



Report for:	Cabinet
Date of meeting:	22 <sup>nd</sup> September 2020
Part:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	<b>COVID-19 IMPACT PAPER</b>
Contact:	Andrew Williams, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Corporate & Contracted Services  Author/Responsible, Officer:  Sally Marshall, Chief Executive  James Deane, Corporate Director (Finance and Operations)  Mark Gaynor, Corporate Director (Housing and Regeneration)  Mark Brookes, Assistant Director (Corporate & Contracted Services)
Purpose of report:	1. To provide Cabinet with an update on the projected financial impact of Covid-19.  2. To highlight the work and support the Council has been carrying out across service areas in relation to Covid-19.
Recommendations	1. That Cabinet receive and note:  (a) The projected financial impact of Covid-19 for 2020/21 as set out in section 1.  (b) The service updates provided in section 2.
Corporate objectives:	The financial impact and the Council's response to Covid-19 will impact all of the Council's Corporate Objectives.
Implications:	<u>Financial</u>  Financial Implications are covered in section 1.
'Value for money' implications	<u>Value for money</u>  Covid-19 will have various value for money implications which will

	<p>be assessed as proposals develop to respond to the issues raised.</p> <p>The Council's initial response has focused on continuity of service provision and support for key groups and organisations – the measures implemented are aimed at assisting the recovery and minimising the long terms impacts as much as possible.</p>
Risk implications	Due to the significant impact of Covid-19, a new strategic risk has been entered into the Council's Strategic Risk Register.
Community Impact Assessment	The Council's response to date has tried to ensure minimal service disruption to the community. The recovery phase of the Council's response will continually assess its impact on the community to ensure a balanced and effective response and this will be directed through the various recovery groups.
Health and safety Implications	The Council has acted promptly and put in place appropriate measures to ensure that staff, councillors and the community are protected from Covid-19 whilst trying to ensure minimal service disruption. This will continued to be assessed through the recovery stages.
Monitoring Officer/ S.151 Officer Comments	<p><u>Monitoring Officer comments</u></p> <p>The Monitoring Officer continues to monitor the key issues raised by legislative changes and relevant government guidance and ensure that effective policies and procedures are in place to assist services to continue to deliver during the pandemic and subsequent recovery phase.</p> <p><u>S151 Officer comments</u></p> <p>The Financial Implications section of the report have been written by the S151 officer and will continue to be monitored as actual costs become clearer. Members will be regularly updated on the financial implications of Covid-19 as they develop.</p>
Consultees:	Leader of the Council, Councillor Andrew Williams
Background papers:	<p>Coronavirus Covid-19: Guidance for Local Government</p> <p>Procurement Policy Note 02/20 – Supplier Relief due to Covid-19</p>
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	None

## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 1.1 This section provides an update on the Covid-related financial pressures detailed in the June Cabinet report. It does not include the business-as-usual pressures that

emerge over the course of the year, which will continue to be reported to Members through the scheduled Budget Monitoring reports.

- 1.2 The forecasts in this report have been updated to reflect five months' worth of current year data, as well as the most recent announcements from Government on the financial support that will be provided to councils over the course of the year.
- 1.3 As at the end of August, DBC is forecast to face a net General Fund pressure in the current financial year of around £2.5m (down from the £5m pressure forecast in May). This is a net position, incorporating the following:
  - Additional expenditure £1.8m – offset by £1.8m of Government grants, as detailed in the previous report (see section 1.10)
  - Lost income £4.1m – offset by £1.6m from the Government income guarantee scheme, detailed later in this report (see section 1.7)
- 1.4 Currently, there are no indications that further Government support will be made available to local authorities. Whilst use of reserves may be an option for DBC to cover the predicted shortfall, they are all currently earmarked for future projects and their use would have longer-term implications for the Council's future ambitions. This will be kept under review as the year progresses and more clarity emerges on both the scale of the final pressure and the options available to mitigate it.
- 1.5 Falling collection rates for both Council Tax and Business Rates could create funding issues in future years. However, the technicalities of these funding streams means that the current year's budget will not be affected.
- 1.6 The HRA is currently forecasting a full-year surplus of c£900k. This is a net position, with an expected increase in the bad debt provision to be partially offset by reduced expenditure of £2.4m.

