

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Public Protection Committee
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EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	COVID-19 Update
REPORT NUMBER	COM/20/156
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TERMS OF REFERENCE	2.1 and 2.4

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide an update of the Council's response to COVID-19 as a Category 1 responder against the Council's approved Generic Emergency Plan.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 That the Committee notes the update of the Council's response to Covid-19 as a Category 1 responder against the Generic Emergency Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Council has been responding to the global pandemic, COVID-19, since early March. This response can be categorised in stages: rescue, transition, recovery. The Council has duties as a Category 1 responder as detailed within the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 which include:

- Assessing the risk of emergencies occurring and using this to inform contingency planning;
- Maintenance of Emergency Plans and Business Continuity Plans;
- Informing the public about civil protection matters and maintaining arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public in the event of an emergency;

- Sharing information with other local responders to enhance coordination, as well as co-operating with other local responders to enhance co-ordination and efficiency; and
- Promoting business continuity by providing advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations

3.2 The North of Scotland Regional Resilience Partnership (North RRP) provides a strategic forum for the co-ordination of emergency planning and response. This includes Grampian, Tayside, Highlands and Islands. Within Grampian the local level of planning and response is co-ordinated by the Grampian Local Resilience Partnership (GLRP). There are two tiers of the GLRP:

- Strategic
- Tactical

The Strategic tier, which is made up of the strategic leads from each of the Category 1 responder agencies, was activated on 27th February in response to the developing global crisis. This corresponded with the activation of the Gold command structure at Scottish Government, which in turn flowed into the regional and local resilience structures, and from there down to individual partners.

Rescue Stage

3.3 On 4th December 2019, the Public Protection Committee approved a Generic Emergency Plan, establishing a three-tier emergency response structure to support the Council in meeting its obligations as a Category 1 responder. This Plan provided the Council with the tools necessary to respond to the needs of any incident or emergency, regardless of the level of escalation required or disruption caused. It also facilitated the delivery of critical services, as well as compliance with statutory requirements, during an incident.

3.4 On 16th March 2020, in response to the global pandemic, the Council activated the emergency response structures set out within the Generic Emergency Plan including the establishment of strategic and tactical structures in order to respond to the emergency and national lockdown:

- Strategic – ACC Strategic CMT COVID-19
- Tactical – Incident Management Team (IMT). This included all of the Council's Arm's Length External Organisations (ALEO)s.

3.5 At a meeting of the Urgent Business Committee on 20 March, the Chief Executive provided an update on the structures activated at a Council level and at a regional level. The Urgent Business Committee agreed, amongst other things, to cancel committee meetings (with some exceptions), update Standing Orders and update the emergency powers of the Chief Executive and Duty Emergency Response Coordinators (DERCs). This better enabled the Council to comply with UK and Scottish Government guidance and support the efficient operational response to the pandemic to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the staff and customers.

- 3.6 All guidance and legislation issued by Scottish Government was tracked by the IMT which helped to ensure a clear audit trail of compliance. Often new guidance and legislation required a swift response from the Council including the issuing of appropriate internal and external comms to ensure customers and staff were clear on revised requirements and the implications of these.
- 3.7 The COVID-19 DERC role was shared by the Chief Officers for Strategic Place Planning, Data & Insights and Governance. This ensured consistency and continuity of response. The COVID-19 DERC chaired meetings of the IMT, which initially met daily and reported into Corporate Management Team (CMT) once a week. A separate DERC rota was established, to ensure that any concurrent incidents or emergencies were managed by a separate pool of Directors and Chief Officers. This proved invaluable as the risk of concurrency increased. The recent flooding in August was labour intensive in terms of a response from the Council, and the dual rota allowed this separation to be managed carefully. The non-COVID-19 DERC led on this activity and participated in the GLRP which had been activated to respond to flooding across the region as well as the train derailment in Aberdeenshire.
- 3.8 A set of strategic risk workstreams were established and overseen by the CMT and the IMT:
- Workforce Planning and Protection
 - Financial Resilience
 - Business Resilience
 - Governance
 - Supply Chain Stabilisation
 - Digital Resilience
 - Critical Services
 - Care for People
 - Communications
- 3.9 Establishing the critical services to be maintained through the emergency response was a significant undertaking. The IMT established which services were critical to the delivery of statutory functions as well as those which would be required to support the emergency response. Business continuity plans were reviewed to reflect the additional pressure on these services and to ensure that the required capacity was available from other areas. IMT agreed several temporary staff movements between clusters, drawing on significant numbers of staff volunteers, to ensure that critical services were adequately resourced.
- 3.10 Risk registers were established for each workstream, as well as relevant data sets, to ensure that the controls required to mitigate risks were data led and put in place quickly and closely monitored. A series of scenario plans were also built in order to anticipate potential scenarios as the pandemic unfolded. A system of escalation was put in place to allow IMT to manage risks and scenarios on a weekly basis, and to escalate any risk to CMT should it be required. There was also a dedicated Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) group established to support the Supply Chain and Workforce workstreams. This group met twice weekly to ensure that demand was in accordance with guidance and that the supply chain could respond accordingly. The group

included representation from the Health and Social Care Partnership as well as Bon Accord Care.

