

SERVICE HIGHLIGHT REPORT – COVID-19 AND KEY SERVICE UPDATES

SERVICE AREAS:	Customer and Digital Services Directorate: including Communications, IT & Digital, Emergency Planning and Health & Safety for Peterborough City Council and Cambridgeshire County Council. HR, Learning & Development and Customer Services for Cambridgeshire County Council.
REPORT AUTHOR:	Sue Grace
REPORTING PERIOD:	December 2020 – January 2021
LOCAL AUTHORITY:	Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council

Part 1 - COVID-19

NEW GUIDANCE AND IMPACT

Peterborough moved into Tier 4 on 20 December and Cambridgeshire moved into Tier 4 on 26 December. Alongside a number of heightened restrictions for businesses and members of the public this required all staff who are clinically extremely vulnerable to work from home.

A National Lockdown was introduced on 5 January, in response to the new variant of COVID and its increased transmissibility and impact on the health service. Alongside the introduction of more stringent restrictions this required a review of all staff working in office buildings to maximise home working, whilst ensuring we maintain critical services. A review of building Risk Assessments for council buildings that are in use with a focus on ventilation, humidity and cleaning regimes. A review of the use of, and the quality of, face masks for staff working in shared offices. These changes were informed by the SAGE document on Mitigations to Reduce Transmission in the light of the new variant.

HR, Health and Safety and Communications were all involved in considering and implementing these changes.

NEW CHALLENGES AND ACTIVITY

Emergency Planning – in the context of increasing rates of infection and hospitalisation Emergency Planning are working with all partners on the Excess Deaths Group to monitor how the systems are operating following the Christmas and New Year holiday period. The two supplementary body stores, in Cambridge and Peterborough, are in place awaiting activation if required.

Customer Services (Cambridgeshire) – have been working to increase its capacity so we can launch a self-isolation support service. This will operate across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The service will launch on the 18th January. Recruitment for this new service began in December. All management positions are now filled and recruitment continued between Christmas and New Year and through early January to identify teams of advisors. All IT equipment, systems development, processes and procedures and training materials have been put in place in approximately 4-5 weeks to deliver this service which will operate from 8am to 8pm. Resources will be focused on making contact with positive cases in the first instance to remove barriers to social isolation in areas of high infection to help break the transmission of COVID at this critical time.

HR Advisory – are supporting the planning and recruitment process for the self-isolation support service. They have put in place arrangements to recruit, induct and train this new set of agency workers within a very tight timescale. HR have also worked to update advice and information for staff which cover the requirements of the new lockdown arrangements and support for those who will now be having to balance home schooling against their job roles once again. Risk assessments for all those who are clinically vulnerable are being reviewed to ensure they are still appropriate for those whose roles prevent them from being able to work at home.

IT and Digital – have delivered a call handling system for the self-isolation support service. Enhancements have been made to the customer management system to ensure accurate information is available for calls so we can offer support to residents who have tested positive for COVID-19. Laptops have been procured

ready for deployment to the staff who start this work during January. An updated handbook has been developed for these call handlers so they can provide information to residents about help that is available locally to enable them to self-isolate.

RECOVERY ACTIVITIES

HR Advisory – the focus on staff wellbeing continues with twice weekly wellbeing updates, guidance and tips issued in the staff bulletins as well as providing up to date advice and FAQs to staff as the COVID situation evolves and guidance changes. For the first week of the new lockdown period this advice will be issued daily to increase the information and support available. In addition the online mental health awareness training continues to be rolled out, five sessions per month, alongside monthly wellbeing hours. Fortnightly briefing meetings have continued with our trades union colleagues. These meetings provide an opportunity for answering questions and engaging trades union colleagues on all aspects of the Councils' response to the COVID crisis that have a people related connection.

DECISIONS MADE SINCE LAST REPORTING PERIOD

NEW COVID-19 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS SINCE LAST REPORTING PERIOD

Customer Services – funding has been agreed from the Outbreak Management Fund to support the new self-isolation support service.

WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

HR Advisory - see above for the HR support for staff wellbeing.

Customer Services (Cambridgeshire) – in December the COVID-19 Hub enquiry line had a 126% increase in contacts compared with November. In December, we received 699 calls, compared to 180 in October and 309 in November. This was largely due to enquiries about the Winter Grant scheme. We expect to see an increase in response to the new Lockdown and the impact this will have on the shielded community.

COMMUNICATIONS

Communications and Information – weekly updates continue to be sent to all Members highlighting key information about the COVID infection rates and actions being taken to mitigate them – these updates are also sent to all District Communications teams for wider distribution to Members in other District or City Councils.

A revision to the communications strategy was produced to support communications activity as we moved out of the second lock down and into Tier 2 or 3 restrictions. This focussed on positive activities around December and Christmas – showing people how to carry out daily activities safely. This plan was further updated as first Peterborough and then Cambridgeshire moved into Tier 4 restrictions on December 20th and 26th respectively.

Linked to this we have:

- Published video blog translations of the revised key messages related to Tier 2 or 3 and celebrating Christmas differently – promoted on social media and on our website.
- Published media releases, and vlogs from Dr Liz Robin and celebrity advocates, including Father Christmas, concentrating on encouraging people to think early about how to celebrate Christmas differently.
- Developed a series of one page or half page advertorials in all local media titles outlining how Christmas bubbles could work safely, but continuing the message that the safest way to meet with family was online, and the next safest was outdoors.
- Produced a video detailing the personal experiences of members of our faith groups and how they were celebrating Christmas or Diwali differently, or supporting their congregations through the winter months.

