

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

02 June 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 updates on the government's latest advice.

1.1 Strategic Context

- 1.1.1 The last report to Cabinet in March 2021 set out the roadmap announced by the Prime Minister and also updated on the vaccination and testing arrangements. At the time of writing we have now moved, from 17 May, into Step 3 of the roadmap.
- 1.1.2 Whilst we continue to operate in the Emergency Structure in accordance with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 led by the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF), the frequency of meetings is being significantly wound down as we move forward to the 'recovery' phase.
- 1.1.3 As Members are aware, the majority of our staff continue to work from home at this point in time. Preparations for the transitional working arrangements for staff as we progress towards Step 4 and beyond are underway.
- 1.1.4 Members are also aware through reports to both Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet, that the virtual meetings regulations have now expired and we are now operating once again a face to face meeting programme. As a decision is not scheduled to be taken on social distancing guidance until Step 4 of the Government's roadmap (i.e. no earlier than 21 June 2021), we are required to make every reasonable effort to ensure that any person attending a Council meeting can do so safely.
- 1.1.5 This report focuses on three key areas:
- 1) Step 3 of the roadmap
 - 2) Update on vaccination and testing sites
 - 3) Update of the Corporate Strategy Addendum and steps towards recovery.

1.2 Step 3 of the Roadmap

1.2.1 The easing the lockdown has been carried out in stages. On 17 May, England moved into Step 3 of the roadmap, predicated on England meeting the four tests for further easing of the lockdown.

1.2.2 The four tests being:

- The vaccine deployment programme continues successfully.
- Evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths in those vaccinated.
- Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations which would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS.
- Assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new 'Variants of Concern'.

1.2.3 In Step 3, all but the most high-risk sectors are able to reopen. Sectors and venues which could reopen from Monday 17 May, include:

- 1) **Indoor hospitality.** There is no requirement for a substantial meal to be served alongside alcoholic drinks, and no curfew. The requirement to order, eat and drink while seated ('table service') remains.
- 2) **Remaining outdoor entertainment events**, such as cinemas, theatres, and other performance events are permitted.
- 3) **All remaining outdoor entertainment and visitor attractions will reopen.** This includes (amongst other things): cinemas; theatres and concert halls; museums and galleries, adventure playgrounds and activities, bingo halls; bowling alleys; games, recreation and entertainment venues; play areas (including soft play centres); aqua parks; indoor visitor attractions at theme parks, zoos, botanical gardens, and heritage sites; conference centres and exhibition halls.
- 4) **Remaining holiday accommodation**, such as hotels, hostels and B&Bs, saunas and steam rooms can open.
- 5) **Organised adult sport and exercise classes can resume indoors and saunas and steam rooms may reopen.**
- 6) **Support groups & parent and child groups:** 30 people will be able to attend a support group or parent and child group.

- 7) **Some larger events** will be able to take place, including conferences, theatre and concert performances, and sports events. (Restrictions on the number of attendees will remain as set out in the roadmap).
- 1.2.4 In terms of 'life event' ceremonies including **weddings** and other commemorative & life-cycle events, these are able to proceed with up to 30 attendees. They can take place outdoors or at any indoor Covid secure venue that is permitted to open.
- 1.2.5 For **funerals**, the legal limit of 30 mourners has been removed. The number of people who can attend a funeral will instead be determined by how many people the venue, such as the relevant place of worship or funeral home, can safely accommodate with social distancing. This includes both indoor and outdoor venues.
- 1.2.6 In **secondary schools**, face coverings in classrooms will no longer be required. All remaining **university students** were eligible to return to in-person teaching and learning from 17 May.
- 1.2.7 Up to six people or two households will be able **to meet indoors** and up to 30 people outdoors.
- 1.2.8 **Both outdoor and indoor gatherings or events**, organised by a business, charity, public body or similar organisation, can be organised, subject to specific conditions.
- 1.2.9 The '**Stay in the UK**' regulation will be lifted, meaning leisure travel from England will no longer be illegal, allowing people to go on foreign holidays to 'green list' countries.
- 1.2.10 Since 4 May, **care home** residents have been able to leave their care homes to visit a friend or family member's garden, or go on walks in places such as parks or public gardens.
- 1.2.11 Notwithstanding all of the above easing of restrictions, the **advice is still to continue to work from home** wherever possible. The Borough Council continues to operate a system of homeworking at this time as mentioned at paragraph 1.1.3.
- 1.2.12 As Members will appreciate, the above 'easing' has allowed services to reopen or expand (having regard to any rules, restrictions or general advice in the context of social distancing). Advisory Boards will be updated in respect of service changes.

