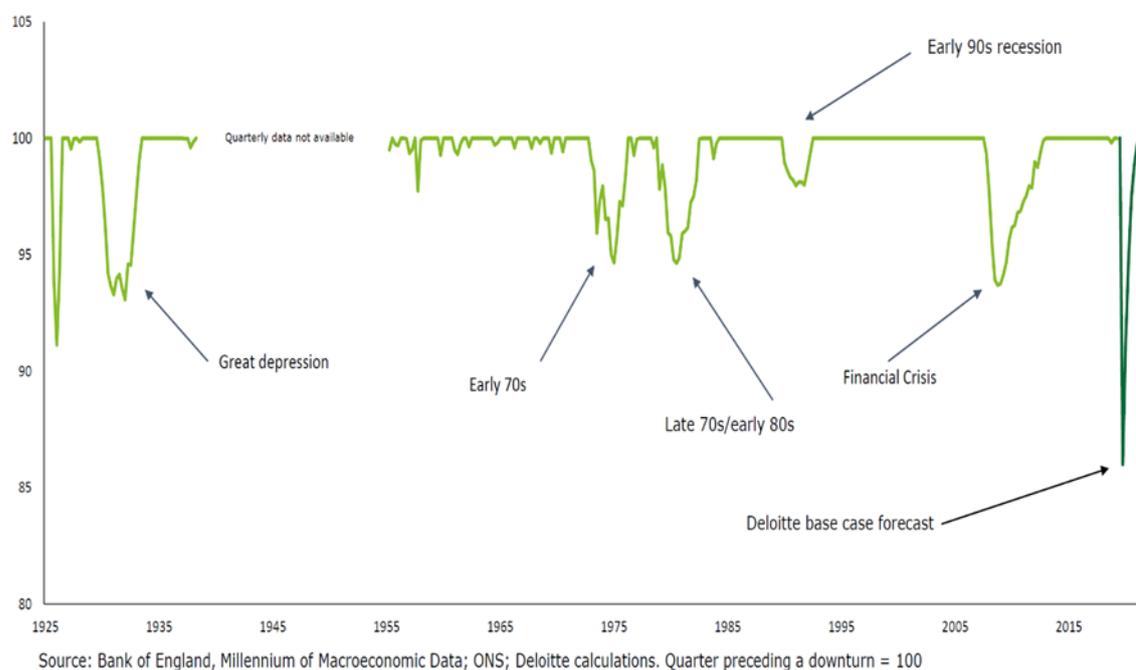
Longer term outlook

The preceding sections have focused on the short term impact on the Council in 2020-21. Of greater concern is the impact of the projected economic downturn on public expenditure and local government finances and what that means for the public sector in the longer term. UK public debt stands at nearly £1.8 trillion and is forecast to rise to over £2.0 trillion. Once the immediate crisis is over and lockdowns have ended, the IMF have indicated that governments will have to raise taxes and put the brakes on public spending to bring their books closer to balance.

This need to bring down public debt is going to come into play alongside an economic contraction unprecedented in modern times. This will not only place additional pressure on Government funding but is also likely to have considerable impact on the Council's ability to raise additional income. In recent years, local government has been increasingly relying on business rates as a source of income, which will in future years be less buoyant. The following graphs give an example of the economic contraction forecast as a result of COVID- 19. Of some comfort is the time projected for the economy to rebound, but it should be stressed that the UK is in uncharted territory, as never before has a government deliberately halted economic output for a sustained period.

UK downturns since 1925

Depth and time to recover to previous peak



How does the coming downturn compare?

