

ITEM 9 – COVID-19 UPDATE INCLUDING BUDGET ADJUSTMENTS

FOR INFORMATION

Local information.

We continue to produce the Altonian weekly and have now published 6 editions, with another three already planned. This is in digital format but can be printed out from our website and a small number of paper copies, funded by a Tesco Bags of Help grant, can be found in Co-op, Waitrose and are also delivered by Alton Mutual Aid. Our social media platforms are proving popular with between 2,000 and 4,000 direct viewers to every Facebook post, a number of new followers on Instagram and nearly 1,000 visitors to the Covid-19 page of our website. Community and Events Officer Natalie is also recording a regular slot on Wey Valley Radio.

Town Hall staff are continuing to work from home with office working only when necessary with social distancing measures imposed. Following a period of sickness and self-isolation, the majority of grounds staff are now back at work and have PPE, changes to working practices and guidance on social distancing to ensure they keep safe.

In the community we have seen some uplifting and inspirational acts of kindness and generosity, from people sewing scrubs for the community hospital to delivering meals to NHS staff, as well as delivering shopping and prescriptions. We are currently preparing bus stop posters with a message of support to our community and key workers.

Alton Mutual Aid have reported that they have 120 volunteers currently looking after around 160 people a week with both shopping and medication and a separate report has been produced by Paula Langley in respect of their work, which is enclosed in this bundle.

Cllr Burns attended a Community Co-Ordination Group (CCOG) meeting hosted by EHDC on the 22nd April. The Terms of reference for this working party are appended below. This group is meeting weekly with the next meeting being held on the 29th April. Cllr Burns will update Full Council following this. It was reported that the East Hampshire Support desk has received 189 calls and most queries are being dealt with in around 30 minutes.

Community First are working across the district plugging the gaps in volunteer provision and are currently working in a “sweeper role” – although this position may change if people go back to work and they need to step in for continuity of provision to those in need.

All play areas and skateparks remain closed in accordance with government guideline. All open spaces are available for access 24/7 with the exception of the Public Gardens which remains closed due to concerns over the ability to social distance in areas such as the outdoor classroom, maze and bandstand and an inability to close the gardens overnight with reduced staffing and contractors. This will be monitored and reviewed.

Finances

We have run some projected figures on losses to the council for the first quarter of the financial year to 30th June and what we are doing to try and mitigate these.

We have given a number of commercial tenants, who are experiencing financial hardship, rent relief to the 30th June (on a case by case basis), including the weekly market. If the

current situation continues beyond this period we may need to look to offer a period of rent deferrals rather than rent relief until such time as they are able to resume operations. This has resulted in a direct cost to the Council of **£20,600** to the 30th June.

The Assembly Rooms is currently closed and as such is not generating any income. Loss of income to 30th June is estimated at around **£9,000**. Whilst the Town Council has a contract with the Community Association to provide administration and caretaking for the premises, the Community Association has agreed to a 55% reduction in contract value to reduce our outgoings whilst not adversely impacting ACA financially (the 55% represents the administrative staff who have been furloughed) . The District Council did initially agree to apply business rates relief to the Assembly Rooms but this has now been rescinded as it was applied in error. The Council is also ineligible for the government grants of up to £25,000 currently on offer for leisure facilities, as, whilst expenditure for facilities such as the Assembly Rooms are directly paid for by their income, as a precepting authority we are deemed to be exempt from the scheme. We will therefore be applying to the EHDC Community Fund for assistance to mitigate the losses at the Assembly Rooms, so the building does not become a burden to the public purse and is able to welcome back our regular hirers once the doors can reopen.

With the abrupt ending of a washed-out season for rugby and football, these fixtures will not now be replayed and we hope the 2020/21 season can start in September to prevent further losses. The cricket season has also yet to get underway and whilst the cricket club are still paying ground rent, the weekly pitch hiring collected for these games have been lost. The annual spring fairground on the Butts has also been cancelled. In total pitch and site booking losses are currently estimated at **£7,000** to the 30th June 2020.

