



Report for:	Cabinet
Date of meeting:	16 th March 2021
Part:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	COVID-19 IMPACT PAPER
Contact:	Andrew Williams, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Corporate & Contracted Services Author/Responsible, Officer: Claire Hamilton, 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 receives 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'	<u>Value for money</u>

implications	<p>Covid-19 will have various value for money implications which will 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, Councilor 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 builds on previous reports to Cabinet to provide the most recent update on the Covid-related financial pressures facing the Council in the current financial year. This is now based on ten months of in-year data. It does not include the business-as-usual pressures that have emerged over the course of the year, which will continue to be reported to Members through the scheduled Budget Monitoring reports.
- 1.2 As at the end of January, DBC is forecast to face a net General Fund pressure in the current financial year of around £2.35m (marginally up on the £2.2m reported in November).

This is a net position, incorporating the following:

- £2.45m additional expenditure (para 1.7)
- £2.1m reduced income, net of government income support (paras 1.4 – 1.6)

Offset by:

- £2.2m of government grants

- 1.3 The HRA is currently forecasting a full-year surplus of c£2.8m. This is a net position, with an expected increase in the bad debt provision of £1.1m to be more than offset by reduced expenditure of £4.4m on repairs and maintenance. This repairs and maintenance underspend reflects the reduced access requirements to people's homes which has impacted on the Council's ability to carry out non-essential internal works. It is anticipated that this work will be picked up once the social distancing restrictions begin to be lifted.

Pressure on General Fund income streams

- 1.4 As has been the case throughout the year, the most significant financial threat continues to be lost income. The table below (paragraph 1.6) shows the latest year-end forecasts for key income streams. The table shows that, after significant early movements, before demand trends could be identified and before Government had finalised its Income Support Scheme, forecasts against most income streams have become more stable in recent reports.
- 1.5 The income stream that remains most exposed to potentially significant changes over the closing months of the year is the one with the largest budget: Investment Property. As rental income, it is not eligible for the Government's income protection scheme which limits the volatility of other, non-rental income by underwriting 73% of net losses. The risk of a significant in-year swing has reduced with each month that the expected recession has not crystalized. However, the risk remains stark for the future as businesses begin to exhaust the reserves and government support that have helped keep them afloat over recent months. Announcements of further Government support within the March budget will potentially have a significant impact on this income stream in future months. An update will be reported back to Members at the next opportunity
- 1.6 The table below provides an update on the Council's key income streams highlighted in previous reports.

Income stream	Budget	May Forecast	August Forecast	October Forecast	January Forecast	Commentary
Investment Property	£5.4m	£2.7m	£4m	£4.4m	£4.7m	As at the end of January, 82% of rents due in the current year had been collected compared with 93% at the same point last year. This shortfall has been projected onto the year-end to forecast income of £4.7m.
Garages Income	£3.6m	£2.7m	£3m	£3.1m	£3.2m	As at the end of January, the garage occupancy level has not reduced throughout the year, though the impact of Covid has impeded the realisation of budgeted gains due to the delayed garage project and the redirection of corporate staffing resource. Future garage rental income remains exposed to the threat of potential recession.
Car Parking	£2.8m	£1.8m	£2.5m	£2.3m	£2.4m	As expected, the nationwide lockdown during the early months of the financial year had a dramatic impact on parking revenue, with income down at 15% of budget as at the end of May. The following months saw a positive trend with actual income gradually moving toward budget through subsequent months through to October (80%). Following implementation of the third lockdown, however, income again began to reduce and was down at 35% of budget for January. A slight improvement of 50% against budget is forecast for the remaining months of the year. The forecast outturn position reflects that Government will underwrite c73% of the lost income from car parking.
Planning Fees	£1.2m	£0.9m	£1.1m	£1.1m	£1.15m	Over the first 10 months of the year income has been down around 5% against budget. Future income remains exposed to fluctuations in the property market and this forecast assumes 15% under budget for the remainder of the year. The Government Income Guarantee Scheme will reimburse the Council around 73% of the planning income shortfall.
Commercial Waste	£1m	£0.75m	£0.9m	£0.9m	£0.9m	Forecast remains consistent with the October position, and is based on the final two months continuing year-to-date trends.
Temporary Accmmdtn	£950k	£950k	£950k	£950k	£950k	Demand has increased dramatically, but the Council is unlikely to see a significant increase in income as the Council's own TA capacity becomes fully utilised. The Council has budgeted capital resource to increase its supply of TA, which will result in increased income.
Leisure	£500k	£200k	£360k	£360k	£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. It is unlikely that any management fee will be received this year, but £360k will instead be reimbursed through the govt. income scheme.
Civic/Sports/A PG hire	£300k	£150k	£260k	£260k	£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	£200k	£215k	There has been a minor increase in income over the last three months, probably as a result of the temporary relaxation of stamp duty requirements. This is likely to continue until the end of the current year, and potentially into next as a result of the extension announced in the March budget.

