

# Cabinet – Tuesday 15 December 2020

## Supplementary Papers

### Agenda Item 8 (References from Other Bodies)

Notes:

1. Only the Chair of the referring body / motion owner may speak on a referral from Council, a Committee, or Scrutiny Committee (Cabinet Procedure Rule 2.3 (d) & (e)).
2. Referral from Council 21 October (Urgent Planning Improvements – Statement from the Leader) will be received at agenda item 2 (announcements).
3. Referrals from Council on 25 November 2020 are deferred until the Cabinet meeting on 2 February 2021.

Referring Body	Page No
<b>(a) Covid-19 Task and Finish Group (19 August &amp; 29 October 2020)</b>	
Report(s) of the Task and Finish Group (Councillor D Hopkins)	1 - 42

#### **(a) Covid-19 Task and Finish Group (19 August & 29 October 2020)**

*The second interim report of the Covid-19 Task and Finish Group is attached as Annex C to Agenda Item 8.*

Response from Councillor Marland (Leader of the Council):

I'm grateful to Councillor Hopkins and indeed to the whole Group for their hard work and diligence in preparing this report. The Group were able to hear evidence from a wide range of sources and alongside the Chief Executive and other key officers, I was pleased to attend a number of the Groups meeting's and offer my views on the Council's response.

I'm also pleased to say that despite the disruption, we have continued to run a full programme of scrutiny meetings this year and are one a of a small number of Council's who have chosen to critically review their response to the pandemic, whilst it is ongoing.

There is a lot to be proud of in this report, but of course there are also lessons that we can learn about how we continue to respond to the challenge of the pandemic. There has already been much work in response to the first interim report's recommendations, but because of the rapidly evolving nature of the pandemic, we will need to keep the applicability of the recommendations under review as we go about our work.



# Response to Covid-19 in Milton Keynes Task and Finish Group

Second Interim Report  
December 2020



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## Note on the Text

After the first reference, the “Response to Covid-19 in Milton Keynes Task and Finish Group” will be referred to as “the TFG” and Milton Keynes Council will be referred to as “the Council” throughout this report.

## 1. Introduction and Task and Finish Group Membership

The Response to Covid-19 in Milton Keynes Task and Finish Group was established in June 2020 by the Scrutiny Management Committee to provide an analysis of the response by Milton Keynes Council and its partners to the Covid-19 pandemic, assess what worked and what did not, assess the value of any lessons learned during the crisis and make recommendations on strategies and procedures the Council should consider putting in place so that it is in a position to provide a robust but flexible response to any such future emergencies.

The Terms of Reference for the TFG can be found at Annex A.

Membership of the TFG was on a 2:2:2 basis across the political parties as follows:

- Councillor J Ferrans (LD)
- Councillor D Hopkins (C) (Chair)
- Councillor H Minns (L)
- Councillor A Reilly (LD)
- Councillor E Wales (L)
- Councillor A Walker (C)

Elizabeth Richardson served as the Overview and Scrutiny Officer during the TFG's work.

The purpose of this report is to outline the work the TFG has carried out to scrutinise the response of the Council and its partner organisations to the current COVID-19 pandemic, to see whether there are lessons to be learned and to present a number of recommendations based on its findings. It combines an Interim report which was presented to the Scrutiny Management Committee in September with the additional work the TFG has done since then.

When the TFG first started meeting in the summer it was hoped that the stringent lockdown measures taken nationally in the spring would have been sufficient to prevent a second wave of the virus spreading in the autumn. It is clear now that the predicted second wave is upon us and therefore the TFG will be making a request to the Scrutiny Management Committee that it meets next in February 2021 to review the position across Milton Keynes post the second wave of the pandemic and in light of what appears to be a possible vaccine being rolled out internationally. The TFG will further request that it be reformulated in the new council year (2021/22) to carry out the next phase of its remit to scrutinise how Milton Keynes is recovering from the pandemic.

## 2. Foreword

I want to thank everyone who contributed to the Task and Finish Group's first two pieces of work. The scale of the responses, and the honesty with which people shared both the hardships they'd experienced and their hopes for the future, was incredible. It has given the Committee a huge amount to think about in terms of the complex different ways that this pandemic has impacted us over 2020 and how it is likely to affect us in the long-term.

We are conscious as well that, by the very nature of this fast-moving situation, several of the recommendations contained within this report have already been implemented or are in the process of being implemented by the Council.

We will now be proposing that the Group moves on in 2021 to explore the key themes that emerged from this work in more depth, beginning with the topics highlighted in section nine of this report. For example, the last nine months have accelerated the digitalisation of our lives dramatically. This is affecting everything from the sustainability of high-street retailers to our opportunities for social connection, and so we want to explore the long-term impact of this on our economic and social wellbeing across Milton Keynes.

We will then reconsider some of the other themes that emerged from our first two pieces of work, as topics for our future inquiries.

As talk of a vaccine gathers pace and people turn their attention (let's hope not too prematurely) to life after Covid, we need to capture all that we have learnt, prepare for many months (possibly years) of recovery and reflect on how life in Milton Keynes may never be quite the same ever again.

Finally, can I thank the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive who offered detailed evidence (in writing and in person) to the TFG on two occasions, Elizabeth Richardson who as Committee Manager served to ensure I was just about on schedule as Chairman! ... and finally thank my fellow TFG members who worked with focus and diligence through what were often quite intense and fast-moving meetings.

On behalf of the Task and Finish Group, I commend it to Cabinet and the wider Council.

Councillor D Hopkins  
Chair  
3 December 2020

### 3. Task and Finish Group Work Programme

The TFG met on 6 occasions during the summer and autumn of 2020, hearing from a range of witnesses, from both the Council and its external partners and discussing with them their service's or organisation's response to the pandemic, what they thought the problems were, how they overcame them, lessons learned and what they would do differently in the future.

Many witnesses backed up their reports and presentations with written notes afterwards, which the TFG have found invaluable as reference points in compiling this report.

A schedule of the meetings and details of the subjects covered, together with the list of witnesses is given below:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Witness</b>
15 July 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• View from the Administration:</li> <li>• Overview of Events and Management Action Plan:</li> <li>• Response by Children's Services:</li> <li>• Communications and Local Support Centre:</li> </ul>	<p>Councillor Peter Marland - Leader of the Council</p> <p>Michael Bracey – Chief Executive Milton Keynes Council</p> <p>Mac Heath – Director of Children's Services Milton Keynes Council</p> <p>Sarah Gonsalves – Director of Policy, Insight &amp; Communications</p>
5 August 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local First Responders/Local Resilience Forum:</li> <li>• Probation Service:</li> </ul>	<p>Michael Osborne – Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Bucks &amp; MK Fire &amp; Rescue Service</p> <p>Nicola Webb – Head of NPS for Oxfordshire &amp; Buckinghamshire</p>

<b>Date</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Witness</b>
5 August 2020 cont.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MKC Adult Services:</li> <li>• Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils (MKALC)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mick Hancock – Group Head of Commissioning</li> <li>• Sandra Rankin – Head of Service Older People's Housing and Community Support</li> <li>• Linda Ellen – Head of Service MKC Simpson Care &amp; Response Service:</li> </ul> <p>Philip Ayles – on behalf of MKALC</p>
19 August 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MK Community Foundation:</li> <li>• Community Action MK</li> </ul>	Ian Revell – CEO, Clare Walton - CEO
2 September 2020	Interim Report presented to Scrutiny Management Committee	
15 October 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The opportunities and possible IT revolution Covid-19 has prompted;</li> <li>• The work of Food Bank Xtra over the last 6 months;</li> <li>• SEN provision during the Pandemic and the re-opening of schools in Milton Keynes</li> </ul>	<p>Martin Ferguson, Director of Policy &amp; Research at SOCITM<sup>1</sup></p> <p>Sharon Bridglalsingh, Louisa Hobbs and Fola Komolafe</p> <p>Mac Heath, Director of Children's Services</p>
29 October 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update on progress across the Borough, possible future problems?</li> <li>• Continuing impact on service delivery and council staff, future working arrangements</li> </ul>	<p>Councillor Peter Marland - Leader of the Council</p> <p>Michael Bracey – Chief Executive Milton Keynes Council</p>
3 November 2020	Closed meeting to discuss format of the report and future work plan.	

