

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

16 March 2021

Report of the Chief Executive and Management Team

Part 1- Public

Executive Non Key Decisions

1 CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

This report provides an update as to how the Council and our communities continue to respond and adapt to living with coronavirus, and recommends that the ongoing actions are endorsed.

1.1 Strategic Context

- 1.1.1 The last report to Cabinet in January 2021 was at a time when Covid-19 levels had risen dramatically across the country, including Kent and Tonbridge & Malling.
- 1.1.2 Whilst at the time of writing we are still in a lockdown in England, the levels are falling from the earlier peaks and the government has recently announced a roadmap for the country to exit from the restrictions. For those interested in data, the following web links provide useful information. [Interactive Map | Coronavirus in the UK \(data.gov.uk\)](https://data.gov.uk) and [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - Kent Public Health Observatory \(kpho.org.uk\)](https://kpho.org.uk)
- 1.1.3 We continue to operate in the Emergency Structure in accordance with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 led by the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF). The borough council is an active partner in the forum and through this approach we work strategically and operationally with many partners across Kent, sharing expertise and learning from experiences. This collaborative approach is serving Kent well.
- 1.1.4 The majority of our staff continue to work from home in accordance with government direction. As outlined in the last report, we do have staff who need to attend the offices to deal with post, scanning and access to records. In addition there are staff working from other locations including car parks and country parks, with a further cohort who are working around the Borough undertaking regulatory inspections on site. In addition, we have Covid enforcement responsibilities which necessitate staff undertaking visits to premises across the Borough.

1.1.5 This report focuses on three key areas:

- 1) the government's roadmap
- 2) arrangements for both symptomatic and asymptomatic testing
- 3) the Vaccination programme

In addition, included in this report is a short high-level summary of the Chancellor's budget insofar as it affects businesses and our communities. Further relevant information will of course be presented to Advisory Boards and/or Cabinet in due course.

1.2 Roadmap

1.2.1 The easing the lockdown will be carried out in stages. The roadmap sets out indicative "no earlier than" dates for the steps which are five weeks apart and is based on the advice of the Chief Medical Officer.

1.2.2 It is important to stress that the dates indicated in the roadmap are dependent on the data and are subject to change if the four tests are not met. The Prime Minister has emphasised that the roadmap sets out "*the dates by which we hope we can do something at the earliest*". Announcements will be made 7 days in advance of moving to the next step.

1.2.3 There are 4 steps in the roadmap and a very brief summary of some (not exclusive) key points is as below noting that these are **indicative** dates:

Step 1

- From **Monday 8 March** all schools and further education settings reopen
- From Monday 8 March, two people will be allowed to meet in an outdoor public space and Care home residents will be able to be visited indoors by a single, named individual
- Until 29 March, the "stay at home" instruction remains, but from 29 March onwards that guidance will be lifted. However, many lockdown restrictions will remain. People should continue to work from home where they can, and minimise all travel, wherever possible
- From **29 March**, people will be able to meet outside in groups up to a maximum of 6 people (the Rule of 6) or with one other household. People from different households will still need to socially distance from each other.
- From 29 March, outdoor sports facilities will reopen and formally organised outdoor sports for adults and children can restart. Children will be able to access any outdoor childcare and supervised activities.

Step 2

- No earlier than **12 April**, non-essential retail and personal care premises and indoor leisure facilities such as gyms and spas will be permitted to reopen.
- Overnight stays away from home, in this country, will be permitted
- Public buildings, such as libraries and community centres, would be able to reopen, along with the majority of outdoor settings and attractions
- Hospitality venues will be able to open for outdoor service
- All children would be able to attend any indoor children's activity, including sport, and weddings, receptions, and commemorative events including wakes will be able to take place with up to 15 attendees (in premises that are permitted to open)
- People should continue to work from home where they can, and minimise domestic travel where they can. (International holidays will still be prohibited).