Significant UK downturns since 1925

Name	Years	Decline, peak to trough	Contraction (quarters)	Time to recover to previous peak (quarters)
COVID-19 downturn (base case)	2020	14%*	1	7
Financial Crisis	2008-2009	6.3%	5	22
Early 90s recession	1990-1992	2.0%	7	11
Late 70s/Early 80s recession	1979-1981	4.1%	6	16
Early 70s recession	1973-1975	5.3%	7	14
Great depression	1930-1932	6.9%	9	16
1926 recession	1926	8.9%	2	4

* Deloitte base case forecast, 090420

In addition to the medium term impact of the economic effects of COVID-19, we also need to be mindful that in January 2021 the UK's transition period with the EU comes to an end, and it is not yet clear what the nature of the final exit agreement will be and what impact that will have on the economy.

9. RECOVERY

As a Council, our main focus to date has been to direct all our efforts towards delivering our essential services whilst also playing our part in defeating the COVID-19 virus, by staying home where possible and protecting the NHS, our vulnerable residents and those in need. However, over the coming weeks the Council will need to give consideration to recovery.

In the short term, COVID-19 represents a huge challenge to Spelthorne, resulting in both loss of income and extra expenditure. It comes after 10 years of significant funding reductions which have affected Councils' capacity and ability to respond to such a crisis. However, unlike many other local authorities, Spelthorne is fortunate that the Council's recent commercial investments, and their associated income streams, have to some extent provided a buffer to help protect the authority from some of the impacts of the pandemic.

Planning for the future has been extremely difficult due to uncertainties about when and how the UK lockdown would be lifted and whether there would be a second phase of COVID-19 affecting the country. The Government have only recently started to provide some limited information on how they plan to get the UK back on its feet.

The Council is now starting to develop its recovery plan in terms of both our service delivery, and how we can continue helping the Borough's residents and businesses going forward. As an authority, we have strong foundations; the ability to be flexible and responsive; and corporately has the care of our communities and specifically the vulnerable at the heart of everything we do. Spelthorne's incredible response to COVID-19, as outlined in this report, has clearly demonstrated this. However, we are all still in uncertain times and there is currently no way of knowing when, or if, our society will return to 'normal' and what that new 'normal' may look like.

Service delivery

Moving forward for staff, the Council must take the positives and negatives of recent modes of working, including working from home and look to draw out the learning points, which can assist us, increase the efficiency in the way we work for the longer term. As part of the Council's root and branch work this will be taken forward with individual services, so as to both continually improve and look to see how this authority can best configure itself to meet the likely new needs of our communities, post-COVID-19.

Risk assessment

The Council is already in the process of considering risks to the Council associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and throughout this crisis has been implementing measures to control/mitigate these risks, having to move quickly to react to a rapidly developing situation and changing Government guidance. The following table outlines some broad categories of the main risks to the Council associated with COVID-19:

	RISK AREA
A	<p>Business Continuity and Operational Resilience</p> <p><u>Risk</u> – Unable to deliver critical, essential or non-essential Council Services, resulting in diminished provision to community/stakeholders.</p> <p><u>Risk</u> – Inadequate or delayed preparation for recovery phase and resumption planning, impacting on Service delivery.</p>
B	<p>Health and Wellbeing/Safety</p> <p><u>Risk</u> – Staff, contractors and community are at increased risk of being infected by COVID-19 possibly leading to long term sickness absence, poor physical and mental health or even fatalities, impacting on resource availability and Service provision.</p> <p>There are associated reputational risks if Council staff were found not to be complying with health and safety guidance leading to increased infection rates across the community, or alternatively if Spelthorne staff are not being adequately protected when undertaking high risk activities (potential for claims against the Council).</p>
C	<p>Financial Sustainability and Resilience</p> <p><u>Risk</u> - Significant financial cost implication on the Council associated with increased spend on COVID-19 related activities / operations; uncertainty over reimbursement of funding from central government; significant impact on net budget; insufficient cash resources; reduced level of income due to vulnerable revenue sources; reduced level of investment returns.</p>
D	<p>Remote Working/Performance Management</p> <p><u>Risk</u> – reduced visibility and oversight of output / outcomes potentially leading to lower productivity. On the contrary, there may be opportunities for increased productivity and efficiencies from this new way of working.</p>
E	<p>Insufficient Capacity</p>

