

Report to COUNCIL

Oldham's COVID-19 Response

Portfolio Holders:

Councillor Fielding, Council Leader and Cabinet Member for
Economy and Skills

Councillor Shah, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Covid-19
Recovery

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Reason for Decision

This report outlines Oldham's partnership response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Executive Summary

On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) was informed of a cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. On 12 January 2020 it was announced that a new novel coronavirus had been identified, causing the outbreak. This virus is referred to as SARS-CoV-2, and the associated disease as COVID-19. Since January the virus has spread quickly across the globe, causing a global pandemic.

Manchester and Greater Manchester (GM) declared a major Incident on Friday 20 March 2020. This activated the multi-agency response arrangements in line with the GM generic response plan and the pandemic flu plan. The Prime Minister's unprecedented announcement at 8.30 pm on Monday 23rd March set out the seriousness of the situation and the expectations of all residents, businesses and public services.

New emergency legislation was quickly passed into law to support local authorities in responding to the pandemic, whilst ensuring essential business and services continue. The legislation gives the Council a statutory duty to coordinate food, self-care, medical supplies and other forms of necessary assistance to vulnerable groups in response to COVID-19.

Recommendations: To note the content of the report.

1 Background

- 1.1 On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) was informed of a cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. On 12 January 2020 it was announced that a new novel coronavirus had been identified, causing the outbreak. This virus is referred to as SARS-CoV-2, and the associated disease as COVID-19. Since January the virus has spread quickly across the globe, causing a global pandemic.
- 1.2 Manchester and Greater Manchester (GM) declared a major Incident on Friday 20 March 2020. This activated the multi-agency response arrangements in line with the GM generic response plan and the pandemic flu plan. The Prime Minister's unprecedented announcement at 8.30 pm on Monday 23rd March set out the seriousness of the situation and the expectations of all residents, businesses and public services.
- 1.3 New emergency legislation was quickly passed into law to support local authorities in responding to the pandemic, whilst ensuring essential business and services continue. The legislation gives the Council a statutory duty to coordinate food, self-care, medical supplies and other forms of necessary assistance to vulnerable groups in response to COVID-19.
- 1.4 In line with other Greater Manchester authorities, Oldham has established a major incident command structure which includes a Gold, Silver and Bronze approach. This includes a Political Gold of Council Leader/Deputy Leaders and the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Main Opposition Group.
- 1.5 This report summarises the Oldham Partnership's response to COVID-19, highlighting the incredible contribution from our partners and communities to tackling the pandemic. As the response covers almost all service areas, for the purpose of this report it has been broken down into six thematic areas:
 1. Protecting our most vulnerable residents
 2. Health and wellbeing
 3. Keeping services going
 4. Helping people back on their feet
 5. Supporting businesses and Oldham's economy
 6. The transition from lockdown to recovery.

2 Protecting our most vulnerable residents

- 2.1 In Oldham we recognise that vulnerability may present itself in many ways. The Government has produced guidance on the approach agreed to supporting those who are clinically extremely vulnerable to COVID-19, referred to as the 'shielded list'. However, there is also work taking place across the Oldham Partnership to protect other vulnerable groups, including individuals and groups with protected characteristics, or people at increased risk during the pandemic.
- 2.2 Community Bronze Group
- 2.3 In the first weeks of the response, the Community Bronze group focused on meeting the immediate needs of people and communities in response to the crisis (food, medicines, mutual aid, volunteering and community intelligence). It focused on responding to health vulnerability in-particular (Oldham's shielded list, over 70s, discharged from hospital, symptoms of CV-19, etc.) and the duty put on us by government to ensure the basic needs of these key 'isolating' groups were being met.