### **Pressure on General Fund income streams**

- 1.7 The most significant financial threat continues to be lost income due to falling demand for Council services. Despite now having the benefit of 5 months of in-year data, forecasting the year-end position for these income streams remains far more challenging than under normal circumstances. The forecast year-end position could alter dramatically over the second half of the year depending on factors that cannot be estimated within any certainty and that are beyond the Council's control, e.g. the potential for future national or local restrictions/lockdown period and the unknown severity of any recession.
- 1.8 Since the June Cabinet report, Government has released detail of its Sales, Fees & Charges (SFC) scheme, which underwrites a portion of income losses for certain council income streams. Councils must meet the first 5% of all income losses, but Government will underwrite 75% of the remaining losses. Significantly for DBC, this scheme does not apply to rental income. This means that the Council's two highest income streams, Commercial Property and Garages, are not eligible for support.
- 1.9 The table below provides an update on the Council's key income streams highlighted in the June report.

Income stream	Budget	May Forecast	August Forecast	Commentary
Investment Property	£5.4m	£2.7m	£4m	There is a clear trend emerging on rental collection from commercial properties with year-on-year collection rate down 5% at the end of June, falling to 14% by the end of August. There is a significant risk that collection issues will continue to escalate throughout the year as Government grants received by traders early in the pandemic are exhausted; the furlough scheme comes to an end; and, the impact of the expected recession begins to bite. This forecast is based on 50% collection rate for the remainder of the year.
Garages Income	£3.6m	£2.7m	£3m	Garage income has held up well against budget for the first 5 months of the year, and occupancy levels have not decreased. Whilst still exposed to the threat of recession, due to the relatively strong performance thus far the forecast income loss for the remainder of the year has been reduced to 20% from an initial estimate of 25% loss.
Car Parking	£2.8m	£1.8m	£2.5m	As expected, the nationwide lockdown had a dramatic impact on parking revenue, with income at 15% against budget as at the end of May. Since then there has been a positive trend with income picking up throughout June (35%) and July (63%). The y-t-d position of £600k under budget and an assumption of 80% of budget for the remainder of the year is consistent with the original estimate of £1m under budget for the full year. This is offset by c£700k under the government scheme.
Planning Fees	£1.2m	£0.9m	£1.1m	The first 4 months of the year have been on budget. The income remains exposed to fluctuations in the property market and this forecast assumes a 25% under budget for the remainder of the year.
Commercial Waste	£1m	£0.75m	£0.9m	The timing of bills means that a clear y-t-d trend has not yet emerged. The original assumption of 25% shortfall remains in place, partially offset by the government scheme.
Temporary Accommodation	£950k	£950k	£950k	Demand has increased dramatically, but unlikely to see significant increase in income as the Council's own TA capacity becomes fully utilised.
Leisure	£500k	£200k	£360k	The leisure sector has been hit dramatically by lockdown; revenues continue to be impacted as social distancing limits visitor capacity; and, membership numbers will take many months to recover to pre-Covid levels. Unlikely that any management fee will be received this year, but £360k govt. income offset.
Civic/Sports/APG hire	£300k	£150k	£260k	Income continues to be hit by social distancing. The original forecast of 50% reduction against budget is updated only by the partial offset under the Government scheme.
Search Fees	£230k	£120k	£190k	Housing market likely to stagnate for at least the next 12 months as households await a more clearly emerging economic picture.
<b>Total</b>	<b>£15.9m</b>	<b>£10.3m</b>	<b>£13.3m</b>	

## Pressure on General Fund expenditure

1.10 The areas forecasting significant expenditure pressure remain the same as those reported in June, and, at present, the total remains within the £1.8m of Government grant funding received. The updated figures are as below:

Expenditure Type	Pressure	Commentary
Waste Services	£750k	The initial staffing and vehicle cost pressures in the first months of the pandemic are now starting to ease, and waste tonnages are returning to pre-Covid levels. However, the Council has collected increased recycling tonnages at exactly the time that the global market for recyclates has fallen further, which has led to increased costs of disposal. This trend is likely to continue throughout the year.  There remains a risk of further additional costs depending on future lockdowns that may be implemented either locally or nationally.
Supplier Support Packages	£525k	This comprises payments to key suppliers that were subject to approval under Part 2 legislation. Members can find more detail under PH Decision Sheets dated 31 March and 20 July 2020.
Office-based staff	£250k	Estimated figure across the council to cover future increased demand for services.
Facilitate compliant ways of working	£275k	This includes modifications to Council buildings e.g. screen dividers for desks; automatic door installations; investment in mobile IT, etc.
<b>Total</b>	<b>£1.8m</b>	

## Pressure on Council Tax collection

1.11 At the end of August year-on-year collection rates were down 1.7%, with 46.3% of the annual total having been collected, compared to 48% at the same stage last year. This is marginally down on the 1.4% shortfall reported at the end of May, but the position has not deteriorated in the three months since the end of June. It is not unexpected for collection to be down on last year given the number of taxpayers rearranging their payments for later in the year. The final year-end position will depend on the extent to which reprofiled payments catch up in February and March.