Alternative Financial Model (AFM)	£310k	£310k	£310k	£100k	£0	<p>The AFM is a payment made by HCC to district councils to incentivise recycling and reduce landfill. Reductions in the tonnage sent to landfill saves HCC money (as the Waste Disposal Authority), and a portion of these savings are then shared with district councils as a reward for implementing the changes that drive that reduction.</p> <p>The increased number of people working from home over the last year has driven up the amount of landfill tonnage generated across the county as a whole. Consequently, HCC has not reduced its landfill costs and there are no savings to share with districts.</p>
Total	£16.3m	£10.6m	£13.6m	£13.7m	£14.2m	Forecast shortfall of £2.1m (13% of budget)

Pressure on General Fund expenditure

- 1.7 The areas forecasting significant expenditure pressure remain the same as those reported in November, and, at present, the total remains largely within the £2.2m of Government grant funding received. The updated figures are as below:

Expenditure Type	Pressure	Commentary
Waste Services	£1m	The heightened restrictions and increasing infection rates are placing increasing cost pressures on the service – agency staff usage has again increased and additional trucks are being hired to cope with increased tonnages, the need to separate crews on rural rounds, and access challenges due to increased homeworking and a resultant increase in cars parked on roads.
Supplier Support Packages	£1m	This comprises payments to key suppliers that were subject to approval under Part 2 legislation, and is up £500k on the last report to Cabinet. Members can find more detail under PH Decision Sheets dated: 31 March; 20 July; and 10 December – all issued in 2020.
Office-based staff	£200k	Estimated additional staffing costs to meet Covid-related increases in service demand across the Council over the course of the year.
Facilitate compliant ways of working	£250k	This includes modifications to Council buildings e.g. screen dividers for desks; automatic door installations; investment in mobile IT, etc.
Total	£2.45m	

Pressure on Council Tax collection

- 1.8 At the end of January, year-on-year collection rates were down 1.6%, with 92.2% of the annual total having been collected, compared to 93.8% at the same stage last year. This represents an improvement on the 1.8% shortfall at the end of October, and the general trend has not deteriorated since the end of June.
- 1.9 It is expected that, at this stage, collection rates would be down on last year due to the number of taxpayers rearranging their payments for later in the year. The final year-end position will depend on the extent to which re-profiled payments catch up in February and March. At the time of writing, early data indicates that collection in February was up on all previous months in the current year, which would suggest at least a closing of the current year-on-year shortfall.
- 1.10 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.

Pressure on Business Rates collection

- 1.11 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. Members will be kept updated on the emerging position.

Summary of General Fund budgetary position and potential mitigations

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

Increased expenditure	£2.45m
Net income pressure	£2.10m
Less additional Government grants	<u>(£2.2m)</u>
Net budgetary pressure	£2.35m

1.13 The MTFs approved by Council in November 2020 recommended a strategy of managing Covid-related pressures through the use of the newly created Economic Recovery Reserve. The £2.35m pressure shown above is within the £3.5m forecast draw down from this reserve in 2021/22. The final-year end position and required draw down will be reported back to Members later in the year.