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- 2.4 The Community Bronze Group was established with joint leads from the Council and Action Together. Within days they had mobilised 5 Hubs to coordinate food, medicines, mutual aid, volunteering and community intelligence and an Emergency Helpline to act as a front door and triage.
- 2.5 Emergency Food Distribution
- 2.6 We have developed a comprehensive food distribution network led by Oldham Food Bank and Action Together with support wrapped around from the Council and OCL. Over time the Foodbank has centralised its offer into Oldham Sports Centre and Clemency House. The centres are heavily supported by a volunteer offer and Council staff. Their roles range from coordination, supporting processes, managing deliveries of food and products, packing and delivering.
- 2.7 There has been a huge breadth of support from across Oldham's voluntary and community sector, with many new mutual aid groups being established to support Oldham's COVID-19 response. These groups have been providing a huge amount of support for local people impacted by the pandemic, including leafletting to reach people who are isolated and to raise awareness of support available; running errands, shopping or other activities self-isolated people cannot perform; and providing emotional support and contact for people who are self-isolating or struggling with the effects of the pandemic.
- 2.8 Volunteering
- 2.9 The Council is working with Action Together who are the volunteer coordinators for Oldham, promoting how people can volunteer their time to support the COVID-19 response across Oldham. Through this joint approach, 529 people have signed-up as volunteers, supporting a variety of causes, including foodbanks.
- 2.10 Supporting Wider Need
- 2.11 The Helpline received calls from people with needs that were broader than emergency food and supplies so by week 3 the group started to co-ordinate clear referral pathways for vulnerable groups from both the Helpline and the 5 Hubs to ensure wider need was being met where appropriate. This included clear referral pathways to Oldham Age UK, CAB, Housing Providers, Early Help, Mental Health, Benefits and Advice and Welfare Rights, as well as strong pathways and relationships with the Community Pharmacies, Community Health and Social Care and primary care (GPs). In addition, a wide range of VCFSE and Crisis Support agencies have also begun to align to the Hub model with the distribution of white goods, furniture, transport and donated items being coordinated between VCFSE, public services and businesses to compliment the food offer.
- 2.12 4088 people have been helped with emergency food and household supplies through a central hub and helped 203 people with urgent access to medicine as at 21 May 2020.
- 2.13 Helpline and Response System
- 2.14 The Helpline went live on the 26th March, offering a wide range of support for residents getting in touch with the Council for emergency help.
- 2.15 The Helpline's offer was enhanced on 15th May to include a language option from 11 – 2pm each day, ensuring inclusivity for residents only able to speak Urdu, Bangla and Punjabi. The team have also been responsible for outbound calling to vulnerable, shielded and hospital discharged residents, which began from 22nd April.
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2.16 In addition, a Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) has been developed to support the Helpline and Hub Teams to efficiently capture contacts and cases, allowing them to be cross-check against multiple data sources. This has enabled us to better understand the types and frequency of contact made, ensuring we are providing the right help and support to residents. This system has already proved invaluable in being able to predict demand and flag repeat customers who are now being directed into wider support.

2.17 Up to close of business 28th May, the Helpline has:

- Answered 4925 calls
- Made 1813 outbound calls
- Made referrals for 2421 residents to receive help with either food or medicine deliveries.

3 **Health and Wellbeing**

3.1 The overarching aim of Oldham's health response has been to support the national effort to prevent premature and avoidable harm and deaths and mitigate the negative impact on the health and wellbeing of Oldham residents because of COVID-19. This has been achieved through two primary objectives.

- Reconfiguring the health and care system of Oldham such that it reduces and slows the escalating level of acute and critical care demand.
- Leading and supporting all measures to reduce and slow the escalating demand on NHS services, particularly focusing on reducing demand on critical health and care services so that those who are seriously unwell get the very best care.

3.2 Oldham CCG and Critical Care Services

3.3 Oldham CCG has taken emergency steps to protect patients, staff and public to prevent the spread of the virus, aiming to significantly reduce demand on critical care services.

3.4 Critical care units (CCUs) are specialist hospital wards that treat patients who are seriously ill and need constant monitoring. These patients might, for example, have problems with one or more vital organ or be unable to breathe without support.

3.5 These units are staffed by specially trained health care professionals who deliver intensive levels of care and treatment, for example, there is usually one nurse for every one or two patients. Patients in these units are closely monitored and supported by sophisticated equipment, including ventilators that help patients breathe.

3.6 To reduce the demand on Critical Care Units the CCG has taken a number of steps, including:

- Postponing all non-urgent elective operations from 15 April at the latest, for a period of at least three months.
- Stopping walk-in access to Walk in Centres, Urgent Treatment Centres, Emergency Departments or similar, without some form of prior assessment.
- Assessing patients by telephone or video call and, where necessary, seeing them by appointment only.