1.3 Vaccination and Testing Sites

- 1.3.1 The vaccination programme is going extremely well and, at the time of writing this report, over two thirds of adults in the UK have received at least one dose of the

vaccine. At the time of writing, the NHS vaccine site offer the opportunity for those aged 36 and over to book their vaccine.

- 1.3.2 The vaccination centre at the Angel Centre in Tonbridge has proved to be an excellent and very welcome service. The NHS is in discussion with the Leisure Trust about extending its operation. A verbal update will be provided at the meeting.
- 1.3.3 Looking at local data for vaccination uptake, we were able to work with the NHS to facilitate a local drop in centre in East Malling where the uptake had not been as high as the average. This facility was well received and attendance exceeded expectations. The NHS used this model to inform best practice.
- 1.3.4 In terms of symptomatic testing, within the borough the walk-in symptomatic facility at Ditton community centre continues along with the facility at Upper Castle fields car park in Tonbridge. In addition, the mobile drive in facility at the Council offices in Kings Hill is offered on a 'rota' basis . These sites offer the lab-based polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests for which results are normally delivered within 24 - 48 hours.
- 1.3.5 Symptom free testing, through the 'rapid result' lateral flow antigen tests has moved in the direction of "self-test" kits which can be collected free of charge from pharmacies and other approved sites, or ordered from GOV.UK (and take 24 to 48 hours to arrive). The only lateral flow test site in our borough is at the Hop Farm, as the Larkfield Library facility was closed down at the end of April. Results from these tests are generally available within 30 minutes.

1.4 Step 4, Road to Recovery and the Corporate Strategy

- 1.4.1 The final step of the roadmap, Step 4, is anticipated no earlier than 21 June. At that point, Government aims to remove all legal limits on social contact and will reopen the remaining closed settings, enable large events and remove all limits on weddings and other life events.
- 1.4.2 It is, however, important to remember that we are still susceptible to external influences such as 'variants of concern'; and therefore whilst we hope the date of 21 June will be achieved, it is still only an anticipated date and there are absolutely no guarantees.
- 1.4.3 Indeed, as Members are aware, the variant first identified in India continues to spread in the UK and in some hotspots (particularly Greater Manchester and parts of London), mass testing is being rolled out and in addition, the vaccination programme is being escalated in these areas. In the UK generally, the Prime Minister announced on 14 May that in response to the spread of the variant of concern, the 2nd dose programme for people at greater risk will be escalated to give them maximum protection earlier.

- 1.4.4 It is anticipated that the Government will announce on 14 June whether or not England can get ready to progress to Step 4.
- 1.4.5 Managing the 'transition' period between Step 3 and Step 4 in respect of Council meetings will be a challenge, and these issues have been aired with Members at other meetings.
- 1.4.6 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). It has not been possible to prepare the review of the Addendum for this meeting due to other pressures, but this will be presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 6 July.

1.5 Legal Implications

- 1.5.1 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.
- 1.5.2 The legal implications for any proposals emerging from the Corporate Plan Addendum, will be assessed at the time of individual reports to Members.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 The Council set its 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 assumptions made about recovery may not be right, and therefore the budget and MTFS need to be regularly reviewed.
- 1.6.2 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.

1.7 Risk Assessment

- 1.7.1 The Council's Strategic Risk Register is regularly updated. The most recent iteration was considered by the Audit Committee on 6 April 2021.

1.8 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.8.1 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.

1.9 Policy Considerations

1.9.1 Community

1.9.2 Business Continuity/Resilience

1.9.3 Healthy Lifestyles

1.9.4 Climate Change

1.9.5 Customer Contact

1.9.6 Health and Safety

1.9.7 Human Resources

1.10 Recommendation

1.10.1 It is **RECOMMENDED** that

- 1) the Council's ongoing work in respect of the response to Covid-19 be endorsed; and
- 2) an update to the Corporate Plan Addendum be presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 6 July 2021.

Background papers:

Nil

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