Housing Revenue Account

1.14 As at the end of January, the Covid-related impact on the HRA is a forecast surplus of c£2.8m. The principle areas of variance are an increase of the bad debt provision of c£1.1m, offset principally by reduced expenditure of £4m 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 fourth 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 December 2020 to March 2021.

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 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. There are a number of specific cells coordinating operational activity and supporting these Groups and Boards.

2.3 The Dacorum incident and 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 and vaccination rates for the county and borough. This enables

targeted and coordinated work to be undertaken to manage any local outbreaks. The Director of Public Health at Hertfordshire County Council is currently reviewing his Outbreak Plan to shape the work of the Health Protection Board for the next few months.

- 2.6 The Environmental and Community Protection team continues to be engaged in local Track and Trace, and dealing with complaints and requests for advice surrounding businesses' Covid Secure Status. The intensity of the work continues to rise and the EH team has contact traced 201 positive cases of Covid 19 in Q3 and investigated a number of business outbreaks. The Team has visited several workplaces with multiple cases, to check Covid compliance and ensure close workplace contacts of the cases have also been isolating, in a bid to halt the spread of the disease in the Dacorum area.
- 2.7 From 8th February, a local Dacorum Covid Advisory Service has been set up. 6 Advisors from within the Environmental and Community Protection Team have been visiting businesses and open spaces to discuss Covid compliance. Where compliance is not achieved with advice, the cases are escalated to either the Environmental Health Team or Police dependent on the nature of the breach.
- 2.8 A bid to the Health Protection Board for additional resource in the Corporate, Health, Safety and Resilience Team to support the elections team to deliver a Covid Secure Election has been successful. The Health and Safety Advisor started in post on the 1st March and will be supporting the elections team to carry out a safe election, for staff, Councillors and Members of the Public.
- 2.9 The Council is currently undertaking a review of its approach to the post Covid recovery stage to ensure that it is fit for purpose and targets those areas most affected by the pandemic.

3. Support to Communities

- 3.1 Officers continue to liaise with community and charitable organisations which provide services to residents in the borough to assess the short, medium and long term impacts of Covid-19. A monthly meeting has been arranged to discuss key issues, and this has highlighted the financial challenges faced by organisations, as well as providing invaluable insights into community issues arising from Covid-19. The organisations continue to see an increase in demand for their services, with more residents now being identified as vulnerable. The group also enables insights into future levels and requirements of demands to help make the VCS more resilient as we move forward. Partnership working between charitable and community organisations has increased and many organisations have demonstrated significant flexibility in using their resources in different ways to meet the needs and demands of residents as well as supporting Council services.
- 3.2 Officers have supported the Hertshelp project which provides support for our most vulnerable residents. Support for the food delivery process has now concluded as this service is no longer offered by Hertfordshire County Council. The new focus from Hertshelp is to utilise local charity support to help our vulnerable clients, from volunteers delivering food to picking up urgent medical supplies. DBC is responsible for supporting the County-led advertising campaigns and publishing relevant information on our media platforms. This messaging will form a significant part of our new weekly electronic Digest to support Covid recovery. All relevant staff have also been briefed on signposting information when residents contact us. Furthermore, we are working closely with Community Action Dacorum to support COVID Champions.

These are volunteers who are charged with getting the right messages out to their local community regarding COVID and vaccinations. This is a county-wide initiative and our own employed Covid Champion staff are working with them to disseminate the public health messages.