	<p><u>Risk</u> - Increased demand on some frontline Services such as Customer Services (Council Tax/ Business Rates) / Independent Living / Housing / Benefits</p> <p><u>Risk</u> - Insufficient service capacity to deal with potentially increased levels of fatalities in the community arising from COVID-19 infections.</p>
F	<p>Technological</p> <p><u>Risk</u> - Disruption in off-site data storages or capacity impacting on service delivery e.g. ability to provide Customers and stakeholders with ongoing technical service is reduced.</p> <p><u>Risk</u> - Cyber and security threats heightened in the current environment resulting in Council systems being compromised and data loss.</p>
G	<p>Legal or Regulatory Compliance</p> <p><u>Risk</u> - Non-compliance with GDPR possibly leading to data security breaches and reputational damage arising from the following changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Increased sharing of personal data between services and with partner organisations (ii) Systems set up quickly may mean less robust systems and processes (iii) Collecting and processing new types of sensitive information about individuals (iv) Increased Remote working (v) Phishing and cyber-attacks heightened (see earlier section on 'Technological risk')
H	<p>Suppliers and Contractors /3rd Party Relationships</p> <p>Disruptions in Supply Chain Management e.g. delays in provision of goods/service due to reduced staff complement/ furloughed staff/distribution issues. Companies may no longer be in a position to trade and unable to recover from the crises.</p>
I	<p>Fraud / Error / Theft</p> <p><u>Risk</u> - Covid-19 represents yet another opportunity for scammers and professional fraudsters. They may also target vulnerable members of the community.</p> <p><u>Risk</u> - Increased level of expenditure is being incurred as a result of new operations or enhanced service demands, which provides increased opportunities for error or fraud.</p> <p><u>Risk</u> - Staff and customers may be facing increased financial hardship, leading to an increased risk of fraudulent activities and a reduced staff complement may weaken the control environment.</p>

J	<p>Reputation</p> <p><u>Risk</u> - An absence of timely and accurate communication to stakeholders may result in a lack of awareness / mis-information/ loss of confidence.</p> <p><u>Risk</u> - Adverse public opinion/media intervention may cause negative publicity with associated reputational impact.</p>
K	<p>Decision making</p> <p><u>Risk</u> - Business decisions and actions do not effectively prioritise the needs of different stakeholders, thereby failing to meet needs (economic / financial / social / health etc.) This will influence the measure of success after the crises.</p>
L	<p>Political</p> <p><u>Risk</u> – Unclear political steer and strategic direction in the current environment may impact the effectiveness of decision making.</p> <p><u>Risk</u> – Decisions may not align with Council priorities and responsibilities.</p>

The Council is currently in the process of refining measures to mitigate and control many of these risks and is completing a detailed risk assessment, which it is planning to report to the Council’s Audit Committee in due course. In developing this document, officers will be considering the lessons learned from the decisions and actions taken to tackle the wide range of issues they have faced responding to the pandemic. It must, however, be appreciated that this is still a rapidly changing situation and our assessment must continue to be refined as the Government releases more information on how it intends to move the UK into recovery mode.

Effects on our communities and businesses

The continuation of social distancing requirements will inevitably have a significant effect on many vulnerable people within our communities. As a Council we must therefore consider what support we can continue to provide our residents during the recovery phase, working with our partners including Surrey County Council and the third sector to ensure they remain safe and do not feel isolated.

The Bank of England (BoE) has warned that the UK economy is heading towards its sharpest recession on record. The coronavirus impact would see the economy shrink 14% this year, based on the lockdown being relaxed in June. Scenarios drawn up by the Bank to illustrate the economic impact said COVID-19 was “dramatically reducing jobs and incomes in the UK”, and the BoE Governor has said there would be no quick return to normality. Unemployment is on course to rise above 9%; inflation could

drop to zero in 2021; houses prices have dropped by 16%; and high street shopping has reduced by 80%.