- Promoted the Winter Grant programme aimed at vulnerable children and families.
- Developed communications for the roll out of rapid testing in some areas of Peterborough from December 23 – including leaflets, posters, Member and MP briefings, social media, web content, media information and translations.
- Continued to engage and support younger people with our #CancelCovid campaign - with posters, handing out slogan-ed masks to young people queueing to get into venues in Cambridge and Peterborough on the weekends leading up to Christmas.
- Delivered a Christmas/winter activities and New Year campaign toolkit for the whole public sector communications cell giving people suggestions on how to celebrate differently.
- Funded a two page feature in The Moment magazine about the work of the Peterborough Hub and public health advice.
- Continued to promote the Chairman’s commendations for local organisations and individuals who support COVID activities and working to develop a plan to commemorate those who have lost their lives in Peterborough.

In addition Communications have:

- Continued to successfully promote the need for more Foster carers with a renewed appeal up to Christmas and continued activity to support the recruitment of social workers and reablement workers.
- Supported progress on major infrastructure projects with communications activities – including Kings Dyke and active travel initiatives.
- Supported the recording and issue of Leaders, Chairman and Mayor’s Christmas messages to residents in both areas.
- Updated residents on service Christmas closures and all emergency out of hours contact numbers
- Supported emergency activities linked to flooding in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough between December 24th and December 29th – including attending Silver LRF meetings and issuing briefings from the Fire service, Environment Agency and police.
- Provided on-call support between Christmas and New Year with COVID-19 meetings, support to schools, Peterborough bin issues, Cambridgeshire contact centre phone line difficulties and highways gritting communications support.

Media and major reputational issues - COVID proactive media about the end of the second national lockdown, the introduction of tier 2 and 3 restrictions and then the rapid escalation to tier 4. Local contact tracing, self-isolation support roll out across Cambridgeshire, COVID cases in schools and information about whether and when schools would re-open over the holidays. A continued push to promote uptake of business grants promotion, homelessness in Peterborough and helping people safely off the streets in the approach to Christmas. The activities of contracted Marshals in Peterborough between Christmas and the New Year, trader’s protests about the closure of Mill Road in Cambridge to some traffic.

Part 2 – BUSINESS AS USUAL ACTIVITY

KEY SERVICE UPDATES – INTERNAL / EXTERNAL

Emergency Planning – have assisted with the response to heavy rainfall and subsequent widespread flooding over the holiday period, and are now supporting the review process following this event.

HR Advisory - the HR and Learning and Development Teams have continued to provide some support to the Community Hub activity during the peak periods. Work continues to drive the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda with action plans currently being co-produced with the Equality and Diversity Action Group. Regular staff engagement surveys were launched in November, the first one being focussed on wellbeing and the next one due to be launched this month will focus on equality, diversity and inclusion. The results of these brief pulse surveys will help HR and the leadership team form action plans to address key staffing matters effectively. The new Head of Learning and Development officially joined the County Council on 1st January and has already been engaging with Directorate Management Teams to seek their views on future training needs to help design an appropriate strategy for the organisation. Those plans will capitalise on the move to a more digital and virtual learning experience (where appropriate) that has been accelerated by the pandemic, but has been well received as more accessible and practical for most.

Health & Safety – continue to work with HR and Property colleagues to evaluate and clarify the processes staff and managers need to undertake if someone in a workplace experiences COVID symptoms or is tested positive. This is so we ensure we are doing everything to protect and support them and other members of staff. The team are also regularly advising managers on risk assessments and individual cases to put appropriate safeguards in place.

Customer Services (Cambridgeshire) - calls presented in Dec 2020 = 9336, slightly over the figure for the same time last year. Service Level achieved 90.9% with an average wait of 57 seconds. The highest service volumes were seen across the Waste Management, Highways, Registrations and Social care services (1423 calls for children’s and 1363 for Adults), continuing the contact themes that we have seen since March. With regard to other channels, administrative (e-mail) contacts for social care services are up on the same time last year, as are library, highways and admissions contacts. Most notably, Children’s contacts of this nature equated to 4154 e-mails (the second highest figure of the year after Nov when 4622 were processed).

IT & Digital Services – Cambridgeshire IT have completed key stages of the testing of our Disaster Recovery systems and processes to ensure we are prepared to decommission the data centre at Shire Hall so we can move the data centre to Sand Martin House in 2021 – during this move Cambridgeshire County Council’s IT services will run in this Disaster Recovery mode. A final test with input from business leads has been scheduled for Feb 21 prior to the move in May. A ‘proof of concept’ Disaster Recovery solution for Peterborough has commenced. A key element of work, the internet feed, which will align technology between the two Councils is underway. This change will also contribute to savings targets in Peterborough. Former Vivacity staff have been migrated from Google to O365 as part of their transition to Peterborough Ltd. Changes are also being made to how the County Council remotely manage and deliver systems to its laptops, allowing for greater protection and flexibility.

FINANCIAL ISSUES

N/A

PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES AND CHALLENGES

N/A

UPCOMING ISSUES & HORIZON SCANNING AREAS

N/A

POSITIVE NEWS STORIES

See Communications section above.