<sup>1</sup> Society for Innovation, Technology and Modernisation

7 December 2020	Second interim Report presented to Scrutiny Management Committee Planning Group
15 December	Second interim Report presented to Cabinet

In between meetings the TFG received and studied a large amount of background documentation in order to support its scrutiny of this subject.

During this period the Council’s permanent scrutiny committees also carried out a significant amount of work examining the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the council services within their remits. Where possible, the TFG has tried not to duplicate this work but has used the evidence and the outcomes from these meetings to inform its own work and the formulation of the recommendations in this report.

Outline details of the work done by the other scrutiny committees is set out in Annex B of this report.

In September the TFG produced an interim report for the Scrutiny Management Committee detailing the work it had done so far and making a number of recommendations which were relevant at the time.

This second interim report was presented to the Scrutiny Management Committee Planning Group on 7 December and to Cabinet, together with Recommendation Tracker document, to Cabinet on 15 December 2020.

Documentation associated with all of the TFGs meetings is available on the Council’s website at: [CMIS: Response to Covid-19 Pandemic in Milton Keynes Task and Finish Group](#)

Since the start of the Pandemic meetings which would normally be held in public have been live streamed via the Council’s own YouTube channel. Recordings of these meetings are available via: [Milton Keynes Council YouTube Channel](#)

## 4. Acknowledgements

The TFG would like to thank all council officer colleagues and invited witnesses who assisted with preparing documents and presentations, giving up their time to speak at the meetings and their assistance in supplying supplementary information when requested to do so. It would also like to thank all those who provided written submissions as their contribution to the work of the Group.

In particular, the TFG is grateful for the diligence and patience of Elizabeth Richardson in managing the Group through the various stages of the review, which has been an intense period of work for all involved.

Due to the restrictions imposed by the Government's lockdown measures and the continued need for social distancing between people not of the same household, this is the first Task and Finish Group to hold all of its meetings remotely, using modern technology to facilitate participation by both members of the TFG and the witnesses giving evidence. The TFG would like to thank all those involved in the technological aspects of running its meetings and making them a success.

## 5. Recommendations

### 5.1 Presented in the Interim Report to the Scrutiny Management Committee: 2 September 2020

#### 1. MKC Staff, Councillors and Other Resources

a) Staff Wellbeing

The TFG recommends that a follow-up review of any significant issues identified as a result of the recent staff survey be undertaken to capture the experiences and learnings of all Council staff (wellbeing, support and communications) during the pandemic and which would also focus on the positive and negative impacts of home working (and the return to the workplace) and redeployment during the crisis.

b) Management of the Foodbank

That medium-term plans for possible further expansion of the Foodbank, and its medium-term location, management and staffing at the current, or an expanded level, should now be made.

c) MKC Outbreak Control Plan

- i. That the TFG believes the steps described in the Council's [Outbreak Control Plan](#) are critical to reducing the spread of any infection and ultimately saving lives. This will only be achieved through the co-ordinated efforts of a range of organisations across local and national government, the NHS, Public Health England, businesses and employers, voluntary organisations, schools and other community partners, and most importantly with the support of Milton Keynes residents.
- ii. That the Council monitors closely the neighbouring outbreaks in Northampton, Bedford and Luton and that the Cabinet reports weekly through a virtual press conference highlighting the situation in such high-risk places, locations, communities and healthcare settings as have been identified.

d) Procurement & PPE (PPE Hub)

That the Cabinet formalises the existing arrangements for the Milton Keynes central PPE store hub for all care providers, schools, council staff and contractors (including waste contractors) and other(s) as identified (e.g. dentists), considers its medium term resourcing and continues to build up stocks to be charged at cost only. This to be via a same day, on-line ordering, delivery process.

## 2. Finance

### a) Financial Impact upon the Council and Ongoing Risks

*The TFG asked that if social distancing is likely to be the ‘new normal’ whilst lockdown eases, what does this mean for:*

- *Workplaces, businesses and schools?*
- *Public transport and other forms of transport?*
- *Planning and in particular the design of public and private spaces (e.g. widening pavements and any changes to enable more cycling) and the redrafting of strategic documents such as Plan:MK2 and MK2050?*
- *The enforcement of the new reality?*

That the Cabinet assesses the likely level of the impact on strategic documents of long-term continuing recurrences of similar diseases, combined with the legal necessity to update the documents, and determine an appropriate review schedule.

### b) Management of Grant Funding eg Infection Control Grant

That Cabinet produces a detailed audit of Covid-19 related central government grant funding, how the funding was utilised, what shortfalls still exist in terms of unavoidable Covid-19 related expenditure and proposals for addressing such a shortfall through representations to Central Government.

## 3. Communications, Social Media and the Web

### a) Communications with Residents

That in the event of an impending lockdown:

- i. the Council liaises in advance with the business sector, voluntary sector, and parish councils, encouraging them to get their organisations “lockdown ready” – with homeworking, flexible working plans, services on-line, online contact points, delegated authority, etc; and
- ii. the Council prepares, in advance, a leaflet or other publication to be distributed to every household, business and other organisation with basic details of where to go to for assistance and information in the event of any further lockdowns, either local or national, advising them to get their local support networks in place, and seeks the assistance of local community, parish and town councils in the speedy distribution of such literature at the start of any lockdown.

### b) Broadband, IT infrastructure and Connectivity

- i. That the Cabinet prepares a list of broadband ‘not spots’ and low take-up areas in Milton Keynes and that this list be regularly updated so that these areas can be targeted rapidly with paper updates, rather than residents having to rely on poor social media communications.

- ii. That the Cabinet establishes a specific communications process in agreement with community, parish and town councils to ensure that vital information is passed on in a timely manner, the message is consistent and received by all parish and town councils simultaneously.
- iii. That the Cabinet works with parish and town councils and local businesses to establish and publicise a network of noticeboards, shops etc, where key notices can be displayed in the event of lockdown, paying particular attention to the low access or take-up areas.
- iv. That the aspiration to achieve equality of provision across the entire Borough should become a major priority for the remainder of 2020/21 and beyond, investigate the possibility of low-cost reasonable speed packages for those on low budgets, and that the Cabinet allocates sufficient resources to achieve that ambition.

c) IT and Video at Home – IT in the Homes of Elderly and Those Isolating – Community Care

*The TFG heard evidence suggesting that many older residents prefer to stay in their own homes and communities until it is impossible for them to do so any longer, rather than move into residential care. Most older people enjoy being in their home surroundings and view residential care with suspicion, especially following the recent, highly publicised consequences of the pandemic.*

- i. That the Council investigates ways in which the provision of the most recent ICT designed to extend the time older residents can spend at home should be commissioned and a report delivered to the Scrutiny Management Committee by February 2021.
- ii. That residents be trained in the use of the internet for general services, communications etc, if not already proficient.