3.7 Almost all the CCG staff have been set up to work from home. Where clinicians or other support staff have been asked to support the delivery of services during the pandemic, staff who are at high risk or symptomatic are excluded from this. Across primary care the number

of staff who have self-isolated has not risen above 5%, with the total absence rate, including annual leave not rising above 14%.

3.8 Public Health Campaign

3.9 Since the launch of the national public health information campaign in February, Oldham Council has been advising residents on how to slow the spread of COVID-19. This has included promoting the Government's *Stay at Home* messaging (first phase of the national messaging response), which has now become *Stay Alert* (second phase of the national messaging response).

In addition, Oldham has tailored national messaging, ensuring it reflects the local response. This has included messaging encouraging residents to support each other, as well as recent resources for businesses which include posters and signs to support businesses and organisations to re-open safely.

3.10 Mental Health Services

3.11 Significant work has been taking place in relation to increasing and introducing new services to support our population, workforce and their families with their Mental Health. This includes, but is not limited to, a 24/7 mental health helpline for support users and their carers; online support and wellbeing advice, new pathways to access urgent mental health support, increased monitoring of community mental health teams risk stratification along with an embedded process within community hubs for people to be supported by Mind when identified mental health or wellbeing needs. A weekly Mental Health System Support call including all partners across CCG, LA, providers and third/voluntary sector has also been established

3.12 The CCG are working closely with Pennine Care Foundation Trust (PCFT) to model the capacity and demand expected with the increase of the impact of covid-19. This work will be ready for mid-June.

3.13 Personal Protective Equipment

3.14 At an early stage in the pandemic Oldham Council set up a local PPE distribution hub to provide emergency stock to health and care providers who were unable to secure stock through other routes. The hub coordinated supplies coming into the borough from several routes, including supplies distributed to the Local Resilience Forum, stock purchased by GM on behalf of all 10 authorities, as well as stock purchased through our own local procurement routes. This has meant that Oldham has not faced the significant shortages of some items of PPE that we know other areas have faced. Health and Social Care services operating in the community have been able to access stock from this hub 7 days a week, either by collection or delivery. To date the hub has distributed more than 575,000 items of PPE have been distributed to local services.

3.15 Test and Trace

3.16 Testing, contact tracing and isolation have a vital part in keeping our population safe and preventing the spread of infection.

3.17 Contact tracing is a proven method for public health to control the spread of many infectious diseases. In COVID-19 it works by identifying contacts of people who have tested positive and then encouraging them to self-isolate and closely monitor their health, rather than continuing to mix with others and passing the virus on.

3.18 The national Test and Trace service was launched on 28th May 2020. The local and Greater Manchester (GM) arrangements are aligned with this service.