With all events, including those run by ATC and those hosted by third parties on our lands cancelled, not only have we seen the revenue/fees from these lost for 2020 (although most of these are beyond Q1 so figures are not included here) , but the knock on effect for the local economy which would have benefitted from the big tourist events such as the Battle of Alton, Last Night of the Proms, Regency Week, the Hillman Imp gathering and the Bus Rally will be profound, as will the loss of charitable funds raised for local good causes from events such as the annual Victorian Cricket and the Lions Party in the Park to name a few.

We have also seen a number of sponsors unable to commit to providing financial assistance for events such as In Bloom and of course for events like LNOTP which have been cancelled. Whilst we have reduced expenditure as a result, some cancellations have incurred fees and staff costs are still being met but the overall financial picture for event expenditure versus income will become clearer in Q2.

The fluctuations on the financial markets has seen transactions to the CCLA Property Fund suspended for the time being. The overall reduction in the fund has resulted in around £5,000 being wiped off the value of the council's investment but given that this is a long term fund for the replacement 3G pitch at Anstey and holding the commuted sums for longer term open spaces maintenance, it is expected that the fund will recover. In summary, the Market report for March states:

Clearly much is deeply uncertain still but our current view is that conditions will increasingly normalise in the second half of the year to allow growth to resume in the new year and for markets to start to recover lost ground. At the moment, we remain focused on good quality assets supported by strong cash flows and with growth prospects resilient to changes in overall economic activity levels. At the lower levels we are actively looking for opportunities

to invest in excellent companies at prices which we believe will prove to be great value over the long term.

The dividend payment to the council to 31st March was paid at 3.25%.

Overall, therefore the Council is looking at a Q1 loss of income of around £41,600. Some limited expenditure has been reduced e.g utilities but fixed costs such as insurance, staffing, buildings, and open spaces remain unchanged.

By way of mitigation we will look to lobby, through our MP, for a support grant for local councils, who at a town and parish level have seen none of the £3.2bn pledged by central government to local (principal) authorities. We will also apply where eligible for grant funding although there are very limited opportunities for precepting authorities to apply for assistance.

We will also be seeking to discuss our position with our insurers, whom, whilst stating that our business interruption cover cannot apply in this case, it is clear we are expensing for certain cover which is effectively not being utilised at this time.

Whilst the furlough scheme, when announced, stated eligibility for local authorities, the government position is now unclear on this as the application process, launched this week, does not allow for town and parish councils to submit. NALC is seeking clarification on this. The Council should however, be able to reclaim SSP for those members of staff who undertook periods of self-isolation or were ill over the last month.

In conclusion, there are very limited ways in which we can seek to mitigate our losses. However, the Town Council was well prepared financially for this unprecedented situation, having built up reserves over the last 5 years including the contingency reserve which, created for unforeseen circumstances, will in all likelihood need to be drawn upon to make up the shortfall for 2020/21 should the government not give the sector any support.

There is currently no cash flow issue, nor do we foresee one and the council remains solvent and fully operational.

RECOMMENDATION: This report is for information only.

Appendix 1

Alton Mutual Aid Report 22 April 2020 Cllr Paula Langley

Alton Mutual Aid has been up and running for just over a month and we now have over 100 volunteers from across the Alton community.

We offer a range of services and this growing all the time.

- Shopping for individuals (at the time of writing this had reached 240 requests delivered)
- We also deliver for the free Click and pick at Waitrose

- Pharmacy deliveries. We are working with all of the Pharmacy's in Alton to deliver people's medication on a daily basis

- IT support for residents without internet
- Transport for hospital visits
- Phone call and signposting support
- Post or other errands that need carrying out

Our application procedure ensures all volunteers are I.D. checked through Bookers & Bolton Solicitors who have the correct GDPR support. Once that is passed we send out a handbook to be read and volunteers have to state that they have read it. It gives volunteers advice on procedures and staff structure of the group, information on Safeguarding procedures, health and safety at work, shopping, money handling, etc. Some volunteers have current DBS certificates and we make a note of this so we can ensure vulnerable clients are supported by appropriate people. We have leafleted the whole of Alton and surrounding areas once and are about to do so again with a leaflet containing our new freephone number provided by a local businessman. We are using contactless card readers so that people can pay for their shopping even if they don't have cash.