1.12 The mechanics of the Council Tax Collection Fund mean that a short-fall in the current year collection rate will not result in a budgetary pressure for the Council until next financial year. The twin risks posed to future years' funding by falling collection rates and reduced tax base growth will be addressed within the MTFs assumptions which will be reported to Cabinet in October

1.13 The potential cashflow risk arising from poor collection rates was highlighted in the June report, i.e. the statutory requirement to continue paying HCC the budgeted monthly precept even if the actual amount of cash collected by DBC was way below the budgeted amount. Based on current collection rates and the Council's cash position, this risk is currently considered low.

## Pressure on Business Rates collection

- 1.14 From a budgetary perspective, DBC will not be impacted in the current financial year by falling collection rates. This is because the grant DBC receives from Government is based on 'assessment of need', with a maximum of 7.5% of the grant at risk if Business Rates collection falls below a baseline level. The at-risk element is based on the previous year, so any contraction of the local economy won't impact DBC until next financial year. Assumptions on future years' impacts will be included within the MTFS reported in October.

## Summary of General Fund budgetary position and potential mitigations

- 1.15 Based on the forecasts in this report, DBC faces a potential in-year Covid-related budgetary pressure of:

Increased expenditure	£ 1.8m
Less Government Grant	(£ 1.8m)
Lost income	£ 4.1m
Less Government income offset	(£1.6m)
<b>Net financial cost</b>	<b>£ 2.5m</b>

- 1.16 Based on information available at the time of writing, the use of earmarked reserves is a potential option for the Council to meet these financial pressures within the current year. However, this would be at the expense of the future projects the reserves were created to support (in some cases to finance schemes which are fundamental to meeting future savings requirements). In extreme circumstances, use of reserves could plug the budgetary gap. Options for managing the longer-term financial risks of Covid will be reported within the MTFS in October.

## Housing Revenue Account

- 1.17 As at the end of August, the HRA is forecasting a full-year surplus of c£900k a result of Covid. The principle areas of variance are an increase of the bad debt provision of c£1.1m, offset by reduced expenditure of £2.2m on the repairs budget due to reduced access to tenants' homes. The threat to the HRA is significantly lower than the General Fund, as delays to rental income are likely to be short term whilst tenants transfer to Universal Credit.

## **2 RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY SUPPORT**

- 2.1 Members will note that this is the third update report on the Council's response to Covid-19 and this part of the report will highlight some of key work and support that the Council has provided across its various services to ensure continuity of service and recovery resilience. This report covers the period July to September 2020.

## Managing the pandemic

### ***Linkages to Wider Local Resilience Forum Recovery Structure***

- 2.2 In respect of the current pandemic, a Hertfordshire wide Recovery Coordinating Group (RCG) has already been established. The RCG is a multi-agency officer group with clear linkages and reporting lines to the Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG). The Covid 19 Health Protection Board also meets weekly to work on implementation of the

Covid 19 Outbreak Plan, this has representation from the SCG, RCG, County, Public Health England, Police, CCG and Health Service.

- 2.3 The Dacorum recovery continues to be managed by the Incident Management Team (IMT) which has been managing the pandemic to date and meets at least twice weekly to review all key issues.
- 2.4 There is continued and effective liaison between work streams at county and borough levels and daily updates are received from the Health Protection Board including infection rates for the county and borough, which enables targeted and coordinated work to be undertaken to manage any local outbreaks.
- 2.5 The Environmental and Community Protection team continues to be engaged in local Track and trace, and dealing with complaints surrounding businesses Covid Secure Status. To illustrate the intensity of the work, from the 27<sup>th</sup> August to the 3<sup>rd</sup> September the team have contact traced 56 positive cases of Covid 19, contacted significant contacts and visited workplaces associated with these cases in a bid to halt the spread of the disease in the Dacorum Area. The cases initially were in the Tring and Berkhamsted area with younger adults, although there have also now been further cases arise in the Hemel Hempstead area.