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- 3.19 All areas of the country are developing local outbreak plans, which will establish local good practice approaches and the leadership role of Local Authorities. Tameside is one of eleven Beacon Councils within this work, on behalf of the Greater Manchester system.
- 3.20 We have worked closely with other local authorities in GM, GM Health and Social Care Partnership and PHE to establish a model for contact tracing ahead of the development of the national system. Systems are in place in Greater Manchester to take referrals from the National Contact Tracing Service and we have established systems in Oldham to accept referrals of local cases from the national and GM systems and are working with partners across Oldham to prevent and manage outbreaks.
- 3.21 Partners in Oldham have formed a Test and Trace group as part of our COVID-19 governance structure. We have recognised that Test and Trace is a key part of our immediate response to COVID-19 but will also be a feature of our locality system for the foreseeable future.
- 3.22 Through this structure we have agreed an outline operating model for contact tracing, consequence and outbreak management, which aligns with the wider GM model for contact tracing. Our initial model public health staff in providing the single point of contact function, and environmental health staff as leads for contact tracing and consequence management, working within our place based operating model and aligned to our community hubs. We anticipate that this model will give us a strong link with our local communities in gathering and responding to local intelligence, and managing the response to positive cases and outbreaks, working in partnership across the system through our place-based model. This model will also ensure that we can build on our effective community hubs model to provide support to vulnerable individuals and communities.
- 3.23 We are now developing our engagement and communications plan to ensure that key stakeholders and higher risk settings understand the system and processes that we will be working to, and the steps that they need to take to support the system, including undertaking health and safety risk assessments, and updating business continuity plans to take account of potential for large numbers of staff being required to self-isolate.
- 3.24 Our approach to testing has focused on promoting the national testing offer to eligible groups and providing local access to testing for health and social care staff. All care home residents and staff in Oldham have been offered testing, and many have now accessed testing on several occasions. Over the coming weeks we will be increasing access to local testing, including provision of a mobile testing unit operated by the military, which visited Oldham Town Centre for the first time 31st May to 2nd June, and will be in the borough again later this month (June).
- 3.25 Care Homes
- 3.26 To support Care Homes during the pandemic, Oldham Council has established a STICH team (Supporting Treatment in Care Homes), bringing together community nurses, allied health professionals and social workers to work directly with care homes that have residents and staff showing possible Covid-19 symptoms.
- 3.27 During each STICH visit, the clinical team carry out face-to-face assessments of each individual patient, working with care home staff to identify, manage and problem solve any health-related issues. The helps Care Homes recognise potential COVID-19 patients at an early stage, to help with initial treatment and to avoid unnecessary hospital admissions by liaising with local primary care services.
- 3.28 In addition to the various elements of support already in place, we are implementing a 90% bed occupancy guarantee payment until 30th June 2020, to support those providers most
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adversely affected by COVID-19. This will allow time for; individual discussions to take place with key providers, support the development of a longer-term commissioning strategy; and for demand to adjust to the new operating environment to support a more informed assessment of the longer-term impact.

3.29 Bereavement Support

3.30 The Council's response to bereavement has been delivered through close working across a range of services. The work has involved establishing the relationship with guidance delivered by the NHS and CCG on end of life care to ensure that clear and informed guidance was delivered in a consistent way at such a difficult time.

3.31 Services have worked with local partners including funeral directors, the coroner and local faith groups to deliver:

- A single end to end process for issue of death certificates to enable burials and cremations.
- Delivery of online funeral capability for families using the Crematorium Chapel.
- Increased mortuary, burial and cremation capacity at the recent peak of the pandemic.
- Reduced fees in recognition of the financial burden suffered by many families.
- A safe working environment for staff covering the services.
- Constant communication with funeral directors to enable a safe operation informed by public health guidelines.
- Work across GM to inform a consistent message re attendance at funerals.

4 **Keeping Services Going**

4.1 Community Safety and Cohesion

4.2 The Community Service has worked with partner agencies to engage with and encourage individuals and communities to comply with the Coronavirus legislation. In the initial stages of the Pandemic, Community Safety Services and Greater Manchester developed a daily COVID19 Consequence Management Group Meeting. This meeting involves representatives from Community Safety, Greater Manchester Police, Detached Youth Services, Licensing, Parks and Open Spaces, the Stronger Communities Team and the LA Comms team.

4.3 This meeting set out a strategy to identify individuals and business premises that were non-compliant with the COVID legislation, to allow us to address the breaches in a way intended to engage and encourage compliance. Residents were provided with mechanisms to report breaches including use of the 101 police non-emergency number and a link was provided to residents for GMP's on-line reporting portal. A dedicated COVID car was set up with Police Officers who were responsible solely for responding to breach reports.

4.4 The Community Safety Service supplied Greater Manchester Police with a contact card system, to capture the identity of individuals who were breaching the COVID19 legislation. Community Safety Services then drafted an Advisory letter to the individual, explaining the need for compliance, in order to halt the spread of the Virus. This was hand delivered by the Neighbourhood Policing Teams. This included Advisory letters to Juveniles, Adults and the registered keepers of vehicles that were witnessed at the site of breaches.

4.5 When business premises were identified as remaining open in contravention of the COVID legislation, or where they were allowed to remain open and failed to ensure social distancing measures were being adhered to, GMP provided their details to Community Safety Services who passed the details to the relevant teams within the Council. These premises were contacted and received verbal or written advice to ensure future compliance.

