

TITLE	WBC Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 20 January 2021
WARD	None Specific
DIRECTOR	Graham Ebers, Deputy Chief Executive

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Scrutinising the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic to date will help to identify which issues were handled effectively and any lessons which can be learned as the Council continues to deal with the pandemic over the months ahead.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:

- 1) note the final version of the Overview and Scrutiny report on the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic;
- 2) consider any issues arising out of the report for inclusion in the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes for 2021/22.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

At its meeting on 25 November 2020, the Committee agreed its final report to the Executive on the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The report is set out at Annex A.

The recommendations in the report will be considered by the Executive at its meeting on 25 February 2021. The Executive will receive a report setting out the officer response to the Overview and Scrutiny report, stating which recommendations are accepted and which ones are not (with reasons).

In the meantime, Members are requested to consider any ongoing issues in the Scrutiny report for inclusion in the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes for 2021/22.

Background

At its meeting on 25 November 2020, the Committee agreed its final report to the Executive on the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. (Annex A). The final report brought together the results of a number of Scrutiny reviews carried out by the four Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The report concluded that the Council's response to the pandemic in 2020 had been very positive, based on strong partnership working, effective decision-making and communications. The Council's workforce had also shown enormous commitment and flexibility in responding to the many new demands placed upon the organisation.

The 10 recommendations in the Scrutiny report will be considered by the Executive at its meeting on 25 February 2021. The Executive will receive a report setting out the officer response to the Scrutiny report, stating which recommendations are accepted and which ones are not (with reasons).

In the meantime, Members are requested to consider any ongoing issues in the Scrutiny report for inclusion in the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes for 2021/22. Members may also wish to consider any learning points arising out of the Scrutiny process.

As at 7 January 2021, 5,505 residents of the Borough had tested positive (lab confirmed cases) since the beginning of the pandemic. The weekly rate of infection stood at 565.7 per 100,000 population (as at 3 January 2021). In total, there had been 35,427 Covid-19 cases across Berkshire.

As outlined above, Council staff have made a huge contribution to the Borough's response to the pandemic. Significant efforts are being made to protect the mental and physical health of staff, especially in relation to the combination of the latest lockdown and the darkest, coldest winter months. Members may wish to take current officer workloads into account when considering potential items for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees over the next few months.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the Covid-19 crisis. It is, therefore, imperative that Council resources are focussed on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	0	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	0	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	0	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

There are no financial recommendations relating to the Overview and Scrutiny process. However, the Medium Term Financial Plan (to be submitted to Council in February 2021) will have to represent a balanced Budget.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

None.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Due regard has been given to the Public Sector Equality Duty in carrying out the Scrutiny reviews underpinning the report. The impact of the pandemic on specific groups with protected characteristics is considered in the Committee's report to the Executive.

List of Background Papers

Institute for Fiscal Studies - Briefing on the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Inequalities.

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