- 3.3 The Council has reviewed the financial support provided to Citizen Advice Dacorum (CAD), given the recent and projected demand on the service. According to the figures from CAD, the demand for advice in areas of employment, debt, benefits and food vouchers is increasing as we move through 2021 and is likely to increase when the Government's furlough scheme concludes. It is also evident that clients in Dacorum have increasing need for advice regarding divorce and separation, which will create future housing issues. There is also a reported increase in advice regarding private sector properties, and the fact fewer jobs are available, will result in increased debts and ultimately, housing issues for these clients.
- 3.4 Despite the support from the Council and National bodies, the demand on CAD services still remains high with a significant likelihood that this demand will grow.
- 3.5 The 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. This is to ensure that, as a group, we are supporting each other and utilizing resources to support the community recovery.
- 3.6 Officers have continued to support residents' physical and mental health through our sports and culture action plans, albeit delivered through virtual means, including starting initiatives such as the Chatty Café and Walk Dacorum.
- 3.7 Community Action Dacorum have been managing the volunteer response to getting vaccination centers up and running, working with over 700+ volunteers as they have continued with their shift in services under our support for Dacorum contract.
- 3.8 The council has repurposed the Community Grant Scheme to provide specific COVID-19 support for voluntary and community sector organisations for the Summer and Winter rounds of funding in 2020. In total, the Community Grant and Small Grants schemes have awarded just over £39k of COVID-19 response and relief funding to voluntary and community sector organisations.
- 3.9 Following the Government's recent announcement, outdoor sports are likely to be allowed again from 29th March, indoor sports from 17th May. It is therefore key that our outdoor recreational facilities are of a good standard.
- 3.10 In Northridge there is an area which has 2 basketball hoops. The hard-core area for play (although used frequently) is in a very bad state of repair and has been identified as a potential to improve provision for outdoor sport and physical activity. To support the local community and Dacorum Basketball clubs to engage in safe outdoor sport and physical activity, it is proposed to use £16,630 of the Youth Reserve to extend the current play area to make it a properly marked out basketball court, with a safe and suitable playing surface and regulation standard hoops. The community and local clubs have made DBC aware of the condition of the area, reporting it to the Community Partnerships and Wellbeing Team, and through relevant Councillors.
- 3.11 The Youth Reserve is a total of £44,000 and has the following stipulation against it for its spend: "To assist with repairs expenditure and the provision of youth provision." This proposal fits within the parameters that the funding can be spent on.

4. Leisure

- 4.1 On 31st October, the Prime Minister announced that further restrictions would be applied on a nation-wide basis for the period 5th November to 2nd December, which was then extended until the recent announcement, which means that gyms should be able to reopen on 12th April.
- 4.2 The closures continue to be a set-back for the leisure service which had done an excellent job ensuring that that the centres were Covid secure. The member base and casual user numbers had begun to recover from re-opening in late July, and efforts to rebuild this will need to recommence once restrictions are lifted.
- 4.3 This further closure period and the required health and safety measures, together with changes in customer behaviour, continue to significantly affect the income generated by the centres. The Council agreed further support for the leisure service from October to the end of March 2021 to enable the centres to re-open as soon as possible once the restrictions were lifted.
- 4.4 It is predicted that there will be a need to support the service through most of 2021/2022, as a return to pre-Covid income levels is likely to be a slow process as customer confidence gradually returns. Discussions are currently taking place to ascertain the level of support required to the end of the 2021/22 financial year and will be reported to members once a position is agreed.
- 4.5 The Council applied, and has been successful in obtaining, £296,000 of financial support from the National Leisure Recovery Fund. This will be allocated towards the costs of supporting the service through the period December 2020 to March 2021.

5. New Build

- 5.1 Work on the housing schemes which were on-site at the time of lockdown ceased for a relatively short period of around five weeks but then re-started with a reduced capacity following the Government guidance on working safely. During this period 12 new homes for temporary accommodation were completed at Williams House and Howe Grove House (Northend and Westerdale) We have successfully completed Martindale (65 homes) this includes 21 homes for market sale of which 20 have been sold and Magenta Court (29 homes). The Paradise Fields site has achieved a planning approval to build 58 new homes, sites at Eastwick Row (36 homes) and Coniston Road (10 homes) are mobilising to start works on site. In addition, there are eight schemes currently submitted for Planning Approval.