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- 4.6 When hotspot areas were identified during the meeting, it was agreed that the area would be included in the relevant Neighbourhood Policing Teams patrol plans and that the COVID car would default to these locations when not attending breach reports. Where juveniles were being identified at these locations, the Councils detached youth Team were deployed to the area to engage with the groups and explain the need for compliance.
- 4.7 The Stronger Communities Team, have also been scanning social media sites to identify problematic locations allowing GMP and the detached youth team to respond quickly to issues, or for early referrals to be made to the relevant sections of the Local Authority when non-compliance by businesses was identified.
- 4.8 Key messages were also disseminated by the Local Authorities Comms team via Social Media, to reinforce and clarify the Governments restrictions. These messages were changed as the Government eased lockdown to reduce unintended non-compliance.
- 4.9 The meeting allowed for fluidity in meeting different challenges over this period, including the VE day celebrations, Easter and Eid celebrations.
- 4.10 Domestic Abuse
- 4.11 The Council has coordinated a range of activity to address the concern of hidden harm under Covid-19. This has included raising awareness of domestic abuse and promoting support helplines and the white ribbon campaign at local venues such as supermarkets and pharmacies and on social media.
- 4.12 Professionals have also been provided with a range of advice and guidance to increase their awareness of domestic abuse and how to work with families to reduce risks. Early Help teams both within the Council and at Positive Steps have been providing additional assistance in support of the IDVA teams. The Probation Service and Early Help have worked collaboratively on cases where individuals who have committed domestic abuse offences are being supervised by the Probation Service.
- 4.13 Education
- 4.14 On the 20th March all UK schools and colleges were closed, though provision has remained in place for vulnerable children and children of critical workers. This has meant that over 1,000 vulnerable children and children of critical workers have been able to continue attending school.
- 4.15 By working closely with Children's Social Care colleagues, we have ensured that over 3,000 vulnerable children have been safeguarded whilst they are away from school.
- 4.16 Home learning has been available to those children not attending schools, with our entire school population of c45,000 receiving a home learning offer.
- 4.17 We have planned for the phased return of schools, which means that some primary schools will widen their opening to priority year groups from 1st June, with virtually all primary, secondary and special schools doing so from 15th June.
- 4.18 Libraries and Gallery Oldham
- 4.19 All our libraries and Gallery Oldham are currently closed in line with the Government's advice. However, though library buildings are closed, residents have been able to access digital resources, including books and magazines. Since libraries closed there has been a 97% increase in eBook issues and a 66% increase in eAudio issues. There has also been a 19% increase in digital magazine downloads. During the lockdown the Library Service
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has also moved a number of events online, including Rhyme Times, author events and quizzes, which have been viewed over 15,629 times.

4.20 The Library Service has also continued to support residents, delivering 161 book packs (which equates to 420 books), in partnership with Age UK and the Early Years Team, to families and individuals that are vulnerable and isolating.

4.21 Parks and Greenspaces

4.22 To enable people to exercise during the lockdown, Oldham's parks have remained open. However, car parks, sports courts and bowling greens were closed to encourage social distancing. Following updated government advice, these have now reopened, though play areas, trim trails and outdoor gyms remain closed.

4.23 Safeguarding

4.24 Safeguarding remains a key priority during the pandemic. We have a robust approach to safeguarding in Oldham. For adults, accountability remains with the Adult Safeguarding Board, which holds weekly assurance meetings for all statutory partners to capture safeguarding activity.

4.25 Oldham's Safeguarding Children Partnership have continued to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in Oldham during the pandemic. As a local authority we have taken steps to protect children during the COVID-19 crisis, risk-assessing and then reviewing the circumstances of every family they are currently working with, ensuring that those facing the highest risks are visited the most frequently.

4.26 Waste and Recycling

4.27 On Monday 30th March temporary general waste weekly collections were introduced by Oldham Council's Waste Management Team. This step was as a measure to ensure that weekly waste collections would continue, with only grey bins collected. This lasted for a short time, with recycling collections starting again on April 27th, following improved staffing levels.

4.28 On the 23rd March all Greater Manchester's recycle centres were closed until further notice to slow the spread of COVID-19. Arkwright Street reopened on May 2nd, with new measures in place to protect the health and wellbeing of residents and staff.

4.29 Accommodation Review

4.30 Officers and Members continue to work remotely where possible to protect the essential frontline services which must operate in workplace settings in conjunction with Government guidance for working safely.

