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**PART B: RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**DATE: 19 MARCH 2020**

**REPORT OF THE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
STACEY BURLET**

**TITLE OF REPORT: COVID-19 RESPONSE**

**WARDS AFFECTED: ALL**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 This report outlines the approach to service delivery during the current Covid-19 emergency, outlines delegated powers held by the Chief Executive which can be used in an emergency, and recommends Council's endorsement of a budget of £250k being made available from reserves to support the response. Where resources are required above this amount on an urgent basis, it is recommended that the s151 officer discusses this with the Leader before authorising any spend.

### **2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)**

2.1 It is recommended to Full Council that

- (i) The initial approach to service delivery, prioritising support to local people, be noted and endorsed, as set out in Appendix 1;
- (ii) Further measures to support local people will be put in place as the situation emerges and the government issues more guidance;
- (iii) The delegated powers held by the Chief Executive for use in an emergency be noted;
- (iv) The Council make available from the Strategic Reserve a sum of £250k to support the Council's response.
- (v) To agree that where resources are required above this amount on an urgent basis, that the s151 officer discusses this with the Leader before authorising any spend.

- (vi) To note that we will also work with other organisations and government to assist where we can, and await further guidance from central government on a number of issues, including business rates and the payment of benefits. This may require creating a further contingency.

### **3.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 3.1 The Council's role is to work in partnership with other agencies to support local people and Ryedale as a place to thrive, and ensure that when emergencies occur that people are supported. The current Covid-19 situation is an unprecedented public health emergency, which is impacting on local people's lives – jobs, businesses, health, access to services and supplies and the democratic business of the Council are already being affected.
- 3.2 The emerging position from Government is that councils will be expected to play the key role in supporting local communities, in particular supporting people who are self-isolating (ie: have been advised to isolate because they are particularly at risk if they catch the virus or they or others in their household have symptoms) – the county council is likely to coordinate this in North Yorkshire, with district councils being the 'doers' alongside the third and charitable sector.
- 3.3 In essence there will be three tiers to the support:
- (i) Firstly - people will be encouraged to seek support from family, friends and neighbours for things like shopping, collecting medicine, non-physical social contact to reduce feelings of isolation (backed up by ongoing campaigns encouraging people to look out for and help their family, friends and neighbours);
  - (ii) Secondly - If people can't access help in that way, the county and the district councils will be signposting/referring people to about 25 voluntary and similar organisations across the county – NYCC has already 'recruited' these and are already supporting these to coordinate local volunteers and other support (voluntary organisations, faith groups, etc) available in their patch to provide support locally;
  - (iii) Thirdly - If people still can't access help or there are significant issues councils will use other means (eg Ready for Anything volunteers and redeployed staff from councils) to provide help and seek to solve problems

There will also be a small grants scheme eg to pay for food shopping if people don't have the money.

- 3.3 Elected Members are the representatives of the Ryedale populace so it is imperative that they remain informed of the approach that will be taken during this emergency and are aware of the emergency powers in place in the Constitution.
- 3.4 It is also imperative that an amount of money is made available to support the continuation of service delivery and those in specific need at this time. The situation is escalating and this access is required immediately.

### **4.0 SIGNIFICANT RISKS**

- 4.1 Access to funding will ensure that the Chief Executive is able to take immediate action to secure service delivery continuity wherever feasible. It will also mean that she is

able to direct resources as the crisis escalates to support partnership initiatives and those individuals and communities who are most in need. Not having access to immediate funding will result in service delivery failure and could in the worst case scenario mean that we aren't able to support vulnerable people and communities.

- 4.2 This is a fast changing situation, which requires officers to be fully focused on playing its part in supporting the local emergency efforts in partnership with other organisations and maintaining service delivery. This report aims to mitigate the risk of Elected Members not being aware of the emergency powers available within the Constitution and to ensure that they are assured as the elected representatives of Ryedale that essential Council services and business will continue and that residents of Ryedale will be supported.
- 4.2 The powers the Constitution provides for the Chief Executive mitigates risks around key decisions not being able to be taken during an emergency.

## **5.0 POLICY CONTEXT AND CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 This report sets out measures based on the Council's business continuity plans and the Constitution.
- 5.2 As stated earlier in this report, the policy context is constantly changing around this public health emergency. New legislation is expectation today which may impact on our approach. It has also clearly been stated that councils are expected to work in partnership to support local communities and will be playing a key role in the emergency efforts that unfold.

## **REPORT**

### **6.0 REPORT DETAILS**

#### **The approach to service delivery**

- 6.1 Given that the situation with COVID-19 is changing rapidly, our approach to service delivery and prioritization must remain fluid and response to emerging circumstances. However the basis of the approach at the current time is described in Appendix 1.