### **Support to Communities**

- 2.6 Officers continue to liaise with community and charitable organisations which provide services to residents in the borough to start to assess the short to medium term impact of Covid-19. A fortnightly meeting has been arranged to discuss key issues, which has highlighted the financial challenges as well as insights into community issues arising from Covid-19.
- 2.7 In addition, officers have supported Hertshelp in delivering food parcels to vulnerable/shielded residents and a support letter was sent to Dacorum residents from Herts CC and Dacorum detailing various different pathways for a vast range of issues.
- 2.8 Dacorum Health and Wellbeing board has changed its agenda to focus on Covid-19 recovery with our key partners – Police, Community and Voluntary Sector, etc.

### **Learning from Lockdown**

- 2.9 The New Normal Programme team met with every Group Manager from across the Council to understand what changes implemented as a result of Covid-19 had worked, what could be improved and what changes should be continued once lockdown is eased completely.
- 2.10 Overall, although the lockdown happened very quickly the Council was able to modify its working practices quickly to ensure that those services that were not stopped due to the pandemic were able to continue and provide support to the community. This was largely as a result of earlier investment in remote and agile working practices and technology. In addition, a number of other activities were undertaken that are not part of normal responsibilities.
- 2.11 Based on the feedback received and taking into account the results of the Staff Health and Wellbeing Questionnaire, the following observations have been made:

- (a) The Council is able to adapt ways of working and continue to deliver quality services during a period of significant change and concern.
- (b) MS Teams has been invaluable and officers have been able to continue to deliver their services whilst working from home. All Group Managers felt that it should continue to be used post the pandemic and have seen how it helps collaborative working.
- (c) MS Teams has assisted regular teams meetings and project work with external parties as it ensures more people can attend, makes coordination of diaries easier, and saves on travel time.
- (d) Feedback has been that for operational meetings, the flow of the meeting is improved in MS Teams as there is an etiquette of allowing people to speak one at a time and raising hands to ask questions. The meetings can be focussed and hence cover more ground in the same amount of time as a normal meeting. Although there are also some limitations where a greater degree of interaction is required or where the meetings involve larger number of participants.
- (e) Enabling managers to support flexible/agile working arrangements has been much appreciated by officers through the pandemic and enabled them to maintain an improved work/life balance. Managers feel that this has not impacted their team's productivity overall and so should be considered to continue as this will support individual officers in achieving their maximum potential. It will be necessary to develop and review key performance indicators to be able to assess any impact on service delivery in the medium to longer term.
- (f) Flexible working arrangements may also assist recruitment as candidates may not be so focused on the location they live in terms of proximity to Hemel Hempstead. However, it is stressed that all working arrangements need to take into account the requirement to provide the necessary level of presence in the Forum to ensure continuity of service delivery and the ongoing development of services whilst ensuring that complex and vulnerable customers are able to access services appropriately. This will vary between departments and needs to be managed by the relevant Group Manager.
- (g) The need to change business processes to enable home working has enabled both officers and managers to reflect and see what further improvements can be made. Many managers expressed a desire to automate and digitise further to remove non-value adding tasks.

2.12 The outcomes of the feedback will be considered by the New Normal Project Board and Corporate Management Team to agree which practices and procedures the Council should continue and to evaluate how services can be developed, balanced with the needs of the service and the Council's priorities.

## **Leisure**

2.13 Officers have been working with the operator of Hemel and Berkhamsted Sports Centre, Everyone Active to agree measures for reopening with appropriate health and safety measures in place. Hemel Hempstead and Berkhamsted Sports Centres as well as Jarmans Park Athletics Track both reopened to the public and clubs in late July and feedback from service users has been positive.



- 2.14 The required health and safety measures and changes in customer behaviours have meant that the income generated by the centres is significantly less than pre-covid levels whilst operating costs remain broadly similar. A support package with Everyone Active was agreed for July, August and September to enable the centres to open, provide continuity of service and protect local jobs. The details of the support package are set out in the Part II Officer Decision dated 20<sup>th</sup> July 2020. Further support is likely to be required until the end of the financial year as a minimum and this is currently being reviewed once August and September's income figures are known.
- 2.15 Match funding has been confirmed from Sports England for consultancy support to assess the short to medium term impact of Covid-19 on all the Council's leisure facilities and this includes working with Dacorum Sports Trust to consider the impact on Little Hay Golf Club and the XC Centre.