Step 3

- No earlier than **17 May**, all but the most high-risk sectors would be able to reopen. In all sectors, COVID-Secure guidance would remain in place.
- The Government will lift most legal restrictions on meeting others outdoors, but gatherings of more than 30 people outdoors will remain illegal
- The Government will continue to advise the public to work from home where they can.
- Sectors which would reopen include: indoor hospitality (with no requirement for a substantial meal to be served alongside alcoholic drinks); Remaining outdoor entertainment, such as outdoor theatres and cinemas; Indoor entertainment, such as museums, cinemas and children's play areas; hotels, hostels and B&Bs; adult indoor group sports and exercise classes; some large events, including conferences, theatre and concert performances and sports events.
- Weddings, receptions, funerals, and commemorative events including wakes would be able to proceed with up to 30 attendees.

Step 4

- No earlier than **21 June**, Government aims to remove all legal limits on social contact
- Reopen the remaining closed settings, including Nightclubs and enable large events, including theatre performances
- Remove all limits on weddings and other life events

1.2.4 Management Team are working through the roadmap, cognisant that these are indicative dates only at this point, and putting in place plans for reopening of services and facilities. Further details will be reported through Advisory Boards as appropriate.

1.2.5 All Advisory Boards, Committees, Cabinet and Council continue to be held virtually by Microsoft Teams. The legislation permitting virtual meetings remains in place until 7 May 2021. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee meets on 11 March 2021 to consider virtual meetings and homeworking.

1.3 Testing Update

1.3.1 As mentioned in the last report, the national programme of symptomatic testing, booked via the national portal, continues to be in place and is a vital element in the management of the pandemic. Within the borough, Members are aware that for some time there has been a walk-in symptomatic facility at Ditton community centre, and a mobile drive in facility at the Council offices in Kings Hill offering the lab-based polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests. At the beginning of March, the NHS announced the opening of a new symptomatic testing facility in the Upper Castle Fields car park in Tonbridge. This is a welcome addition to serve residents in the southern part of the Borough.

1.3.2 Symptom free testing, through the 'rapid result' lateral flow antigen tests, is also an important strand in helping to contain any outbreaks. Lateral flow test sites in our borough are located at Larkfield library and at the Hop Farm. Results from these tests are generally available within 30 minutes. Staff who are going into the office or working 'out and about' in our communities are actively encouraged to have lateral flow tests.

1.3.3 As progress is made through the various stages of the Government's roadmap, the venues for all testing sites will be subject to review, as premises are able to return to their primary use, and also in response to levels of positivity in the community. Members will be advised of any future changes.

1.4 Vaccination update

- 1.4.1 As Members are aware, the rollout of the vaccination programme led by the NHS has been a real national achievement. At the time of writing this report, 17.2 million adults across England have received a first dose vaccination.
- 1.4.2 The programme is being managed through a number of routes. The initial tranche of vaccinations were primarily managed through GP surgery collaborations and Primary Care Networks. Members will however be aware of the increasing rollout of mass vaccination centres across the country as the programme expands to include more cohorts. Further information on Kent Vaccination programme can be found [Covid-19 vaccination :: Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group \(kentandmedwayccg.nhs.uk\)](https://kentandmedwayccg.nhs.uk)
- 1.4.3 The opening of one of these mass vaccination centres at the Angel Centre in Tonbridge has been a real boost for our communities. This resulted from some detailed conversations with the NHS, local MPs and of course the Leisure Trust.
- 1.4.4 The arrangements for the capacity and opening hours of the facility remain entirely with the NHS and its partners. However, it is anticipated that the facility will be open until at least 31 May 2021, based on the agreement for use of the building.
- 1.4.5 At the time of writing, the take up of vaccinations in our communities has been very high. Over 99% of all those people in the first two cohorts i.e. all those over 80 years of age, have received at least their first vaccination. For cohort 3 (over 70's) the vaccination rate is over 97%.
- 1.4.6 The supply of vaccines across the country has been well documented by others. There will be a verbal update on the current position on the night of Cabinet.