#### **The powers of the Chief Executive in an emergency**

- 6.2 The Constitution provides the Chief Executive (and other officers in her absence) with powers to make decisions in an emergency.
- 6.3 Para 1.2.1 of the Scheme of Officer Delegation states:

*Council delegates to the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Service Leads, Section 151 Officer, Head of Human Resources and, Council Solicitor and any officer acting in her/his place in accordance with paragraph 1.2.6 below the authority to:*

*(e) Take decisions in relation to the discharge of any of the Council's functions in cases of emergency.*

Para 1.2.6 says:

*Where an officer referred to in paragraph 1.2.1 above is to be absent for any period, s/he or the Chief Executive or Deputy Chief Executive, as appropriate, must nominate in writing another officer to act in her/his place during their absence.*

- 6.4 Council Procedure Rule 37 states:

#### **MATTERS OF URGENCY**

*The Head of Paid Service has delegated authority to take any action he/she considers necessary in the interests of the Council in cases of urgency. He/she where possible must only act after consultation with the Leader of the Council, the Chairman of the appropriate Committee and the relevant Ward Member(s), if any. Any action taken in this way shall be reported to the first available meeting of the Council or relevant Committee, as appropriate.*

- 6.5 These powers mean that decisions could be taken and funds made available if it was not possible to hold meetings of Council and committees because of Covid-19. Currently it is not possible legally to hold virtual meetings, where Members use technology to dial in. In exercising her powers the Chief Executive is required to consult with appropriate Members, as specified above, and this consultation can be done remotely.
- 6.6 To be clear, the reference to “relevant Ward Member(s), if any” refers to ward specific matters and does not mean that all Members will be consulted on everything. Similarly “Chairman of the appropriate Committee” refers to committee specific matters and does not mean that all Committee Chairmen will be consulted on everything. When urgent decisions are required, time clearly is of the essence and consultation requirements have to be reasonable to support this.
- 6.7 All Members will of course be kept informed of what is happening through regular updates from the Chief Executive.

#### **Making funds available from reserves**

- 6.8 Whilst the Chief Executive can make funds available from reserves using her emergency powers, Council is asked to endorse making £250k available to fund emergency spend.
- 6.9 If approved, the following would be applied in relation to any necessary emergency spend:
- a) A special budget code would be put in place so that emergency spend in relation to coronavirus is clearly identified.
  - b) Emergency spend will not be utilized to fund items/initiatives for which other funding (eg insurance) is available.
- 6.10 The Council is keen to support its community in these unprecedented and difficult times as a result of Coronavirus. We already operate a Council Tax Hardship Fund which will help if your ability to pay Council Tax is affected. We will also be as flexible as possible regarding payment arrangements for those whose income or circumstances are affected.

6.11 We will also work with other organisations and government to assist where we can, and await further guidance from central government on a number of issues, including business rates and the payment of benefits.

## **7.0 IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 The following implications have been identified:

a) Financial

The funds identified are available in the Council's Strategic Reserve.

Some level of Government reimbursement may be possible in the future, therefore it may be possible to reclaim some of the expenditure.

b) Legal

Under s101 (a) of the Local Government Act 1972, the discharge of an authorities functions may be carried out by an Officer. The Council's Officer Delegation Scheme contained within the Constitution authorises the Chief Executive to take decisions in cases of emergency, as outlined in the report.

c) Other (Equalities, Staffing, Planning, Health & Safety, Environmental and Climate Change, Crime & Disorder)

All relevant implications are considered, as decisions are made relating to the Council's response to the Covid-19 situation.

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**Background Papers:**

The Council's Constitution

**Background Papers are available for inspection at:**

[www.ryedale.gov.uk](http://www.ryedale.gov.uk)

## **APPENDIX 1:**

During this period of national health emergency, Ryedale District Council is focused on two over-arching goals:

- To support the citizens of Ryedale, especially those whose lives and livelihoods are most at risk as a result of COVID-19
- To protect the health and welfare of those who work for the Council, both as a responsible employer, and so that the Council can maintain the level of staffing necessary for vital community services to continue

The Council's approach is aligned to:

- Government policy and guidance in relation to COVID-19, which is based on scientific advice
- The health advice of Public Health England and the NHS (the lead agencies on COVID-19)
- The strategies and operational plans of North Yorkshire Local Resilience Forum. This is the established multi-agency group for emergencies, comprising North Yorkshire County Council, the District Councils, North Yorkshire Police, North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, and health partners.

### **Internal governance:**

- A COVID-19 coordination group has been set up. The purpose of the group is to:
  - Collate the advice, guidance and requests coming from national government and regional partners, and ensure these are reflected in RDC's COVID-19 response
  - Allocate tasks to Heads of Service in relation to COVID-19 response
  - Monitor staffing levels and resourcing (which are in flux) across the organisation, and make recommendations to the Head of Paid Service on any necessary prioritization of resource, in accordance with the over-arching goals
  - Identify and deal with pressing service issues and staff questions as they arise
- Daily coordination teleconferences are held every weekday morning. These include all heads of service, with the addition of team leaders once a week for a more comprehensive catch-up on events.
- The coordination group reports to the CEO at the end of every day on key activity over the day, issues, and operational decisions to be made.

### **Staff health and welfare:**

The Council has adopted the following measures in line with Government advice (see appendix 1):

- Instruction has been issued on self-isolation, eliminating business travel and avoiding in-person meetings wherever possible.
- Additional cleaning routines have been adopted across all sites, and cleaning materials made available for disinfecting hard surfaces between routine cleans.