#### **4. Partnership Working**

a) Broader Parish Relationship

*The TFG recognises that parish and community councils are both providers of key services and facilities in their areas, and repositories of local knowledge about their areas. However, the TFG understands that formal parish decision-making processes will often be too slow if an emergency occurs.*

The Council should, therefore, in advance of any likely lockdown:

- i. request that each parish set up a standing working group with the brief to respond informally to urgent information or requests for assistance in the event of a lockdown, and ensure that the Council has the contact details of the working group chair and of the Parish Clerk;
- ii. request that parishes ensure that the Clerk has sufficient delegated powers in the event of a lockdown or significant restrictions affecting the

services and facilities they provide to act quickly to protect the community and their staff and contractors in the event of a local spike in cases and to provide whatever assistance the working group agrees;

- iii. encourage parishes to sign up to the email alert service for updates on restrictions, grants and other funding, voluntary organisation responses, etc;
- iv. include parish and ward councillors in discussion of local arrangements in preparation for, or in the event of, a local lockdown; and
- v. encourage those parishes not already members, to join the Buckinghamshire Association of Local Councils (BALC) in order to access customised advice to parish councils on government legislation, funding, etc. and recommends that the Council arranges a borough subscription to access BALC material in an editable form adding MK only contacts where appropriate.

b) Resilience Forum

That the Cabinet publishes weekly a Recovery Timeline and statistical bulletin to show how Covid-19 is affecting Milton Keynes.

c) Co-ordinating the Volunteer Response

That in the event of an impending lockdown, the Council:

- i. liaises with the voluntary sector to establish an organisation with a “brand image” to co-ordinate community support, and to prepare an emergency fund; and
- ii. liaises with the voluntary sector to establish a mechanism to communicate appeals to existing voluntary groups for experienced help with any additional support that may be required.

d) Working with Contractors

That the Council needs to negotiate now with its contractors to agree which services should continue, if at all possible, in the event of local or widespread lockdowns in future, to ensure that vital workers are not furloughed.

## 5. **Adult Services and Health**

a) Safeguarding

- i. That Cabinet earmarks sufficient budget, contingency reserve and other (non-financial) resources to cover an expected 30% rise in demand for both children and adult safeguarding services due to Covid-19.
- ii. That the TFG is aware of the ongoing safeguarding issues and **recommends** that councillors (and officer colleagues) take time to read the excellent [Safeguarding in Challenging Times: Keeping Yourself Safe When Receiving Voluntary Support](#) and also view a 3 minute

safeguarding awareness video for volunteers produced by Waltham Forest LBC: [Waltham Forest LBC - Safeguarding Awareness Video](#)

Councillors may also find the following video about safeguarding adults, produced by VODA (North Tyneside Voluntary Organisations Development Agency) helpful: [Safeguarding Adults](#)

b) Day Care Services

That the actions recommended by the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee in relation to support for Day Care Services be further strengthened by stipulating that Cabinet be invited to send the letter to the local MPs.

c) Public Health

The TFG, therefore **recommends** that the Cabinet monitor the potential long-term public health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic associated with the identified national trends at a local level.

d) Test and Trace Information Control

That the Council co-operates fully with every opportunity to localise the test and trace service to improve its effectiveness, and, if necessary and legal, draw on councillors' contacts to improve it.

## 6. **Care Homes**

a) Family Contact

That consideration be given to putting in place appropriate arrangements, such as the provision of suitable PPE, and Covid-19 testing of visitors, to allow one, consistent family member of dementia residents in the Council's care to visit on a regular basis to provide continuity and reassurance in their lives.

b) Care Home Support

That the Council and its partners recognise and follow the best national discharge from hospital practices, particularly in relation to those who require safe accommodation when discharged to home (or care home) settings but are unable to immediately do so due to infection risk to other household or care home members.

The TFG recommends that specific areas of action be prioritised as follows:

- i. continued development and issuing to providers of regularly updated health and infection control guidance, possibly in the form of easy to use action cards, be maintained;
- ii. procurement, storage and distribution of PPE stock be continued and that an online request system (Recommendation 1(d) above) be developed;

- iii. the Council examines the possibility of developing its own localised testing process (if appropriate and more efficient) for symptomatic residents to enable large scale testing for all residents and staff in all care homes (be they Covid-19 positive or not);
- iv. proactive roll-out of Infection Prevention and Control training to all care homes be continued;
- v. a roll out of iPads / other social media devices to all care homes in Milton Keynes to enable GP consultations and the use of technology to reduce social isolation and retain close family contacts be implemented;
- vi. the proactive support for the mental health and wellbeing of care home managers and staff – and for those employed in supporting the care sector within the Council be continued;
- vii. as the care home market will, inevitably, be different to its pre Covid-19 form that modelling be undertaken to project future demand. Care Home managers had also highlighted the need to build up a reserve of “on call” staff against future possible spikes in cases;
- viii. that Cabinet considers whether the long recovery times some patients are experiencing have any implications for services – for example (if they prove to be infectious during this time) isolation support, PPE supplies and ongoing testing; and
- ix. that Cabinet adds its voice to the call for the Government to underwrite the risk in relation to the soaring cost of Covid-19 insurance premiums for care homes, particularly in relation to visitors.

## 7. Children’s Services

### a) Education

*Central Government’s expectation is for a return to full-time educational provision for all school aged children from September. The TFG recognises that some children will find returning to school difficult, such as those who had attendance issues prior to the pandemic, and it is conceivable that there will be increased absence levels following the summer holidays.*

- i. That the Council’s education and welfare service supports all schools to address pupil attendance issues, that it monitors attendance and provides appropriate support to ensure full attendance.
- ii. That the TFG notes the need for all educational settings to complete risk assessments before reopening in September and **recommends** that the Council’s educational support team offers assistance to any school which requests it in preparing such an assessment prior to the start of the new term.

- iii. That the TFG notes the focus nationally and locally upon those children entitled to Free School Meals and welcomes the provision of holiday lunch boxes via Children’s Centres, but **recommends** that the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee examines the broader issues connected with the provision of school meals (and/or vouchers) to those entitled during school holidays.
- c) Home to School Transport

The TFG received evidence regarding the reduced capacity of home to school transport vehicles due to the constraints of social distancing and **recommends** that the Cabinet write to the two MPs for Milton Keynes highlighting this issue to Central Government and the considerable financial challenges this could place on the Council from September onwards.
- d) Looked After Children

That the Council adopts the principles contained in the statement by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health [Looked After Children Services in Covid-19 Pandemic Recovery Plans](#) .
- e) Child Poverty Commission

The TFG takes this one stage further in that it has received evidence with regards to the impact on poverty (food banks, unemployment, homelessness) as furlough ends and **recommends** that the findings of the Commission be funded by Cabinet in full as a priority.

## **8. Social Cohesion, Community Action and Support for the Voluntary Sector**

- a) Support to Vulnerable Residents

That Cabinet authorises the Council’s Communications Team to engage with residents who may need assistance in the event of any future lockdown, encouraging them to set up plans for any personal networks sooner, rather than later, so that they are best prepared if the situation changes quickly.
- b) Resilience of the Community Sector and Social Cohesion

The TFG notes the community resilience shown across Milton Keynes during the emergency and how communities (in whatever form) took responsibility for their local wellbeing and therefore **recommends** that the Council examines ways in which it might build upon these positive local relationships, capturing best practise to be duplicated elsewhere.

The TFG noted that **Recommendation 3(a)i** should help to ensure that timely preparations are made.

c) Impact of Covid-19 on the BAME Community in Milton Keynes

*The TFG received evidence suggesting that the higher risks of Covid-19 for BAME communities poses questions about whether the Council's (and its partners') intelligence sufficiently accounts for the diverse needs of our many multi-cultural communities.*

That the Cabinet provides resources to help scope and fund a fully resourced local BAME infrastructure organisation akin to National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) to include a local community-led research and knowledge hub.

d) Support for the Charitable Sector

The TFG noted the impact of Covid-19 on the financial resilience of (some) local charities and **recommends** that Cabinet reflects on its policies with regards to support for the charitable sector through grant assistance and assistance in kind.

e) Voluntary Sector Restart Support

That the Council extends its support for restarting (similar to that currently offered to businesses) to Voluntary Sector organisations and parish councils where they are restarting services.

## 9. Environmental Issues

a) Play Areas

*The TFG noted that play areas could be a significant source of breaches of social distancing, and that the message that they were closed was slow to get into the public domain among a number of competing priorities.*

It therefore **recommends** that the Council should design a standard closure notice and request help from parishes in closing the play areas promptly in the case of lockdown.