The UK is facing the sharpest downturn since 1706 (over three hundred years). However, the BoE Governor expects any permanent damage from the pandemic to be "relatively small". The economy was likely to recover "much more rapidly than the pull back from the global financial crisis". Furloughing in particular will allow people to come back into the economy quicker, and the Government's loans, grants and wage subsidies have kept more businesses afloat than would otherwise have been the case.

Given Spelthorne's proximity to Heathrow airport and the impact of COVID-19 on air travel the local economy is likely to be severely hit, both in terms of the workforce and businesses who rely on the airport for trade. Nationally and internationally it is likely there will be a recession and we do not yet know if there will be any added effects as a result of Brexit.

Officers within the Economic Development and Strategic Planning teams are already researching employment/unemployment information, looking at the impact on businesses locally and researching the latest economic data. Where local data is not readily available they will extrapolate macro national/regional information against Spelthorne data to get the clearest possible idea of impact.

At a macro level it is clear that high level income earners are more likely to be able to work at home (70%) compared to low level (40%). Within the South East PwC research has established that around 15% have been made redundant, with close to 50% furloughed. It is also apparent that Universal Credit claims have increased dramatically in the borough.

It is already known that those sectors most affected are food, hotels and transport. Logistics has also been affected across the board. Heathrow has a direct impact on the borough. 7% of Spelthorne's residents work at Heathrow, and this rises to 25% in our northernmost ward. 22% (or 1 in 5) of the active workforce in the borough are employed in the Heathrow supply chain. Whilst Heathrow has seen a 90% drop in passenger air traffic (April 2020) it has already restyled itself as a vital 'airbridge' for supplies and medical essentials, with cargo only flights increasing by 500%. How Heathrow changes and adapts its business model post COVID-19 will have a direct impact on the borough moving forwards.

Once the Council understands the data and intelligence, the authority can focus on matters such as supply chain disruption, labour supply reduction, uncertainty impacts and sector lockdown (whether partial or full).

Our Economic Development team with the help of Strategic Planning and partners including the SBF will look to assist businesses in developing a revitalised economy. This is likely to be a slow process and could include working with the LEP to support local businesses and SMEs, or reviewing the Council's infrastructure/building plans to

see if investment can be brought forward to provide an added boost to the local economy. In conjunction with other partners Spelthorne may need to explore options to ramp-up retraining to equip people with the skills most in demand. Ministers have also suggested this may be an opportunity to stimulate the Green Economy, as climate change issues have not gone away, and at local levels, the effects of COVID-19 lockdowns across the world have been seen to greatly improve air quality.

An analysis of impacts and an initial review of implications will need to be fed into a far-reaching and broad ranging Recovery Action Plan (which will also need to consider the impact of Brexit). This has yet to be developed, but the intention is that the Council develops a list of key interventions that may lessen the impact on business or accelerate the recovery.

10. FINAL WORD

Every day over the past two months colleagues from across this authority have worked tirelessly to ensure that our residents and businesses have remained well supported throughout this national emergency. The corporate response to Covid-19 has been outstanding and this report attests to the professionalism and dedication of all our staff, in which we can rightly be proud of.

Whilst the threats of this pandemic on our communities and our Borough continue, the next steps to reopen our society and rebuild our economy will be equally challenging. Having already overcome unimaginable tough times thus far, with the continued support of our full Council, this authority will persevere and succeed in saving lives and livelihoods.

11. APPENDICES

- A. Appendix – Timeline of events
- B. Appendix – Information on Applied Resilience and LRF etc
- C. Appendix – Pictures of the teams in action
- D. Appendix – Some of the thanks we've received – community, cross-chamber, MPs
- E. Appendix – Example of team daily diary (coping with change) - Housing Benefits
- F. Appendix – VE celebrations – wartime spirit overcoming lockdown to celebrate
- G. Appendix – Councillor Briefing Document
- H. Appendix – Poster and Graphics (PDF)
- I. Appendix – Social Media (PDF)
- J. Appendix – Team photo