6. Support to Individuals

- 6.1 The wellbeing and safety of tenants remains a priority for the housing service, as it balances risk with the more complex needs of some of the residents. Officers in the Income and Tenancy teams prioritise phone calls and use of video calls to deal with enquiries and understand any concerns that tenants have. Where there is an essential need to see a tenant in person, doorstep visits have been undertaken, in particular for those in Supported Housing or those working with the Tenancy and Welfare Sustainment Officers. This has ensured that support and referrals are provided to tenants in crisis and safeguarding concerns can be identified.

- 6.2 Communal lounges have remained shut at schemes since the first lockdown in March 2020. During December, socially distanced activities took place at some schemes with the support from partners in the community and voluntary sector. Feedback from this identified that social isolation is a significant risk to older tenants and a programme of activities and support will be introduced that can ensure tenants can be connected to each other safely. Further letters have been sent to all supported housing tenants giving them details of how they can get involved.
- 6.3 The Income and Tenancy Sustainment teams have continued to provide 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. Over 2200 tenants are now in receipt of Universal Credit and officers are focusing on regular communication and providing support over enforcement. As a consequence we have seen rent arrears reduce slightly so in January 2021 arrears were only 9% higher than this time last year. Over the coming months, we expect to see an increase in applications for debt relief orders and will work closely with the Citizens Advice Dacorum to support these tenants.
- 6.4 The Welfare & Sustainment Officers within the Tenancy Sustainment team, provide vital support to those households in temporary accommodation and in the first 6 months of their introductory tenancy. As a commissioned Housing Related Support (HRS) service by Hertfordshire County Council, the service has a contract to support 35 service users and receives funding of £45,000. The team is currently supporting 189 applicants in temporary accommodation and 41 households in the first 6 months of their tenancies with DBC, which is far in excess of their current contract. Currently low level support is being provided to 69 homeless households with approximately 120 with medium to high support needs receiving more intensive support and guidance, this number fluctuates slightly as clients move in and out of the service. Due to this significant increase and disparity in funding, a proposal was submitted to Hertfordshire County Council in early February 2021 requesting consideration for additional funding and a review of the current contract.
- 6.5 The Council's bid to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for Next Steps Accommodation Project (NSAP) funding, to assist with move on accommodation was successful in part. A co-produced bid with Hightown Housing Association led by Dacorum, has been successful in receiving 50% of funding to deliver a scheme of 5 move on units for single homeless clients, the remaining 50% has been match funded by Hightown.
- 6.6 Homeless approaches continue to be high with 213 approaches in November, 170 in December and 257 in January, this compares with 153, 113 and 149 approaches in November, December and January of the previous year. To date a total of £114,117 has been spent on the Covid response. In addition to funding already received, the service has been successful in claiming £19,900 from the Hertfordshire County Council DEFRA grant, plus a further £11,000 to assist with food costs for households accommodation in B&B's, hotels or needing additional support in temporary accommodation and £1,800 of Winter Support Grant. Additionally the service is currently finalising its year 4 bid for Rough Sleeper Initiative funding (RSI), with assurances from MHCLG that at least £241,000 will be granted to enable the the Dacorum Outreach Service and the double district Housing First project to continue. The final submission deadline is 26th February 2021, with funding being granted in April 2021.
- 6.7 The service has continued to work in partnership with multiple agencies to manage

the response, to 'protect' those at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping and bring them into accommodation. This includes co-leading the Hertfordshire Accommodation Cell and the establishment of Countywide Multi-Disciplinary Team meetings, as well as localised engagement with the statutory and voluntary sector. In particular the partnership work with Dacorum Community Trust has enabled 633 households to receive vital help and support since April 2020 and this is a 92% increase on the previous year, a figure which is set to rise further. Currently there are 4 known rough sleepers within the Dacorum area. This has reduced from 9 in December 2020 and the Outreach Team continues to engage to establish trust and breakdown barriers, with the aim of bringing clients safely into accommodation. As at 12th February 2021 there are 165 households in temporary accommodation, with 3 households pending imminent placement. Of these clients in temporary accommodation, there are a number who require more intensive management and support from staff due to offending history (15 clients) and those who are homeless as a result of domestic abuse (22 clients). Since July 2020, 1447 households have been given advice and support.