### **Support to business and council contractors**

- 2.16 During August 2020, eighty-four of the 780 businesses that took part in the original business intelligence telephone surveys between April and June were re-surveyed. Sixty-seven of the 251 businesses that previously reported being in crisis were re-surveyed. Of these, thirty (44.8%) felt they were still in crisis, thirty-six (53.7%) now described themselves as ticking over and one business had been sold to new owners (whom it was not possible to contact).
- 2.17 The most common reported concerns for these businesses were, as before, loss of turnover (almost 100% of the businesses), reduced productivity (86.3%) and cash flow (81.8%). 39.4% of these businesses were concerned about potential closure of the business and 37.9% were concerned about the possible need for redundancies.
- 2.18 Overall, 311+ redundancies have occurred from the total job count of 1328 for the businesses surveyed (around 23%). However, it should be noted that 250+ of these redundancies were from one employer. 146 self-employed staff had also been let go.
- 2.19 Fifty of the previous "crisis" businesses still had staff furloughed, accounting for 187 staff. A total of 200 staff had been un-furloughed, although 119 of these were on flexible or part-time furlough, to enable the business to cope with fluctuating and unpredictable demand.
- 2.20 Only 24 of the 67 business (36%) were continuing to work from home and only 11 (16%) were planning to make this part of their working conditions permanently.
- 2.21 37.3% of the previous "crisis" business were able to describe adaptations to the business. These adaptations varied according to the business, but included online or virtual services, increased marketing effort or seeking new types of customer.
- 2.22 Businesses were asked a new question this time, on how the pandemic had affected their long-term business plans. The majority felt that they were only able to focus on survival, reducing costs and trying to keep going/keep staff employed. Many reported a substantial impact on turnover, setting the business back many years in terms of its development and growth.
- 2.23 As previously reported by businesses, they found it difficult to know what support they would need ongoing, however those that answered most commonly stated that some form of financial assistance was what was needed. This was in the form of future grants, business rates relief or reform or help with staff costs. A minority mentioned

training or business advice/mentoring as helpful in the future.

- 2.24 In addition to those businesses surveyed that had been in crisis, sixteen businesses that had been ticking over and one that had been thriving were also re-surveyed. Of those ticking over, two were now able to describe themselves as thriving again. One was a discount tyre company that feels a recession will be good for them and the other provides surveying and project management services and has found business to have increased post lockdown. The business that was thriving previously provides Legionella consultancy services and continues to thrive. The previous survey can be accessed on the link below:



BusinessSurveyAug2  
020CMT.pptx

- 2.25 The Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership is leading on the economic recovery for Hertfordshire and has published its Economic Recovery Plan, *Unlocking Hertfordshire*, in response to COVID-19. This plan builds on the emergency measures which were taken at both local and national levels.

Its purpose is to chart a clear route through the short-medium term economic effects of the pandemic and define actions in response. It aims to accelerate recovery over the next 6-18 months, but it will also position Hertfordshire for sustained and good economic growth in the years thereafter.

The plan is structured around main three delivery packages. These are focused on:

- **Enterprise and Innovation;**
- **Skills and Creativity; and**
- **International Trade and Investment**

To ensure that progress is made towards the longer-term aspirations set out in the draft Local Industrial Strategy (and previously the Strategic Economic Plan), two transformational programmes will be also advanced.

These are:

- **Equipping Hertfordshire's places for mid-21st century working and living**
- **Connecting Hertfordshire for mid-21st century working and living**

Across both transformational programmes, Hertfordshire LEP will work alongside other partners to ensure that progress is made. In particular, the intention is that many of these broader commitments should be advanced through the emerging Growth Deal which is being negotiated through the Hertfordshire Growth Board.

Hertfordshire LEP Board will oversee the delivery of the Economic Recovery Plan and it will monitor its progress closely. Given the uncertainty of the situation and the process of EU transition, this plan is, and will remain, a live one. The LEP intends to review it in the autumn and early in the new year.

## **New Build**

- 2.26 Work on the schemes on-site at the time of lockdown ceased for a relatively short period of around three weeks but re-started with a reduced capacity to ensure social distancing and safe working. Two schemes were completed Williams House and Howe Grove House (Northend and Westerdale) providing twelve new homes and Martindale (65 homes) and Magenta Court (29 homes) are due for completion and letting in the

next few weeks. Work has continued in getting new schemes out to tender and in for planning.

### **Property and Place**

- 2.27 Following re-mobilisation of Osborne, who during lockdown were carrying out emergency repairs only, has allowed ordinary repairs work to restart though understandably a backlog built up whilst these could not be done. Gas Servicing and testing did continue and compliance has remained over 99%.

