

SERVICE HIGHLIGHT REPORT – COVID-19 AND KEY SERVICE UPDATES

SERVICE AREAS:	Law & Governance
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REPORTING PERIOD:	February 2021
LOCAL AUTHORITY:	Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council

Part 1 - COVID-19

NEW GUIDANCE AND IMPACT

NEW CHALLENGES AND ACTIVITY

RECOVERY ACTIVITIES

DECISIONS MADE SINCE LAST REPORTING PERIOD

- **Peterborough** - Due to the elections being called, it has been agreed for 2 members of the Constitutional Services Team to return to service area, from the Track and Trace Team, to support the delivery of elections

NEW COVID-19 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS SINCE LAST REPORTING PERIOD

WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

- **Peterborough** – Constitutional Services teams will support some aspects of the delivery of the elections on 6 May. Democratic Services team will support the postal vote opening process, Members Services Officer will support with administrative tasks, Mayoral Services Manager is continuing to support the staffing process and the Leaders office team will support the administrative tasks in relation to attendance at the count.
- **Cambridgeshire** – Democratic Services will be supporting the electoral County Council count for Cambridge City.
- **Virtual Meeting Regulations – Peterborough and CCC** - Democratic Services – Virtual meeting legislation is due to end on 7 May 2021. The Secretary of State, Robert Jenrick MP, confirmed that this has been a successful process, but he has no plans to extend the primary legislation as there is not enough time to extend the legislation to enable meetings to continue remotely at this current time. If there was an opportunity to make this more permanent, he would take it. The Association of Democratic Services Officers has been working with Lawyers in Local Government to develop the legal arguments for continuing with remote meetings beyond this deadline. The document below sets out the current position: [ADSO and LLG Statement on Virtual Meeting Provision 5th February 2021](#). The legal advice says that the best course of action would be for Parliament to amend primary legislation to bring certainty and clarity. Running alongside the legal proceedings, evidence will be presented to the Secretary of State that remote meetings have produced real benefits across the board. Arrangements will need to be made to hold council meetings safely if the Regulations are not extended.
- **Child Protection Team PCC** - The number of Police requests for the disclosure of CSC records has increased, and the volume of documents in the records requested has also increased. The documents need to be checked before they are sent to the Police and CPS, but the volume is becoming extremely difficult to cope with and extra support will need to be sourced. Prior to COVID restrictions, the Police Officers would attend SMH, but now all

documents must be uploaded and sent electronically, which has added to the increase in work.

- **Planning Highways and Property Team** - A team member recovering from Covid has returned to work at reduced hours. An experienced Planning lawyer has been recruited for three days a week and will go back to the market for the remainder. The Highways and Property team are over capacity due to year end commitments and are prioritising and focusing on urgent matters that need completion as soon as possible.
- **Contract & Procurement Team** – Work levels are extremely high with the impact of Brexit having an effect on review of contracts within the Council and this has created further work for the team. Generally instructions are increasing. One officer will go on maternity leave at the end of March but recruitment for a temporary cover is in hand.
- **Litigation team** – work levels are increasing and decisions are being made around various prosecutions to be progressed, including outstanding cases of non-school attendance. The Court Service is progressing its plan to change the way the Council interfaces with them to issue proceedings and this will involve extra planning and preparation.