4.31 A programme of risk assessments has been put in place to support the recovery phases for schools / markets / more services returning and re-opening, ensuring social distancing is embedded and safe working practices are in place.

4.32 Communications

4.33 We are utilizing a variety of communication platforms to ensure that key messaging around government policy is communicated in a meaningful and helpful way for our communities. This includes an information hub on the council website, extensive social media activity, newsletters to businesses, direct mail to our most vulnerable groups along with regular engagement with local media channels.

4.34 Workforce

- 4.35 Following government guidance, we adapted to new ways of working at pace, designing or redesigning many different approaches to support our workforce in the most appropriate way possible. This has largely been achieved by delivering services remotely with little / no degradation of service, with most services continuing to proceed with usual activities alongside the response to COVID-19.
- 4.36 Recognising the pressure on staff, a bespoke welfare offer for all #TeamOldham has been developed. This has been very well received with other localities have used this to guide their welfare approach.
- 4.37 New practices have been implemented e.g. self-service payroll, employment checks, remote assessments for recruitment which will become part of new ways of working as relaxation of lockdown continues.
- 4.38 We undertook work early on to ensure we understood how staff worked so that we did not expose any staff to unnecessary risk. This included identifying staff who might be more vulnerable, for example, BAME staff or those with underlying health conditions. This exercise has proved invaluable in helping to work through how to restore services and our approach to relaxation of lockdown.

5 **Helping People Back on Their Feet**

5.1 Financial Support for Residents

- 5.2 The Council has received a Government grant of £3.015m to provide help with Council Tax payments for working age claimants of Council Tax Reduction (CTR) up to a maximum of £150. The estimated cost of the scheme is £2.637m. The balance of funds, an estimated £0.378m, will provide other support for residents facing financial hardship, including those extremely vulnerable households who may not be in receipt of means tested benefits. All Enforcement Agent (bailiff) action, including visits to collect overdue Business Rates and Council Tax, has been suspended until the end of June 2020. Special Payment plans have been made available on request. As at 28 May 2020, 1,937 (£303,077) householders had deferred their Council Tax payment.
- 5.3 The rate of the additional earnings disregard of £17.10 in Housing Benefit has been increased to £37.10. The increase takes into account the temporary increase in the basic element of Working Tax Credit (WTC) for 2020/21 only. The changes made to the Housing Benefit (HB) regulations ensure that there is no negative effect on the award of HB as a result of the change to WTC but would have reduced entitlement to CTR. The Council's CTR scheme had already been set for 2020/21 and cannot be changed in year. In view of this, the excess of the Hardship Fund award from Government has been earmarked to ensure CTR claimants are not detrimentally affected by this earnings disregard change. The relevant shortfall created by the increase in WTC will be funded through s13(a)1(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 i.e. the Council's discretionary Council Tax hardship scheme. The increase has been calculated automatically and claimants do not need to separately apply for this help.
- 5.4 In response to COVID-19, the Government increased Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates to the 30th percentile of local rents from April 2020. This provides immediate help to claimants on both Housing Benefit (HB) and Universal Credit with their housing costs by alleviating shortfalls between their rent and housing support.
- 5.5 Residents have experienced difficulties in making payments over this period as income levels have fallen or become uncertain. The Council estimates that during 2020/21, the

Council may experience a reduction in income from Council Tax as a result of COVID-19 of £5.160m

5.6 There has been a sharp increase in the numbers of new claims and changes in circumstances received for Housing Benefits and Council Tax Reduction during lockdown. There has been an increase in benefit post received with 14,647 items of post received over the period April to 17 May 2020 compared with 9,507 items received over the same period in 2019 (an increase of 5,140). Much of this increase is due to increased number of Universal Credit data share information from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for working age Council Tax Reduction claimants.

5.7 Food Donations and Fundraising

5.8 Oldham Council has been working closely with the Emergency Food Providers across Oldham, ensuring people who are vulnerable can get access to food and everyday essentials. Since May 3rd 7,806 food items weighing 24,565.6kg have been donated, including personal hygiene products and cleaning products.

5.9 In addition over £73,000 has been raised to support local projects responding to coronavirus, with over £28,000 coming from donations.