- 3.11 The Council also participated in the GLRP’s response structures after these were activated on 27th February. This consisted of a multi-agency strategic group which oversaw the activities of tactical cells covering:

Cell	ACC representative(s)
Comms Cell	Communication & Marketing Manager
Care for People	Chief Officer – Early Intervention & Community Empowerment
Excess Deaths	Chief Officer – Operations & Protective Services Environmental Health Manager
Recovery	Director of Customer Assurance Manager

- 3.12 An Aberdeen City Care for People Group was also established to feed into the activity of the regional care for people group and this was led by Chief Officer, Aberdeen Health and Social Care Partnership.
- 3.13 A model of these reporting arrangements is attached as Appendix 1.
- 3.14 The Council’s Generic Emergency Plan remained active throughout this stage of the COVID-19 response.

Transition Stage

- 3.15 On 28th May, the Scottish Government announced that the country would move to Phase 1 of the Scottish Government’s routemap. This signalled an end of the rescue stage and the beginning of the Transition Stage – that is the stage bridging Rescue and Recovery. The routemap anticipated a return of pupils to schools from 10th August, provided the number of positive cases continued to reduce. This coincided with the introduction of Scottish Government’s Test and Protect measures. The transition stage continued to test the Council’s resilience structures, including the Generic Emergency Plan and business continuity plans.
- 3.16 During this stage, CMT also agreed Terms of Reference for two new groups which would report into the IMT, also reflected in Appendix 1:
- Service Reinstatement Working Group – to oversee the safe reinstatement of services as the routemap allowed and in accordance with legislation, guidance and full risk assessments. The Working Group has followed a strict process including Gateway Questionnaires detailing the reason for reinstatement, the health and safety requirements for staff and the link to the Scottish Government routemap, including the impact of any delay in progression between phases. Trade unions were fully engaged in this process. This group was chaired by the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord.

- Urban Realm Governance Group – a multi-agency group to promote the safe use of the public realm.
- 3.17 These groups were key to the Council’s transition from the early rescue stages, specifically to ensure that the city could begin to return to life and essential services resume and do so safely.
- 3.18 The Urgent Business Committee met on 30 June 2020 where it received an update on aspects of the Council’s response to the pandemic. It also approved the Council’s Financial Resilience Recovery Plan, a Socio-Economic Rescue Plan for the City and agreed to reinstate committee meetings.
- 3.19 During the Transition Stage, a timeline and approach to consolidating the Council’s Covid-19 Emergency Response Structures into business as usual was agreed in principle by CMT. The timeline set out an approach that would see the structures consolidate into the business as usual structures in August on the assumption that the country would move to Phase 4 on 30 July 2020. This would also coincide with the reinstatement of the Committee structure and the cessation of emergency powers. On 9th July, the Scottish Government announced that the country was moving to Phase 3 of its routemap with a further review due on 30 July.
- 3.20 From initial publication in May, the routemap instructed local authorities to prepare for pupils returning to schools in August, and in this pursuit a Local Delivery Phasing Plan (LDPP) was developed to implement phases 1 to 4 of the routemap to support a safe and phased reopening of schools. However a decision was then taken by Scottish Government that schools would return in full from the start of the term. Plans were revised and subsequently overseen by IMT.
- 3.20 Coinciding with the return of schools from 11th August, Aberdeen experienced a spike in positive COVID-19 cases directly linked to the hospitality sector. This resulted in local restrictions being put in place which were supported by the Council’s Environmental Health (EH) team as well as other local authorities’ EH teams through a mutual aid request agreed through the GLRP. This response is reported separately on the agenda.
- 3.21 The Generic Emergency Plan remained active at this stage and was scaled up to ensure that the support to the hospitality industry was in place.

Recovery Stage

- 3.22 As the Council responds to moves through the routemap, implements the decisions of the June Urgent Business Committee meeting and responds to ongoing local outbreaks, focus is turning to the Council’s long-term recovery. Recovery will be driven by measures implemented nationally and locally. Local developments include:
1. [Outbreak Control Plan](#)
NHS Grampian have published an [Outbreak Control Plan](#) for Aberdeen which sets out the measures to protect the public from any future outbreaks.

This was written with the experience gained from the recent local outbreak in the city and ensures that we are ready at any point to respond to a surge in positive cases and/or reinstatement of lockdown.