## 10. Underlying Data

*The TFG noted that the situation remains fast moving; some data will become available to inform actions but acknowledges that the Council's data analysis function is under severe pressure.*

It therefore **recommends** that the Council creates an additional central data analysis post, for a minimum of 12 months, and with a budget to purchase access to such ongoing or specific data sources as are deemed to be useful, to provide as clear an overall picture as possible, and specific analyses as services require, of how the health and economic situation is evolving.

## 5.2 Additional Recommendations – November 2020

### 1. Recovery Plan

The TFG commented on the report of the actions taken by the Council and the subsequent recovery plan and makes the following recommendations:

a) Domestic Abuse

That mindful of the drop in referrals for domestic abuse during the first lockdown and the subsequent increase, the Council does everything in its power to get the message out that help is still available, contacts known persons at risk during lockdown and prepares for increased demand after lockdown.

b) SEN Provision

The TFG commends council officers for the frequent contact with many SEN children and their parents but notes that a review of how they found the experience of both lockdown and initial recovery has not yet been carried out. It **recommends** that a basic review be carried out swiftly to identify any further support needs.

c) Community

- i. That Cabinet builds on the experience of co-working with community groups during 2020 to retarget the Council's support to the parish and third sector to enable individuals and voluntary and community groups to take responsibility for their wellbeing.
- ii. That the Council continues to work closely with all ages, statutory and specialist services and locality-based community and health and care services to assist recovery.

d) Green Recovery Strategy

The TFG notes the Council's Green Recovery Strategy and recommends that:

- i. every recovery theme will need to consider the environmental impact of its activities and identify opportunities to contribute to a green recovery; and
- ii. the Council organises a virtual Milton Keynes Climate Alliance conference as soon as practicable (Covid restrictions allowing) to discuss the Council's ambitions for a green recovery as set out in the [Strategic Recovery Framework for Milton Keynes](#) document and provide an opportunity for residents and partners to consider fully the suggestions that might emerge from such an event.

e) Libraries

That the Cabinet prepares a step by step plan for the phased reopening of all Milton Keynes Libraries and that this be published and consulted upon with

town and parish council partners and other local stakeholders as a matter of urgency.

f) Economy and Environment

*Having heard evidence from a range of witnesses and examined other written evidence, the TFG is of the view that the impact of COVID-19 on Milton Keynes will take many months to understand. Significant efforts to explore the relationships between disrupted and changed services and the long-term impact on health and wellbeing will be needed. Analysis of the effect of COVID-19 on the Borough will need to be updated regularly as new information is available and the longer-term implications of the pandemic become more apparent. This will provide the ongoing evidence base for the borough's recovery planning moving forwards.*

*In addition, historically, the "after hit" of a major recession continues to emerge for several years, because as many companies go bankrupt coming out of a recession as do going into it.*

- i. The TFG therefore **recommends** that resources be budgeted for at least 2021-2023 to monitor and understand the impact on the Milton Keynes economy and environment to inform service plans as recovery progresses.
- ii. That money for continued support for residents and the economy is budgeted for at least two further years to cope with continuing economic efforts.

g) Service Delivery

That the Cabinet reviews the [SOCITM - Covid-19 Digital ICT Impact Survey Report](#) and the user feedback, as it considers what "new normal" to return to, always taking into account that not all residents have access to good internet provision, or the funds to pay for it.

## 6. The Evidence

The TFG heard from a wide range of witnesses from various sectors of the community in Milton Keynes as set out in Section 3 of this report. Where possible the TFG provided witnesses in advance with a list of topics or questions it wanted them to address during their presentations. The witnesses found this helpful and it meant that the evidence taking sessions were very focussed, providing the TFG with the insight it needed. Several of the witnesses then also provided additional, written responses after the meeting which, in its turn the TFG found helpful, particularly when it was formulating its recommendations. Written responses from witnesses are available to view on-line at: [CMIS: Response to Covid-19 Pandemic in Milton Keynes Task and Finish Group](#) .

Below is a summary of some of the key issues discussed at each meeting.

### 15 July 2020

#### View from the Administration

Councillor Marland reported that Milton Keynes had been affected by the pandemic for longer than the 17 weeks since lockdown as it had been designated an isolation centre for travellers returning on special flights from Wuhan in China in February.

Due to the way the Council's system of delegated decisions worked it had been possible to maintain a process of open and transparent decision making, even in emergency situations. He had had regular, weekly calls with the leaders of both opposition groups to keep them up to date and share with them information of a sensitive nature, which was not generally available, which allowed opposition leaders to understand the decisions being made and the necessity for them.

Councillor Marland stressed the point that this was not a political emergency and information needed to be shared across all three political groups. He was also meeting regularly with the local MPs.

#### Overview of Events and Management Action Plan

The Chief Executive had prepared an extensive PowerPoint presentation setting out events and how they had affected Milton Keynes up to this point in time. He also provided a written response to the questions and themes the TFG had asked him to address in advance of the meeting. Both these documents are available on the Council's website via the link to CMIS given above.

#### Response by Children's Services

The Director of Children's services reported that there was real concern about whether all children would return to school as planned by the Government in September. Children's Services were working on how to re-socialise children during

the summer break so that they were ready for school in September. They would also be working to encourage parents, who might be reluctant to send their children back to school, that this would be in the children's best interests.

Schools in Milton Keynes had stayed open to provide support for the children of key workers and those who might be vulnerable in other settings during the pandemic. The TFG heard that attendance locally was about 16%, which was higher than the current national average.

#### Communications and Local Support Centre

The Director of Policy, Insight and Communications reported on the number and type of communications that the Council had made since the start of the pandemic across all media platforms, together with the number of people who had read them. She also explained how communications were changing as lockdown eased and provided details of publication dates for key Covid-19 documentation produced by the Council such as the *Milton Keynes Outbreak Control Plan*. Finally, she detailed the extent and range of the Council's communications with the local Parish and Town Councils.

Her written report is also available on CMIS.

#### **5 August 2020**

#### Local First Responders / Local Resilience Forum

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer from the Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) reported to the Committee on behalf of the Local Resilience Forum. He advised that response capability remained relatively unaffected, prevention and protection activity was scaled back consistent with the requirements of social-distancing, support for the shielding programme and maintaining sound infection prevention and control measures. Partnership activities were refreshed to ensure those at most risk received the necessary and appropriate support.

A number of operational committees had been established as part of the Local Resilience Forum, including Strategic Coordination Groups, Tactical Coordination Groups, a Community Hubs Working Group, a Media Advisory Cell and a Finance and Legal sub-group as part of the ongoing recovery effort. A task and finish group, which was being chaired by BFRS had recently been formed to develop an exercise to explore the possible consequences of Local Outbreak Plan activation.

#### Probation Service

The National Probation Service had issued guidance to local Probation Delivery Units, Approved Premises and its staff in Courts, to ensure that the guidance issued by Public Health England / Wales in relation to suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19 and to limit the spread of the virus, were being followed. Plans had also been put in place to release additional staff, if required, to the front line if they had been working elsewhere.

A range of 'Exceptional Delivery Models' had been developed, which could be used to cover all aspects of probation work where it was not possible to deliver services as normal due to staffing levels. The underlying principles of the contingency plans was to prioritise the safety of probation staff and service users and to maintain a focus upon public protection. This included prioritising cases who are assessed as high or very high risk of serious harm, domestic abuse and safeguarding both children and adult cases. In line with government guidance, the Probation Service was also ensuring it adhered to social distancing measures wherever possible and adopting different methods of supervising offenders as appropriate.

#### Response by Adult Services

The Team from Adult Services reported that in Milton Keynes they had been able to continue to deliver services although the way in which many of these were being delivered had had to change but vulnerable people have continued to receive the support and care they needed.

At the beginning of the pandemic Adult Services identified that care homes were likely to need additional support due to the vulnerabilities of their residents. The Council provided the 47 care homes in Milton Keynes with both practical and financial support, including reliable supplies of PPE as other supply chains collapsed.