Request Procedure

Some referrals are coming to us via EHDC and HCC support lines and other local support organisations. However, most requests for support are by individuals who may contact our helpline in person or for a relative.

Alton has been split in to wards and each ward has a coordinator. They manage the requests for their areas and their volunteers. The request is put onto a spreadsheet that coordinators can access and a coordinator passes this info on to their area of local volunteers, only giving them info on a need to know basis. The volunteer is given the contact address and phone number with any contextual info needed to support the request. The volunteer completes the job and this is marked completed on the spreadsheet. We are communicating in What's App groups and information is only given to individuals – not shared in a group context.

We now also have a call back process whereby the requester is contacted after the job and asked how it went. This gives that person a chance to chat or let us know if there is anything we can do to improve the service.

Funding

We had an initial grant from Radian that allowed us to purchase contactless card readers for volunteers, leaflet printing and badges. As we are now offering quite lengthy hospital trips we are offering volunteers, who may themselves be in financial difficulty, the option of claiming a mileage fee. Many are not choosing to do so.

Some people we are helping have also made small donations in thanks for the support we are giving. We have had further financial support from EHDC councillor grants and the Alton Lions.

The longer this goes on the more funding we will need and any support that can be offered would be gratefully received.

Working Together

The link between different organisations has been key to supporting those most vulnerable in our society.

The data we are gathering about the needs of our residents, many of whom probably need this support going forward, is extremely important, and we will review this on a regular basis and when this comes to an end. It has been remarkable how quickly we have actually been able to make links where they didn't exist before – this should continue!

We are overwhelmed by the response of our volunteers and also by the needs of people living in our community. Everyone is very grateful for the support and many would not be able to shop or access medication without it.

Please feel free to contact me should you have any further questions and I am also happy to join your meeting to speak about it briefly if that would be helpful.

Appendix 2

East Hampshire District Council Community Co-Ordination Group (CCOG)

Terms of Reference

Purpose

To provide a co-ordinated approach to ensure the safety of vulnerable people and the volunteers across East Hampshire.

Principles

- Avoid duplication of roles, responsibilities and services;
- Promote joint-working and shared data between organisations to ensure a targeted and co-ordinated approach;
- Promote joint communication across the district to ensure simple, effective messages for residents;

Objectives

- To co-ordinate and maximise our impact across the public and voluntary sectors in respect of support to vulnerable people in need of assistance in East Hampshire;
- To spread best practice amongst our groups and networks;
- To be a strong local link to the Hampshire Local Resilience Forum;
- To keep information flowing across our groups. To build strong community resilience through the Covid-19 pandemic.

Roles & Responsibilities

The Community Co-Ordination Group will have the following roles and responsibilities:

- Work collaboratively to deliver the objectives outlined above;
- Ensure a regular flow of communication between partners.

Membership & meeting frequency / format

The Community Co-Ordination Group (CCOG) will:

- Meet on a weekly basis until we all agree this can be less frequent;
- EHDC to chair the meeting and to take notes of actions;
- Comprise a maximum of one representative from each of the following organisations (except for EHDC, chair, minute taker and Portfolio Holder for Welfare and Community Integration and Deputy Leader):
 - Community First
 - East Hampshire Association of Town and Parish Councils
 - Whitehill Town Council

- Alton Town Council
- Petersfield Town Council
- Representative from the Southern Parishes

The meetings will not be open to the public, and any information shared in confidence must be treated as such, unless otherwise stated. Information may be shared by email between meetings.