2. Governance

Resumption of the full committee structure in August. The IMT continued to keep strong situational awareness during August and September particularly in the context of the additional restrictions that applied to Aberdeen. CMT Strategic COVID-19 ceased meetings on 30th July formally stepping down the strategic layer of the Council's response. The regular Covid-19 strategic GLRP meetings have now been stood down and its tactical working group will monitor any requirement to reactivate the strategic group in the future.

3. Surveillance

A surveillance working group was established at the end of July. The purpose of the group is to review data to understand whether and where infection continues to occur in the city, the effect this is having on the health of our citizens and any measures required locally to respond to such infection. The surveillance activity is led by the Chief Officer – Governance, who owns the COVID-19 risk register on behalf of the organisation, with support from the Chief Officer – Data and Insights and the Assurance Manager. Any data reviewed which impacts on the city is used to inform decisions about our emergency response. The Chief Officer – Data & Insights will also feed into the Public Health Surveillance Group. This is an NHS led multi-agency regional partnership group. This will facilitate data sharing and effective surveillance of Covid-19. The Chief Officer – Data & Insights will also monitor the Scottish Government's public facing dashboard available on the Public Health Scotland [website](#).

Test and Protect plays a vital role in isolating contacts and breaking chains of transmission. Combined with effective and reliable surveillance that provides information about clusters of cases, the Council will be able to develop an early warning system that will inform our response and help to contain any outbreaks that occur. Maintenance of robust, representative, and independent public health intelligence systems will be a core element of managing COVID-19. It is acknowledged that local authorities have a key role to play in supporting the "isolate and support" elements of Test and Protect and this is overseen by the 'Care for People' structures within the city.

4. Workforce Planning

Preparations are being made for the return of non-essential office staff once confirmed by the Scottish Government and provided that the local position in Aberdeen remains stable. This involves careful planning for the protection of staff to ensure their health, safety and wellbeing. This is also balanced against a position where the capacity of our buildings is much reduced due to the impact of physical distancing guidance and the retention of the home working where beneficial and appropriate.

3.23 The Scottish Government reviewed the routemap again on 10th September and confirmed that the country is not yet ready to move out of current restrictions within Phase 3 and that this might be the case for some time to come. Further announcements on 22nd September, imposing additional restrictions to be reviewed every 3 weeks, confirmed this position. Consideration is now being given to safely stepping down the IMT as the tactical layer of the Council's response in light of additional controls put in place such as the Surveillance Working Group and recognising that the Council's Committee structure is fully operational. It is worth noting that the tactical and strategic layers can be reinstated in accordance with the Generic Emergency Plan at any stage should circumstances require it.

Activation of Generic Emergency Plan

3.24 The Council's emergency response structures, established in line with the Generic Emergency Plan, have been tested by the pandemic and have proven to be robust. The pandemic has enhanced experience and capability across the organisation in respect of areas such as civil contingencies, risk management and business continuity. There is added clarity on the Council's role and responsibilities as a Category 1 responder. Efforts will be made to use the experience gained by staff to enhance our organisational resilience even further.

3.25 The Generic Emergency Plan identifies a set of objectives, all of which have been fully tested during the pandemic response. The below sets out a self-assessment of the extent to which these objectives were met and so provides assurance as to the effectiveness of the plan and that lessons have been identified for continued or future activation. Improvement activity will be overseen by the Organisational Resilience Group in the first instance which is chaired by the Council's Emergency Planning & Resilience Lead.

Objective	Self-assessment	Improvement required
Define the Council's responsibilities in an emergency, in accordance with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and other relevant legislation and guidance,	The Plan provided adequate clarity on the Council's responsibilities in responding to the pandemic, particularly as these related to other partners given the multi-agency nature of the response.	Throughout the pandemic, the organisation has taken into account the GLRP's response objectives to the situation. During the next update to the Plan, an amendment will be made to the benefit of setting strategic objectives in response in appropriate scenarios.
Outline the Council's emergency response capabilities.	The extent and length of the emergency response required the scaling up of the Plan in a very prescriptive way, particularly given the global nature and interventions at a	Further development of supplementary procedures and processes to support the Plan, using the learning from the COVID-19