All building-based day centres were closed in March as part of the Government's lockdown to mitigate the risk from COVID-19. However, these closures have had significant impact on service users and carers who relied on this form of support. Council teams, alongside providers have been keeping in touch with vulnerable people who were accessing day services prior to the lockdown and, where needed, staff have commissioned additional support at home and in supported living.

Home care services continued to operate largely as normal since March. Initial concerns about the supply of PPE and staff sickness levels were managed well and therefore the disruption to service users had been minimal.

The TFG welcomed the information that a [Milton Keynes Borough Care Home Support Plan](#) (as required by Central Government) was in place.

#### Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils (MKALC)

The MKALC representative reported that parish councils felt that some communications from the Council could be more timely. Parish councils knew their local areas and were ready and willing to help the Council get its messages about Covid-19 out to local residents provided they received the information from the Council. He also said providing parish councils with regular information on the number of cases in their areas would be useful so that parishes could ramp up their local alerts to residents.

Town and parish councils had lost income from the closure of community centres, sports grounds and swimming pools; more information on where to go for help and support or how to apply for any relevant grants would have been welcome.

A lot of useful information specifically for town and parish councils was coming from the Buckinghamshire Association of Local Councils but not all local parish councils were members.

## **19 August 2020**

### MK Community Foundation

Many organisations took time to adapt to new ways of working, and a few closed down due to the high numbers of staff shielding. The Community Foundation and Community Action worked to signpost people to other services. The Community Foundation took the lead in raising money to grant-fund the additional support needed by residents, and the transformation of services required by many voluntary organisations. So far £423,000 has been awarded in grants as part of the Foundation's Covid-19 Emergency Appeal Fund. A list of grants given is available on the Community Foundation's website at: [Community Foundation Grants Funded Through Covid-19 Emergency Appeal](#)

Detailed case studies of some of the awards made are also available on the Community Foundation's website at: [Emergency Appeal Case Studies](#)

### Community Action MK

Over the past four months the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in Milton Keynes had provided essential support to the most vulnerable people in local communities. The sector had adapted and changed its practices in response to intelligence and information gathered at grassroots. No one asked for, or indeed commissioned this response, it happened because the sector believed in the importance of communities and its collective mission to support people when they need it.

The Pandemic had amplified the vital role of volunteering and the need for community support. Milton Keynes Council (and indeed the NHS) needed to work with the Voluntary Sector as an equal and strategic partner.

Local VCS organisations had to shift their service delivery model overnight from bringing people together to keeping people apart whilst remaining connected, despite significant reductions in their incomes.

## **15 October 2020**

### Covid-19 Led IT Revolution

The TFG noted that had the pandemic hit two years earlier, residents and businesses in many rural (and urban 'not spot' areas) would have found it far more challenging to stay at home and stay safe, access key services, shopping and entertainment without

the progress in the provision of connectivity that had been achieved across the Borough. However, it recognised that there were still 'not spots' and inconsistent levels of broadband connectivity across the Borough and request that the Broadband Stakeholder Group refocuses its efforts on addressing these issues working in partnership with technology providers.

### Foodbank Xtra

Foodbank Xtra is a temporary project established in March 2020 as a partnership between Milton Keynes Foodbank and the Council to meet the emergency food needs of local residents caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. It is anticipated that this partnership will now continue until at least March 2021. The day to day running of the partnership is overseen by a weekly Operations Group Meeting, attended by representatives of both organisations.

Before the pandemic Milton Keynes Foodbank issued approximately 250 food parcels per week. During the peak of the current crisis this rose to an estimated 200 parcels per day but is now down to an average of 550 per week. Apart from a small team of full-time staff Foodbank Xtra has been operated by a mixture of regular foodbank volunteers, volunteer council staff and councillors, who have undertaken many of the home deliveries.

### SEN Provision and Re-opening Schools in Milton Keynes

The TFG received a PowerPoint presentation from the Director of Children's Services which covered a wide range of topics, including: the recent Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services, social care demand, support for schools and settings, the current situation in schools in relation to Covid-19 and the number of pupils impacted, the impact of the pandemic on the special needs sector and the challenges and practice approaches needed, supplementary schools, Home to School Transport, distance learning, mental health awareness, supporting children with challenging behaviour, home education, support for return and recovery, and progress on the construction of new schools.

He also reported that there had been a marked increase in referrals to the Children's Social Services Team, almost doubling between August and October. He estimated that there was a 10% increase in the number of referrals which needed a significant officer safeguarding response. Some of the cases coming forward were very complex and challenging. There was concern that issues which before the pandemic might have been flagged up by midwives or health visitors were not being picked up as during lockdown they had had to change the way interacted with service users.

### **29 October 2020**

#### Update on Progress across the Borough

The Leader of the Council. Councillor Peter Marland report that the current position with different parts of the country being in different tiers with different restrictions

meaning people were unclear as to what was required of them was proving to be a much more complex situation to manage. Milton Keynes was in Tier 1 and although local authorities could request to go into a higher tier if cases of Covid-19 were rising locally, he was reluctant to do that as there was no clear exit strategy for authorities to revert back to a lower tier.

He said he thought the future looked far more uncertain now than it had in July. There were widening inequalities developing in society, particularly in education and employment for the under-25s with the effects lasting for up to 5 years.

### Continuing Impact on Service Delivery, Council Staff and Future Working Arrangements

The Chief Executive reported that in general terms, progress since July had been good, but the last few weeks, with the rise in local cases, this was getting more challenging. However, partnership working was continuing, even when the pressure eased over the summer, and the good working relationships established in the spring were being maintained.

He also thought that the current rise in cases in Milton Keynes was possibly lower than it could have been as it didn't yet have a university, so there had been no influx of young people from all over the country. On the other hand, over half of the resident population in Milton Keynes was under 35 and this may be why, despite the rise in cases, admissions to the hospital remained very low.

### **Additional Research**

The TFG noted that research from Public Health England, The Health Foundation, The Office of the Children's Commissioner for England, The British Medical Journal and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine shows that during the pandemic there have been national increases in:

- poor mental health as a result of social isolation;
- weight gain due to lack of physical activity and consuming convenience foods high in calories, salt and sugar;
- food insecurities, not able to access healthy food in a reliable way;
- unemployment and the number of those living in relative and absolute poverty due to furlough or being made redundant as a direct result of COVID-19;
- domestic abuse related incidents and crime, children experiencing adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and the number of children in need;
- the use of smoking, alcohol and drugs and spending money on gambling across all age groups;
- youth violence and those in contact with the criminal justice system;
- staff turnover in the health and social care sector;

- the number of people with no fixed abode, or who have become homeless as a result of COVID-19;
- the use of online gaming and chat rooms and the associated risks around grooming.

Additionally, there have also been decreases in:

- immunisations across age groups which will lead to higher incidences of infectious diseases and local outbreaks e.g. measles, and may impact the outcomes across the winter season e.g. excess winter deaths;
- the number of women breastfeeding;
- the overall 'school readiness' of children in the borough;
- access to healthcare for non-COVID-19 related reasons;
- the health-related quality of life for those living with long term conditions, and the elderly.

The TFG heard evidence that care home operators have seen their insurance premiums soar this year (sometime by a factor of ten). Care England warned that the situation was an "an absolutely enormous threat" to the future of the sector.