- 6.8 Due to the significant increase in demand, the service met with MHCLG in November 2020 to address concerns with regards to current pressures and capacity to manage the ongoing response, particularly as the service considered that its NSAP bid was insufficient given the current position. As a result of this meeting and evidence provided to MHCLG, the service was awarded £98,000 contingency funding to assist in the efforts to continue to support and 'Protect' those at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping. Additionally, through engagement with MHCLG and partnership work with DENS, the service was successful in its bid for Cold Weather Funding of £10,000. This funding has been utilised to extend DENS Day Centre hours, providing vital additional support by way of food and access to advice, washing and laundry facilities to those at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping. The funding enabled the installation of two bunkabins at The Elms, to be used as Crash Pods providing additional bed spaces of accommodation during the severe cold weather period. Through further communication with MHCLG, it has been confirmed that the council is eligible for £5,000 'Protect Plus' funding, which it is proposed will be used to further extend the two pods at the Elms for an additional 12 weeks after April 2021.
- 6.9 Within the Private Sector Housing Service, the number of service requests and approaches has significantly increased over the past 9 months. Service data shows that from July – September 2020, 129 approaches were received, compared with 58 during the same quarter of the previous year, similarly from October – December 2020 167 approaches, compared 66 for the same quarter in the previous year. Current evidence is suggesting that this trend will continue.
- 6.10 As a result of Covid 19 guidance, the service suspended all non-emergency private sector visits and inspections. As a result there are currently over 100 visits outstanding, such as HMO or compliance visits. Based on our knowledge of the service, this equates to over 220 hours of officer time required to undertake these visits, in addition to any new activity. MHCLG guidance released on 26th January 2021 confirmed that the regulatory requirements of Private Sector Housing delivery was deemed as a Category B activity: High priority, and advised that these activities should be undertaken wherever possible. As a result, visits have been reinstated following strict guidance, risk assessments and using appropriate PPE.
- 6.11 The service is currently investigating two illegal evictions which have taken place within the past few months. This requires preparation of a case file, building and collecting evidence and taking witness statements from all affected parties. Such processes are challenging within Covid19 restrictions, however once completed the

service will undertake the relevant Interviews Under Caution (IUC) to hear from the Landlord and his account of the case, prior to consideration of enforcement action.

- 6.12 There were 16 new anti-social behaviour cases in December and 12 in January. This is slightly higher than the previous year, but shows cases are not increasing to the levels seen throughout the first lockdown and during last summer. With a number of cases being closed over the past 2 months, the number of live cases per 1000 properties was at its lowest level of 3.81 at the end of January 2021. This allows the officers time to ensure the new cases are effectively managed from initial referral and address some of the more complex cases with a high number of victims and perpetrators of ASB experiencing mental health difficulties.
- 6.13 Domestic Abuse cases have been prevalent since the start of lockdown and, even with the easing of restrictions, the team continues to support a number of individuals fleeing domestic abuse. In September there had been 123 cases in the first seven weeks, since the end of March. There has now been 228 new Domestic Abuse cases since the last report.

7. Forum/staff occupied buildings

- 7.1 In accordance with the further restrictions announced by the Prime Minister on 31st October, office based staff have been advised to work from home until the restrictions are lifted if they can perform their roles effectively from home. There will continue to be a core group of staff undertaking essential duties only in the Forum with appropriate leadership support in place.
- 7.2 The Clean, Safe and Green team continues to run services from the depots with appropriate Covid protection measures in place.

8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- 8.1 Members will note that this report comprehensively sets out 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.
- 8.2 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.