Objective	Self-assessment	Improvement required
	national level. Supplementary procedures and processes on our emergency response capabilities did not anticipate a pandemic of this scale.	response. For instance, recognising the stages of response – rescue, transition, recovery – can guide this further development.
Define the roles and responsibilities of the Council in incident response.	The definitions provided within the Plan were clear, particularly as they related to the COVID-19 DERC and the IMT. These were a source of reference throughout the response to ensure that our governance and use of emergency powers were appropriate. The Plan states that the DERC will exercise emergency powers on behalf of the Chief Executive, as set out within the Council's Scheme of Governance. Running a dual rota system (i.e. a dedicate Covid-19 DERC and a DERC for all other incidents) allowed the risk of and response to concurrent events to be carefully managed.	Amend Generic Emergency Plan at the next review of the Plan to provide the option for a dual rota to operate when concurrent events or incidents are a risk.
Describe how and when the Plan will be activated.	The response to any emergency that could affect or threaten the Council's ability to deliver critical functions should be coordinated by the DERC in the first instance. In such circumstances, the DERC will lead the response and chair the relevant Incident Management Team. The Plan was activated in early March when the DERC on duty chaired the first IMT. This activation continued throughout the response.	Due to the nature of the incident, it was clear when the Plan required activation, in response to a rapidly worsening public health crisis. Future incidents may be less clear cut and this could be strengthened within the Plan and/or its supplementary procedures.
Detail the roles and responsibilities of Incident Management Teams and process for activating and deploying services.	The Plan sets out a detailed remit for the IMT which has been a critical reference throughout. For instance, ensuring a continuous flow of information between the DERC, tactical and operational teams and multi-agency partners ensuring that actions taken at operational level are co-ordinated, coherent and	None required.

Objective	Self-assessment	Improvement required
	integrated; determining priorities for allocating resources; assessing risks and using this to inform the response; and mitigating risks to the health and safety of staff and the public.	
Outline the Command and Control structure for the Grampian Local Resilience Partnership (GLRP).	From the start, this was a multi-agency response therefore clarity on the GLRP's command and control structure was key. This proved to be effective.	None required.
Provide a generic plan linking emergency and business continuity plans and frameworks within the Council and the GLRP.	The Council's business continuity plans have been tested and will continue to be tested as the impact of the pandemic on our services and workforce persists. This has dovetailed with the activation of the Generic Emergency Plan and the various GLRP level plans which have supported the response at a multi-agency level.	Continue to develop and adapt business continuity plans to ensure that the Council is able to respond to any concurrent events or incidents (recognising that Covid-19 will remain in circulation for the foreseeable future) without significant impact on service delivery.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report. The Council has continually managed financial risks throughout the COVID-19 response and these have been reported to the Urgent Business Committee on 20th March, 6th May and 30th June.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report. The Council has continually managed legal risks throughout the COVID-19 response. It has also contributed to and monitored emergency legislation brought into effect by the UK and Scottish Parliaments. The establishment of response structures in accordance with the Generic Emergency Plan has helped to ensure compliance with legislation and guidance.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

6.1 The Council has been managing the risks presented by COVID-19 through a rigorous risk management system. These measures are described in detail in the main body of the report.

Category	Risk	Low (L) Medium (M) High (H)	Mitigation
Financial	Financial risks presented by the pandemic have been documented in reports to the Urgent Business Committee.	M	As outlined in reports to Urgent Business Committee.
Legal	Compliance with statutory guidance and legislation is necessary to ensure the Council is not exposed to legal challenge.	L	Guidance and new legislation was tracked by IMT and overseen by CMT and implemented within clusters. The implementation of the generic emergency plan has helped the Council to comply with its civil contingencies duties.
Employee	Risks to staff throughout the response, particularly exposure to infection.	M	Managed through Workforce Planning and Protection workstream.
Customer	Risk that customers' needs not met and lack of clarity on the availability of services.	M	Managed through Crisis Support Line, GLRP Comms Cell, Critical Services Workstream and Communications Workstream.
Environment	Risk to the city's external spaces	M	Managed through Critical Services workstream and the Urban Realm Governance Group.
Technology	Digital systems under significant pressure as vast majority of workforce moved to homeworking	L	Managed through Digital Resilience workstream.

Reputational	Risk of negative publicity in media/social media around the Council's response.	M	Managed through GLRP Comms Cell and the ACC Communications Workstream.
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6. OUTCOMES

- 7.1 The recommendations contained within this report have no direct impact on the Council's Delivery Plan however if emergency response is not effectively managed and risks mitigated, there could be an impact on the delivery of organisational objectives.

Design Principles of Target Operating Model	
	Impact of Report
Organisational Design	The Council's organisational structure has been tested throughout the emergency response and has proved to be effective.
Governance	The Council's governance structure has been tested throughout the emergency response and has proved to be effective. The governance arrangements have proven to provide the flexibility needed to manage the impact of a pandemic.
Process Design	The lessons learned section details adjustments to process as a result of this event.
Technology	The Digital Resilience risk workstream established at the outset of the response ensure that our technological capabilities were always at the forefront.
Partnerships and Alliances	The Incident Management Team was attended by our partners in the Health and Social Care Partnership as well as our ALEOs. The Council has played a key role at the GLRP and has introduced multi-agency partners to ACC structures where appropriate.

8. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Equality & Human Rights Impact Assessment	Full EHRIA not required

Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
Duty of Due Regard / Fairer Scotland Duty	Not applicable

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

10. APPENDICES

Appendix A – COVID-19 Response Structure

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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