## 7. Lessons Learned

The overall conclusion of the TFG is that on the whole the emergency has been handled well locally, both by the Council and generally by most of its partners/contractors. However, there are a number of specific instances where witnesses felt things could have been handled better:

1. At one stage there were more volunteers and organisations wanting to help than there were things for them to do as there appeared to be little overall co-ordination of the volunteers. This led to confusion amongst both potential volunteers and recipients as to which organisations were reliable and safe or were scams, and where the help was needed, which was a cause of frustration and disillusionment for many.
2. Good practice and innovation need to be recognised, commended, celebrated and shared. In particular, the Council's co-ordination of PPE appears to have been innovative and national-leading and should be shared.
3. The establishment of good communications and developing efficient working relationships between the Council and its external partners is vital in the management of a crisis of this magnitude.
4. Communications between the Council and colleagues in parish and town councils need to be regular, consistent and a two-way process.
5. In future, the Council needs to be more aware of, and maintain better contact with, organisations and service providers on the periphery of its remit and with which it does not often engage.
6. Co-ordination of the use of furlough or redeployment of staff with service contractors is essential to ensure that services to residents can continue to be delivered to the best possible extent.
7. The pandemic has triggered a seismic shift in how the Council and its partners are delivering local services, creating a range of both new opportunities and challenges for councils. The Cabinet should review the [SOCITM - Covid-19 Digital ICT Impact Survey Report](#) and the user feedback, as it considers what "new normal" to return to, always taking into account that not all residents have access to good internet provision, or the funds to pay for it.

## 8. Government Funding

The Government awarded two types of funding to the Council, "passported" money to be passed on to businesses, with specific criteria to be met, and money to compensate the Council for loss of income or extra costs incurred arising directly from Covid-19. None of this, therefore was "extra" money to be spent on council services. It simply aimed to restore the budget to the planned level. In some cases, only partial funding was awarded, so that the Council's finances suffered a considerable cut. Some parts of that cut will continue into the next 2-3 financial years, unless the Government continues to recompense local authorities.

The Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee has been monitoring the effect of Covid-19 on the Councils 2020/21 budget and will be considering the implications for the 2021/22 budget and the Medium-Term Financial Plan at a series of meetings in January 2021.

Below is a headline breakdown of the additional government funding received by the Council (as at 2 November 2020):

### Funding for General Purposes

**£28.7m** Local Authority Support Grant and Income Compensation Scheme = **16%** of the MKC General Fund annual net budget

This is being used to offset the impact of Covid-19 on the General Fund budget, including loss of parking income, mitigating the impact on the council tax and business rates collection fund, increased expenditure in social care support, PPE, rough sleeping, increased waste tonnages etc

**£6.0m** Tranche 1 (March) – *fully committed and reported to Government*

**£7.4m** Tranche 2 (May) – *fully committed and reported to Government*

**£2.2m** Tranche 3 (July) – *fully committed and reported to Government*

**£4.7m** Tranche 4 (expected November 2020) – *not yet committed or reported*

**£8.4m** Local Government Income Compensation Scheme (current forecast based on actual losses)

### Funding for Specific Purposes

**£1m** **Test & Trace Grant (June)**  
Expenditure for mitigation against management of local outbreaks  
*£630k allocated (health protection, campaigns, communications)*

**£239k** **Reopening High Streets Safely Fund (June)**  
To support the safe opening of high streets and other commercial areas  
*Fully allocated and spent on measures to re-open high streets*

- £228k      Emergency Active Travel Fund (June)**  
To support safe walking and cycling interventions  
*Fully allocated within the Capital Programme*
- £267k      Food and Essential Supplies (July)**  
To help those who are struggling to afford food and other essentials  
*Fully committed to Foodbank Xtra and support for community food groups*
- £245k      Home to School Transport (September)**  
To boost transport capacity for dedicated school and college services  
*Fully committed funding to boost transport capacity on Home to School Transport*
- £134k      Local authority Compliance and Enforcement Grant (October)**  
Covid-19 related compliance and enforcement activities  
*Not yet committed*
- £270k      Contain Outbreak Management Fund**  
To support proactive containment and intervention measures  
*Not yet committed*

#### **Passported Funding**

##### **£49.3m comprising:**

- £2.3m**      Hardship Fund
- £40.2m**    Business Support Grant
- £1.3m**      Discretionary Fund
- £4.1m**      Social Care Infection Control (two tranches)
- £1.1m**      Schools Support
- £0.2m**      Low Income Self Isolation Support Payment
- £0.1m**      Bus Services Support

## 9. Reflections and Next Steps

### Reflections on the Second Phase of the Work of the TFG Committee and Some Suggested Next Steps

The Committee held two evidence gathering sessions in October. The same broad themes came up again and again in the responses received, and these themes were broadly similar to those identified by other organisations who had previously provided written and/or oral evidence. They may, perhaps, seem a little obvious, or unsurprising, but they are reflective of what was heard from organisations, from the community and voluntary sector and from individuals. The evidence provided data on:

- The impact of digitisation on our lives;
- The possibility that inequality and poverty across MK will increase;
- The importance of joint working (e.g. with the Foodbank) and how that can be reinforced;
- The impacts on our children and young people (especially mental health and wellbeing issues);
- How the world of work may have changed forever - the Council being one example of that change; and
- The long-term damage to older people's mental health and sense of wellbeing.

Will things change as a result of the pandemic?

- Greater action towards a green recovery;
- Changes necessary to the built environment and access to green spaces (Plan:MK2 and MK 2050 implications); and
- Caring more about Care, future support funding and structures of social care.

### What to Do Next – Why the Three-Month Pause?

Firstly, the Committee felt that trying to identify the long-term implications of the pandemic while we are still very much in the middle of it is hard; it is difficult, if not impossible, to draw definitive conclusions and to make realistic and precise predictions. The Council and its partner organisations have not had the time to give this any detailed consideration; many of our partners are still having to focus on the day-to-day challenges posed by the pandemic, rather than think and plan too far into the future.

Secondly, the widely varying resources (whether financial, practical or emotional) people and organisations have had in order to carry them through the last nine months, the very different way that different types of work have been affected, the vast disparities in people's living situations and (for example) access to outside space – these factors have been critical in shaping the experience of organisations and

individuals of the pandemic to-date and thus the consequent long-term impact. It is likely that all need more time to reflect upon the longer term impacts the pandemic had on them and the organisations they represent.

Thirdly, it does seem significant that some of the witnesses chose to tell us not what they think will change but what they hope will change; how they would like society in Milton Keynes to be different. It is still not clear whether our partner organisations and the individual experts and representatives from those organisations simply provided us with a common 'wish list' as they might have done before the pandemic, or whether the pandemic has changed the things people across Milton Keynes care about and the extent they want change to happen. The theme being that witnesses and the organisations they represented wished for an opportunity to rethink and to change. Individuals often spoke about how they wanted to hold on to changes they'd made in their own lives - for example in the ways they worked – different work/life patterns, family time, reducing food waste whilst expressing frustrations with Zoom and Teams at home etc. Zoom fatigue is a real 2020 phenomenon!

These are all changes that, if the momentum for change is maintained, could easily result in societal change from the bottom up. Other changes anticipated by the Council hinge upon a plan for a 'green based economic recovery', changes to the management of care homes and a different model for funding social care – the latter two predominately having to come from Government. This could be a window where public appetite across Milton Keynes for change makes action easier; the test will be how policy makers locally and nationally respond.

Fourthly, while many of the witnesses spoke about the great hardships they and the organisations they represented had endured during the last nine months – the challenges in care homes, assisting clients confined in very restricted living conditions and struggling to access support, struggling financially and emotionally – a number of witness presentations reflected positivity and with optimism. Officers and partners told us they had valued the chance to focus on priorities and to some extent slow down, to spend more time with family, to re-evaluate their priorities. Some commented about how the pandemic had shown how they, and society across Milton Keynes, could adapt to change, and that they hoped this newly discovered creativity and flexibility (both individually and societally) could be harnessed in the long term to achieve lasting positive change.

However, as broad as the eight themes captured from the second phase of witness presentations are, there are some interesting omissions that the TFG could be addressing in 2021. More focus needs to be applied to quantifying the direct economic impact – recession, radical changes in retail (upon which a significant segment of the Milton Keynes economy is based), potential job losses etc, were starting to come through more strongly in the evidence received, and this in turn will clearly have a major impact on poverty and inequality.

Other topics for future consideration include an examination of the long-term health consequences, the impact and reinvention of retail centres, including the older town

high streets, “out of town” centres and the city centre, as well as on office accommodation and how both building design and infrastructure (Plan:MK2 and MK 2050) will need to adapt.