1.5 Chancellor's Budget

- 1.5.1 The Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, presented his Budget on 3 March 2021 and this included a number of initiatives to support individuals and businesses during the pandemic, and hopefully as we emerge from the pandemic.
- 1.5.2 More details will of course be shared via appropriate Advisory Boards, but the headline issues (not exclusive) are:
- 1) There is an extension of the existing 100% business rates relief for Retail, Hospitality and Leisure for the three months from April to June 2021.
 - 2) There will be a new 66% relief for the same premises from July 2021 to March 2022, capped at £2m per business for properties which were required to be closed on 5 January 2021 and £105k per business for other eligible properties.

- 3) The government will provide 'Restart Grants' in England of up to £6,000 per premises for non-essential retail businesses and £18,000 per premises for hospitality, accommodation, leisure, personal care and gym businesses.
- 4) The government is providing local authorities in England with an additional £425m of discretionary business grant funding. (Individual allocations, and the criteria surrounding this is awaited).
- 5) The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) and support for self-employed people are to be extended to the end of September 2021.
- 6) There will be additional support for eligible working tax credit claimants in the form of a one-off payment of £500
- 7) The government is extending the temporary £20 per week increase to Universal Credit standard allowance for a further 6 months.

1.5.3 As Members will appreciate, the Council is presently in the process of billing for council tax and business rates in readiness for the new financial year. At the time of writing, discussions are taking place about how the business rates reliefs in (1) and (2) above can be accommodated.

1.5.4 Businesses will of course be eager to receive the Restart grants that have been announced. We await the guidance and funding, and then we will be in a position to roll out the grants to those who are eligible.

1.6 Next Steps & Corporate Strategy

1.6.1 We now have a roadmap for exit from this pandemic, but at this point it is still a rapidly changing environment. Recently, we saw the response to the emergence of the South African variant in a neighbouring authority for which door to door community surge testing was undertaken in a post code area. It is anticipated that in March the Government will also publish a plan for dealing with local outbreak and variants of concern.

1.6.2 As mentioned at para 1.2.5, all Advisory Boards, Committees, Cabinet and Council continue to be held virtually by Microsoft Teams. Where permitted public speaking has also been facilitated, and all meetings are live streamed on YouTube. The legislation permitting virtual meetings remains in place until 7 May 2021. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee meets on 11 March 2021 to consider virtual meetings and homeworking.

1.6.3 Members will recall that at its meeting on 3 June 2020, Cabinet adopted a one year Addendum to the Corporate Plan. Various reports have been submitted to a range of Committees and Advisory Boards, and continue to be reported further over the coming months. At its meeting in January 2021, Cabinet resolved that the Corporate Plan Addendum should be reviewed at the end of the first year (2020/21) and this should be the subject of a specific report in the summer.

1.7 Legal Implications

- 1.7.1 The statutory framework governing the response to the pandemic continues to evolve in response to the restrictions placed on both individuals and Local Authorities. It is an absolute requirement that we implement any new responsibilities and restrictions in a timely fashion. This must continue to be a corporate priority.
- 1.7.2 The legal implications for any proposals emerging from the Corporate plan Addendum, will be assessed at the time of individual reports to Members.

1.8 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.8.1 The Council set the budget for 2021/22, and the associated 10 year medium term financial strategy (MTFS), at its meeting on 23 February 2021 taking on board anticipated recovery from the pandemic. It is acknowledged that the projections made about recovery are only assumptions, and therefore the budget and MTFS need to be regularly reviewed.
- 1.8.2 Cabinet had recommended to Full Council during its consideration of the budget that the ethos of 'essential spend' be carried over into 2021/22 to protect the Council's finances.

1.9 Risk Assessment

- 1.9.1 The Council's Strategic Risk Register is regularly updated and the most recent iteration is on the agenda for Audit Committee on 6 April 2021.

1.10 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.10.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on users.

1.11 Policy Considerations

- 1.11.1 Community
- 1.11.2 Business Continuity/Resilience
- 1.11.3 Healthy Lifestyles
- 1.11.4 Climate Change
- 1.11.5 Customer Contact
- 1.11.6 Health and Safety
- 1.11.7 Human Resources

1.12 Recommendation

1.12.1 That the Council's ongoing actions in respect of the response to Covid-19 be
ENDORSED.

Background papers:

Nil

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