### **Support to Individuals**

- 2.28 Risk assessments have been developed to enable the supported housing officers to recommence face to face, doorstep visits to all tenants in sheltered schemes and have met with over 1600 tenants and made referrals to support agencies such as AgeUK, adult care or citizens advice for 128 individuals, who had been negatively impacted throughout the lockdown. Sheltered schemes continue to have additional cleaning of all communal areas and regular telephone contact has been made with all residents who are anxious about face to face contact.
- 2.29 The income and tenancy sustainment teams have been providing advice and support to those households in financial difficulty or with complex needs through the impact of Covid-19 and the numbers requiring support continue to increase month on month.
- 2.30 The number of presentations to the Homelessness service reduced slightly in July, but increased in August, which is ordinarily a quiet month. The Council submitted a bid to Ministry Housing, Communities and Local Government for Next Steps Accommodation Funding, to assist with move on accommodation and recovery plan. The bid is currently being assessed and if successful would provide funding for up to 38 additional units. Dacorum were initially allocated £29,000 of MHCLG funding specifically to assist with homelessness, however to date we have spent in excess of £76,000 on the immediate and ongoing response.
- 2.31 At the time of writing this report there are still 160 households in Temporary accommodation and all available units are being occupied with a further pipeline of 11 referrals to be assessed. Over 620 households have been provided assistance and support since the beginning of the Pandemic.
- 2.32 The Council have seen an increase in anti-social behaviour cases, and in quarter one the number of live cases per 1000 properties was 8.38, compared with 7.24 per 1000 properties before the lockdown.
- 2.33 Domestic Abuse cases have been prevalent since the start of lockdown and even with the easing of restrictions the team continue to support a number of individuals fleeing domestic abuse. There had been 123 cases in the first seven weeks, since the end of March.

### **Forum/staff occupied buildings**

- 2.34 Reviews have been carried out of all staff occupied buildings and changes made to ensure that staff can occupy buildings safely with appropriate distancing and hygiene measures and a phased return to the buildings has commenced. The main measures introduced include:
- Staff to sit diagonally from each other (4 staff on a bank of 8 – at the Forum).

- Maximum of 155 staff in the Forum (approximately 1/3 of full capacity) – Working from home rota to be agreed by managers
- Everyone entering the Forum will have their temperature screened and a process for what should happen if a high temperature will be agreed
- Shared seating areas and kitchens have been reconfigured
- Atrium and café to be open for takeaway only
- Visitor access to the Forum to be by appointment only – The library formally opened to the public in controlled numbers from the second week in September.
- Access to Forum to be via the pass door to the side of the main entrance and exit will be via the fire exit on the lower ground floor to ensure a one-way system can operate.
- One way system has been created around the Forum with appropriate markers
- Perspex screens (870 mm from desk surface) have been fitted to all desks and points of contact with customers/public (similar to what has happened in most shops).
- The use of lifts in the Forum are restricted to people that must use them and only 1 person is allowed in them at any one time.
- Appropriate 2 meter markings are placed on the floor at prominent parts of the building to remind everyone of the 'social distance' measures.
- Introduction of additional hand disinfectant/sanitising units around the Forum.
- Automated doors have been fitted to reduce the number of door handles needing to be touched.
- Staff will be responsible for their own coffee/tea mug and should keep it in their locker when not in use to ensure that only they use the receptacle.
- A Forum user etiquette has been prepared to ensure all users are aware of the behaviors that must be observed in relation to appropriate hygiene and social distancing measures when in the building

### **Town Centre, Shopping areas and public open spaces**

2.35 Officers have developed an action plan for the main shopping areas across the Borough including Hemel Hempstead Town Centre, Tring and Berkhamsted and neighbourhood centres and this has now been implemented and the shopping centres have re-opened. Implemented measures include:

- Safe distancing and hand washing signage
- Utilising the large screen in the Marlowes for visual messaging
- Continued closure of play areas

- Enhanced cleaning regimes
- Liaising with the Hemel Hempstead Business Improvement District to ensure shops are managing queuing appropriately and are opening/operating safely

2.36 Safe distancing and hygiene signs have been placed at the entrance to parks and open spaces and play areas which have also now been reopened.

### **3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

3.1 Members will note that this report comprehensively reports the actions taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic during the last quarter. The report also summarises the financial impact on the Council as currently forecast.

3.2 Officers will keep under review any impact on service delivery and associated financial implications arising from the pandemic, particularly leading into the period of preparation for any impact resulting from winter pressures. Officers will continue to provide appropriate briefings and reports to Portfolio Holders and elected members on a regular basis.