- Wherever possible, staff are being supported to work from home in order to minimize social contact and transmission opportunity.
  - Those who fall into the most vulnerable categories (over 70s, those who are pregnant, those with an underlying health condition) have been identified and have been prioritized for home working
  - A significant proportion of the officer team at Ryedale House is now working from home
  - Procurement of additional IT and telephony equipment to extend home working is currently an issue due to short supply, so allocation of resources is being prioritized on the basis of critical services/workers
- A variety of keep-in-touch methods have been adopted to prevent staff feeling isolated, and to continue strong line management relationships during home working or self-isolation. Additional teleconferencing and video conference facilities are at the point of being rolled out in support of this.
- National guidance from UNISON is being kept under review, to ensure that expectations around staff welfare is maintained throughout the period of disruption. RDC is also mirroring North Yorkshire County Council HR policy where that is relevant to our organisation.
- Recruitment into vacant posts is continuing, with accommodation made for video interviews/assessments where appropriate.
- Information is being regularly reissued to staff about Health Assured, the assistance programme for RDC employees and their families
- A daily bullet-point briefing is issued via the intranet to inform staff about any new decisions or changes. This is being delivered via other means to shift workers.

### **Supporting lives and livelihoods**

- Work is ongoing to prioritize operational services in line with the over-arching goal of supporting those whose lives and livelihoods are most at risk from COVID-19. This is being done dynamically in response to current staffing levels. Prioritized services have been identified as:
  - Ryecare. Ryecare is RDC's Lifeline service, providing 24-hour call-centre support to the elderly and vulnerable, who often live alone. We expect to see an increase in demand for Ryecare services due to prolonged periods of isolation for the elderly and infirm, at the request of the NHS or other partners as people exit secondary care to return home, or as a result of social distancing. We are prioritizing resource into the Ryecare service (call-centre, set-up for NHS referrals), with a view to ensuring we have sufficient DBS-checked and trained staff in place to deal with an uplift.

- Safeguarding.
  - Plans are in development for regional hubs to identify the most vulnerable people, and put in place a multi-agency support package, with District Councils playing a key role. We are prioritizing work into this area via the Community Team initially. The structures for this work are currently being put in place and Ryedale District Council is working closely with colleagues at the County Council on how best to implement in Ryedale. This is likely to become a significant focus of work and more of a priority as COVID-19 self-isolation continues.
  - As the vulnerable become more reliant on outside help, we are prioritizing community work to prevent exploitation of vulnerable and elderly people at home.
- Housing and tenancy services. Ensuring people have a safe and stable place to live is essential in this time of self-isolation and social distancing. We are expecting increased demand in this area of service.
- Benefits. The numbers of residents expected to experience significant financial hardship is likely to increase due to downscaling in employment and increased financial pressures. Staffing to help ensure citizens can access housing and other applicable benefits has been prioritized.
- Business engagement and support. The government pledged packages of support in the Budget and other measures subsequently. Details of how to access are awaited. We are also engaging with regional partners about potential additional support mechanisms that Ryedale businesses can access.
  - We have prioritized active engagement with businesses to ensure they know what help is available, and support them in making the appropriate applications.
  - Subject to Council support for this approach, we also intend utilizing £20k to provide membership of the Federation of Small Businesses to 100 micro-businesses. This gives access to the FSB's services, which include a funding platform, debt recovery, cash advance and FSB Care.
  - We have put measures in place to ensure that we pay all our suppliers promptly to support them at a time when cash-flow may be an issue.
  - Where possible, as a default, we will use local businesses for supplies to show support for our local business base.
- Grass-root third sector support and volunteering. The role for voluntary sector support is expected to increase as self-isolation continues yet our contacts with local groups inform us that financial stresses are already taking their toll on local charities. At the same time, there is considerable social motivation for community support, with individuals signalling a desire to help.

- We have prioritized working with the emerging structures coming out of the Stronger Communities workstream at the County Council, which is aligned to new Government directions emerging yesterday. Details are still developing but will give a structure to link those wanting to volunteer with local community anchor organisations.
  - Subject to Council support for this approach, we intend re-purposing an underspend on our current community grant budget (approximately £20k) and utilizing a further £20k of the proposed emergency funds to extend this to offer an emergency grant payment of up to £4k for local charitable and volunteer organisations to support vulnerable client groups and keep them in operation at a time when funds from fundraising events and service contracts have dried up. The process would be managed through the existing Community Grants process, but with Officer delegation for rapidity of payments. Grants offered would be reported through the Grants Working Party.
  - Subject to Council support for this approach, we have identified spare capacity in the Ryedale House canteen over the coming weeks, due to large numbers of staff working from home. It is proposed that a scheme is developed to enable the canteen staff to prepare meals for vulnerable/isolated people and arrange for these to be delivered to the vulnerable client group, in partnership with the voluntary/community sector plans for shopping and medication deliveries.
- Public health services. Refuse collection will be prioritized for reasons of public health. Publicity resources are being allocated to inform those who are self-isolating how to dispose of personal waste in a safe and hygienic manner.