COMMUNICATIONS

Part 2 – BUSINESS AS USUAL ACTIVITY

KEY SERVICE UPDATES – INTERNAL / EXTERNAL

- **Peterborough** - Elections have been confirmed for Thursday 6 May 2021 (Locals, Police and Crime and Mayoral). We are waiting for confirmation if two Neighbourhood Plan Referendums will also be delivered on this date
- Purdah will commence on 29 March 2021
- All election key activities and 93 polling stations require an individual risk assessment – Public Health, Health and Safety Team are working with the elections team to support this process
- Confirmed count venue – Peterborough Arena (East of England showground). The Cambridge Suite has been confirmed as a vaccination centre, but this will have no impact on the delivery of the election count
- Primary legislation was laid in Parliament, Monday 8 February, to support the Emergency Proxy applications for people who have tested positive, been contacted by Test and Trace or have symptoms, these electors can apply for a proxy to vote on their behalf at the polling station. This also applies to the proxy as well, if they have tested positive for Covid, been contacted by Track and Trace or have symptoms. The deadline to apply is still 5pm on Polling Day and this is the same for a change in proxy person too
- Secondary legislation was laid in Parliament, Monday 8 February to reduce the number of signatures (subscribers) having to sign a nomination paper. This has been reduced for Local Elections from 10, to 2 signatures, further guidance for Candidates and Agents will follow from the Electoral Commission in due course
- All nominations papers will continue to be hand delivered to the Town Hall. Further guidance on this process will be sent to all members, political parties and advertised on the website in due course. A Candidates and Agents virtual presentation is being scheduled for early March, once we have all the relevant guidance from the Government and Electoral Commission
- **Peterborough** - Democratic Services are preparing for Budget Cabinet and Joint Scrutiny of the budget for February and Full Council budget meeting for 3 March, all continue to be delivered virtually
- **Peterborough** – Mayoral Services, the Mayors car lease has expired, and it was agreed not to renew the car until later in the year due to the Mayor not currently attending any events due to the pandemic. We are continuing to review in accordance with Government and Public Health advice. The Mayors future car will be an electric model, which is in accordance with the Council’s Carbon Management Plan
- **Peterborough** – Democratic Services – Constitution and Ethics committee agreed to hold evidence gathering Task and Finish sessions in public and to hold all other meetings in

private. Considerations are given to sensitive issues. Key witness sessions will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

- Constitution and Ethics committee proposed to refer the discussion on Motions and additional council meetings back to Group Leaders for further discussion
- **PCC and CCC FOI** –Team had held back in two areas where senior managers asked for assistance and managed those requests and is now restarting sending requests in those two areas after 3-4 weeks of grace with director agreement.
- **Child Protection Team PCC** - Monthly COVID meetings with the Designated Family Judge continue, chaired by the senior lawyer. Remote Court hearings will continue and are being managed well, with no significant delays for children’s cases.
- **Planning PCC** – Planning committees proceeding virtually as per usual

FINANCIAL ISSUES

- **Peterborough** - Additional funding has been agreed to support councils in the delivery of elections and in purchasing PPE, a larger count venue and additional staff to support electors at polling stations. To date no allocations have been confirmed
- We are currently planning for a high increase in applications to apply to vote by post, communications have been sent advising people to apply early. This could result in additional costs, which forms part of the Electoral Registration Officer’s functions, and forms part of the Council's budget. The additional funding cannot be used to support this function
- We are also currently reviewing a process of sending a letter and postal vote application form to all CEV categories (32,000). This is also an ERO function and would form part of the Council’s budget. The additional funding cannot be used to support this function
- **Peterborough** – Democratic Services - if a decision is agreed to increase the number of Full Council meetings, the additional costs would be £3,500.00 per extra meeting.
- **Child Protection Team PCC** - while it is positive that Court hearings are going well, with no significant delays, as many as 6 or 7 Court hearings can be listed on one day. This, combined with the complexity of some recent cases, has meant an increase in the use of counsel.
- **Planning Highways and Property** - With the town grant successful, officers are focusing on development. This combined with year-end commitments and the start of Purdah, has taken the team past capacity and may be some time before capacity returns to normal.

PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES AND CHALLENGES

UPCOMING ISSUES & HORIZON SCANNING AREAS

POSTIVE NEWS STORIES

- **Peterborough** – The Holocaust Memorial commemoration was delivered virtually on 27 January 2021
- Flag was raised on 1 February to support the LGBT history month
- 25 Civic award winners were declared at Full Council on 27 January 2021
- Preparatory work has commenced on the Peterborough University Project