Arguably, 2019 solutions will not apply to the new realities in 2021. The challenges of loneliness, and fear of further future loneliness, of those less able or comfortable to use the internet also came through strongly from the evidence provided by the senior director from SOCITM, as did the need for guaranteed, consistent levels of broadband connectivity everywhere across Milton Keynes. This is something that the TFG recognises and would propose to examine in greater detail in 2021.

In February 2021 (or at a date to be decided at the planned review of this work in February) the TFG would look to explore the key themes that emerged from the initial two phases of work in greater depth, which will enable it to draw more specific conclusions about the long-term economic and societal implications of the pandemic for Milton Keynes (and the Council in particular) and make some further detailed recommendations to Cabinet (and others). For example, a focus on the impact that our rapidly increasing reliance on digital technology, accelerated by the pandemic, may have on our long-term social and economic wellbeing. In doing so, the TFG will be able to draw on the contributions that people have made to this first phase of its work and the Chairman would like to take this opportunity, once again, to reiterate the thanks of the TFG to all those who took the time to share their thoughts and observations with us.

In particular, thanks should go to Councillor Peter Marland, Leader of the Council and Chief Executive, Michael Bracey, for whom these past few months have offered up stresses and challenges that either could have ever imagined and who have both addressed those issues with courage, fortitude and dedication. The Council, and the community at large, owes them both a debt of gratitude for their commitment, patience and good humour through this extraordinary period in our local, national and international history.

Therefore, in February the TFG proposes that it should:

- Assess the impacts of the second and any subsequent lockdowns on the Council (and the community at large) and explore the above themes identified from the October evidence gathering sessions in greater depth;
- Examine the long term economic and social impacts of the pandemic on Milton Keynes;
- Examine the reliance on digital technology and its impact on our long term social and economic wellbeing;
- Explore some of the broader long-term health consequences of the pandemic;
- Consider building design and infrastructures (building for a post pandemic Milton Keynes);
- Explore the impacts of loneliness and the fear of loneliness upon our (often most vulnerable) residents;

- And finally, consider how Milton Keynes society can and has adapted to change and how, in say 2-5 years' time, what do people think will be (or should be) different across the borough because of the pandemic, for all our daily lives and for how we function as a local authority.

## 10. Thanks and Commendations

The TFG received a detailed response to its questions from the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council and would like to thank them and, in thanking both for their hard work and commitment during the pandemic emergency, ask them to pass on the TFG's thanks and congratulations to all council staff.

Special mention should be made of Sarah Gonsalves (Director of Policy, Insight and Communications) and her team, who started being involved in the Council's response to Covid-19 much earlier than everyone else, when they helped establish a quarantine centre for travellers returning to the UK from Wuhan in China in a conference centre at Kents Hill. One hundred and five Britons and 95 European citizens, together 13 staff and medics, arrived at RAF Brize Norton on 9 February 2020 and stayed in Milton Keynes for 14 days.

The TFG wishes to congratulate the team at the Council involved in the Looked After Children Service and in the safeguarding of children at risk, all those involved in the general care of children and all those working in sometimes difficult circumstances in schools and colleges across the borough.

The TFG congratulates the Adult Social Care Team for their outstanding efforts during the pandemic.

The TFG received evidence relating to the outstanding work being undertaken by the MK Food Bank(s) and offers its congratulations and thanks to all involved. The TFG would also like to commend the work of the local Community Fridges in Milton Keynes for their support to people in food poverty by providing both cooked meals on the premises and fresh produce to anyone and everyone, regardless of personal circumstances.

The Council's external partners, particularly the Community Foundation and Community Action MK and the voluntary organisations with which they liaise, should also be thanked for their efforts in managing the pandemic and the support they have provided to both the residents of Milton Keynes and the Council.

The TFG commends the members (partners) of the Local Resilience Forum and thanks them for their continuing support.

The TFG noted the presentations received regarding Home Care provision and asks that the thanks of the TFG be passed on to all staff involved in delivering this essential service to some of the most vulnerable residents in Milton Keynes during this difficult time.

The Council should also be commended for its innovative initiative in establishing a network of Community Champions across the Borough who are taking important messages about Covid-19 to their local communities, some of which might be hard to reach by other means.

## Annex A: Terms of Reference

1. To review the Council's response to the Covid-19 Pandemic and identify lessons that can inform the Council's response to any future major emergencies, epidemics and pandemics.
2. To understand whether the Council's actions in dealing with the pandemic were the right ones; what worked, what didn't, what could be improved.
3. To make recommendations to assist the Council in developing a blueprint that can be carried forward to provide an effective response when dealing with any future emergencies / epidemics / pandemics or disasters.
4. To provide public reassurance that in any similar, future crisis the Council has the right plans in place to support and assist the residents of Milton Keynes.
5. To review relationships between the Council, parish/town councils, other support services such as community groups, charities and Central Government, to ensure that those who need help during the Covid-19 crisis are receiving the right assistance, but without duplication of effort.

These were approved by the TFG at its first meeting on 15 July 2020.

## Annex B: Scrutiny Elsewhere

### **Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee - 24 June 2020:**

#### **Covid-19 Public Health Update**

1. That the Director of Public Health be asked to provide the Committee with further comparative data for Milton Keynes, including the impact on BAME communities, and those from different socio-economic backgrounds.
2. That the Head of Communications be asked to ensure that ongoing Covid-19 communications incorporate key messages around keeping safe/not being complacent and that they consider how engagement with local communities on these messages can be improved.

#### **The Impact of Covid-19 on Care Homes**

3. That a letter be sent to the local MP's to ask them to take up with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care the Committees hope that the new relationship with the Joint Biosecurity Centre will result in better data being available locally.
4. That the Director of Adult Social Care be asked to provide the Committee with further commentary against the action points in the Council's response to Covid-19.

#### **The Impact of Covid-19 on Carers and Day Care Services**

5. That the Director of Adult Social Care be asked to note the willingness of the Dementia Partnership to be involved with re-opening dementia day care services.
6. That a letter be sent to the local MP's pointing out the difficulties that a lack of guidance for providers of Day Care Services is having on the ability to reopen services and that whether the Department of Health and Social Care might consider the provision of such guidance as a matter of urgency.

### **The Budget & Resources Scrutiny Committee - 8 July 2020:**

#### **Overview of the Council's Current Financial Position in Relation to its Response to Covid-19**

1. That Council be advised that the Committee is satisfied that the safeguards created to manage the Council's finances are satisfactory at this point in time.
2. That Council be advised that the Committee commends the s151 Officer and his team for the rigour and consistency with which the Council's finances are being managed.

#### **Report on the Work of the Corporate Portfolio Board and Capital Programme Boards**

3. That in the light of the changed priorities caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Capital Programme needs to be reviewed accordingly, particularly as there may be a surge in requests for disabled adaptations.

### **Strategic Placemaking Scrutiny Committee – 9 July 2020**

#### **Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Public Realm Services**

1. That the Planning Group prepare a report for the Covid-19 Task and Finish Group that identifies what the service area should do differently in the event of any future similar events.
2. That the guidance from government on dealing with contractors during Covid-19 be circulated to the Committee.

## **Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee (14 July 2020):**

### **The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Children and Young People's Services**

1. That Cabinet be asked to advise on whether there was funding allocated in the recovery budget to deliver on the recommendations of the Child Poverty Commission.
2. That the Planning Group consider how the meeting in December 2020 be framed including invitees to address the impact of Covid-19 on attainment and education gaps.
3. That the Director of Children's Services be asked to consider the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the BME community, particularly in relation to concerns around school attendance.

## **Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee - 21 July 2020:**

### **Anti-Social Behaviour – Performance Data**

1. That, if any future lockdown in relation to Covid-19 proves necessary, more of the relevant staff are maintained in the Housing Operations Team, rather than being redeployed, so that there are sufficient resources to deal with any possible spikes in anti-social behaviour.

### **Impact of Covid-19 on the Council's Homelessness Service**

2. That the Homelessness Prevention service be congratulated for maintaining such a good service during the crisis and being able to reduce the numbers in temporary accommodation, compared to the last time there was a similar unprecedented demand for council support with housing.
3. That the Team be further congratulated on the work done with rough sleepers and getting them off the street in response to the Government's sudden 'Everyone In' directive, working with them and getting moving-on plans and support in place.
4. That the Committee also noted and endorsed the on-going efforts to find more affordable temporary and medium-term accommodation in preparation for possible further surges in homelessness.
5. That the Committee welcomes the support and proactive approach to providing support for the increased number of young people who have become homeless during lockdown.

### **Impact of Covid-19 on the Council's Repairs and Planned Investment Works**

6. That the Committee also welcomes the agreement with Mears to reduce the average number of days it takes to complete a repair and their commitment to complete the backlog of outstanding repairs caused by the Covid-19 lockdown in the next 8-10 weeks.

## **Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee – 30 September 2020**

### **Covid-19 Public Health Update**

1. That there be a standing item on the Agenda of this Committee on data specifically related to the Covid-19 pandemic in Milton Keynes.
2. That the Head of Communications be asked to ensure that ongoing communications on Covid-19 reiterates the national guidance on who and when to test and self-isolate.
3. That the Director of Public Health be asked to provide an update to the Committee on details of any new testing sites when this information is available.
4. That the Director of Public Health be asked to provide an updated analysis of the impact of Covid-19 on the BAME community when this data is next reviewed.

### **“Starting Well” – Has Covid-19 Impacted on the Health and Wellbeing Strategy?**

5. That the Head of Communications be asked to ensure that ongoing communications on Covid-19 highlights the financial support that is available to those that must self-isolate and that this message is sent out in appropriate languages.

### **Winter Planning**

6. That the Chief Executive of Milton Keynes Hospital be asked to review signage at the hospital, particularly at A&E, to ensure that it is clear and obvious what to do if you self-present or are sent to the hospital by 111 with Covid-19 symptoms.
7. That the Head of Communications be asked to ensure that ongoing communications on Covid-19 includes messages to promote 111 and not to avoid contacting GP’s with any health concerns.

## **Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee – 20 October 2020**

### **Impact on Council Finances Due to Reduction in Income**

1. That the Finance Team continues to monitor closely the level of the Council’s income from all sources, particularly parking income, which appears to be the income stream currently most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Asset Rationalisation of Operational Property**

2. That a full assessment of the risks and benefits to both the Council and its staff be carried out before the possible modal shift to long-term working from home becomes a reality;
3. That the necessary measures to ensure effective management of staff who opt to work from home on a regular basis, in order to get the best from staff and provide staff with the best working experience possible, be in place before working from home becomes an established norm for council staff.
4. That given the anecdotal evidence from across the Council about different experiences of home working, both positive and negative, the Chief Executive be asked to review the long term implications of extensive and extended use of working from home as the main operational model of the Council, reporting back to this Committee in 6 months’ time, with an assessment of those implications.

### **Health and Wellbeing Board**

Although not a Scrutiny Committee, the Health and Wellbeing Board met on 29 July 2020, receiving reports on the following Covid-19 related issues:

- System-wide Response to Covid-19;
- Local Outbreak Control Plan; and
- Seasonal Influenza Plan

## Annex C: List of Background Papers

- [MKC Covid-19 Events Overview Presentation](#)
- [MKC Management Action Plan](#)
- [MKC Local Outbreak Plan](#)
- [Milton Keynes Borough Care Home Support Plan](#)
- [Strategic Recovery Framework for Milton Keynes](#)
- [Covid-19 Economic Recovery Action Plan](#)
- [Reopening Our High Streets Safely](#)
- Health and Wellbeing Board on 29/07/20: [MK System-Wide Response to Covid-19](#) and [MK System-Wide Response to Covid-19 - Agency Letters](#)
- [National Association of Local Councils Covid-19 Case Studies](#)
- [SOCITM - Covid-19 Digital ICT Impact Survey Report](#)
- The TFG also noted that the British Medical Journal has stated that 10% of those from care homes with Covid-19 were suffering serious, ongoing illness/symptoms for 13 weeks or more and that this is highlighted in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) report [Impact of Coronavirus in Care Homes](#)

## Scrutiny – An Explanation

As Milton Keynes Council has a Cabinet (Executive) system it is required by law to have a Scrutiny function to support and scrutinise its executive decision-making arrangements.

Scrutiny committees and scrutiny task and finish groups are not “decision making” bodies but are bodies which monitor and influence the decision makers. The committees and task and finish groups are made up of non-Cabinet members, and are designed to support the work of the Council in the following ways:

- assisting the executive in research, policy review and development and thus helping drive improvements in public services;
- reviewing and scrutinising decisions to be taken, or ones which have been taken by the Cabinet and officers, also known as acting as a “critical friend”, challenging policy and decision makers;
- considering the Council’s performance;
- reviewing the work of external organisations operating in the Borough to ensure that the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working; and
- enabling the voice and concerns of the public to be heard and listened to.

Each scrutiny committee or task and finish group has its own terms of reference. The scrutiny committees / task and finish groups consider issues by receiving information in a number of ways including by receiving presentations and taking evidence from councillors, Council officers and external witnesses or partners to develop an understanding of proposals or practices. As scrutiny committees and scrutiny task and finish groups have no decision-making powers, they can present their recommendations to the Cabinet, full Council, Council officers, or external partners. The committees will often request a formal response and progress report on the implementation of recommendations that they have provided to various parties.

### **Attending Meetings of Scrutiny Committees / Task and Finish Groups**

Meetings of scrutiny committees and task and finish groups are held in public and are generally open for everyone to attend. Due to the current Covid-19 Pandemic it is not possible for members of the public to attend meetings in person. Meetings are now being conducted remotely, via MS Teams and live streamed on the Council’s own YouTube website.

Members of the public wishing to speak on an agenda item at a particular meeting should let us know by 18:45 on the day of the meeting so that the Chair can be advised in advance, either by calling 01908 691691 (ask for the Scrutiny Team in Democratic Services) or by emailing [meetings@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:meetings@milton-keynes.gov.uk) . A link to join the meeting

via MS Teams will be sent to you before the meeting.

The Chair of the meeting will try and make the meeting as informal as possible, but, by their nature, local authority meetings must retain a degree of formality, with the meeting being controlled by the Chair.

If you are to speak on an agenda item, you will be able to speak when the item is considered. The Chair of the meeting will call out your name when it's your turn if you have given prior notice.

When asked to speak, please give your name and let us know if you are representing any organisation or speaking in your own right.

The maximum time you will have to speak is 3 minutes. If there are lots of people wanting to speak, then the Chair might reduce the time per person to one or two minutes to enable everyone to have their say. Please try not to repeat what has been said before.

If you have been invited to give evidence to the scrutiny committee or task and finish group as a witness you will have been contacted by one of the Council's scrutiny officers who will have briefed you on what the committee or task and finish group would like you give evidence and what to expect at the meeting. You will be allowed sufficient time to speak to give your evidence. You will not be limited to 3 minutes.

On occasion there may be specific issues that the meeting must consider in private so all but members of the committee / task and finish group and key officers will be asked to leave.

If you want to speak on a matter that is not scheduled to be discussed by a scrutiny committee or task and finish group then please either call or email the address above and we will contact you to discuss how best to take this forward.

Dates for the Council's public meetings, together with the papers for the meetings, are available on the Council's website at:

[Committee Management Information System \(CMIS\)](#)

If you have any questions about the scrutiny process please send them either to: [meetings@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:meetings@milton-keynes.gov.uk) or The Scrutiny Team, Democratic Services, Milton Keynes Council, Civic Offices, 1 Saxon Gate East, Milton Keynes, MK9 3EJ. Alternatively call 01908 691691 and ask for the Scrutiny Team in Democratic Services.

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