5.10 Housing and Homelessness

5.11 Housing support has continued to be provided to residents through a remote operating model, implemented without a break in service, with the full range of housing advice provided via web, emails, and / or phones.

5.12 Oldham Council has continued to work with registered social landlords to ensure a steady flow of social housing properties are available to re-house our residents who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Weekly liaison (virtual) meetings with housing partners are held, mitigating risks and address concerns / support gaps as they arise.

5.13 Government guidance on social distancing has meant that 'A Bed Every Night' (ABEN) residents had to be temporarily accommodated through individual self-contained rooms in hotels which were procured through GMCA. We have since procured our own accommodation and re-housed residents at Shaw Road. The Council has also used other additional temporary accommodation units to cope with the increase in demand.

5.14 The Housing Options Team continues to work with households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to explore all housing options available. This includes looking at maximizing income, exploring the private rented sector and allocating social homes via the Council's housing register.

5.15 The Housing Team are supporting a cohort of people who have no recourse to public funds. Working in collaboration with GMCA and with funding from the Mayor's fund, we are looking to use one of our accommodation units (Union St) to support this cohort of people.

5.16 Wider accommodation has also been provided for hospital discharges and key workers as part of the response.

5.17 Oldham is working hard to continue our health and wellbeing priorities and improve the health and wellbeing of our residents. In 2019, Oldham refreshed its Health and Social Care Locality Plan 2019-2024. The Locality Plan describes how we will continue to deliver significant improvements in the health and wellbeing outcomes of our residents as we move towards place-based, person centred provision of care and services.

5.18 Support for Carers

5.19 The current pandemic is causing many people to experience additional stress and anxiety. Oldham Council recognises that carers, or those who are responsible for the welfare of someone else, are likely to find the current situation especially challenging. To support Oldham's carers, Shared Lives Oldham has been able to utilise its existing links within another of the MioCare Group's services – the Wellbeing Service – to set up an improvised, support network.

5.20 Managers and staff from these two teams have been visiting homes to provide support and deliver Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and medication. They've also provided opportunities for carers to take time out from their placement to go for a walk, offering a welcome break for both service users and carers alike.

5.21 Welfare Rights

5.22 The Welfare Rights team have been unable to carry out outreach sessions over the lockdown period and have supported residents by telephone (including representing residents in appeal hearings conducted over the telephone). The service has received most of its referrals during the lockdown period via the Community Hubs referral for financial support process and internally via social care teams over this period rather than from residents directly via the online form. Referrals for the period 16 March 2020 to 31 May 2020 were 354 (for the same period in 2019 it was 377).

5.23 A total of 138 applications to the Local Welfare Provision (LWP) scheme were made for the period 1 April to 13 May 2020 with 134 awards made. Over the same period in 2019, 195 applications were submitted, and 107 awards made. Although the number of applications made was lower than last year, the proportion of successful applications were higher to support those needing basic furniture and white goods when moving from temporary accommodation into new homes. The delivery of essential furniture, food vouchers white goods proved challenging in the early days of lockdown because of social distancing requirements and the service has supported efforts across Council services to map out food and furniture provision across the borough. LWP food voucher scheme rules were relaxed over lockdown to enable 2 food vouchers to be issued per month (rather than 2 over 6 months) to those vulnerable residents who were able to get out so were not eligible for the Hub Emergency Food provision but who did not have the money to buy food.

6 **Supporting Businesses and Oldham's Economy**

6.1 The effect of COVID – 19 has had a significant impact on the economy given the requirements of lockdown for businesses and residents which has placed businesses in crisis and has reduced income levels for residents.

6.2 Oldham is committed to minimising the economic impact of COVID-19. We are achieving this by supporting as many businesses as we can, while maximising creation of new jobs, self-employment opportunities and re-training opportunities whilst the private sector recovers.

6.3 Small Business Grants and Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Grants

6.4 The Government has made funding available to support those affected by COVID- 19. Small Business Grants of £10,000 have been distributed to our smallest businesses who on 11 March 2020 were eligible for Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) or Rural Rate Relief. Businesses in the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Sector have also been awarded grants of £10,000 (with a rateable value up to and including £15,000) or £25,000 (for businesses in these sectors with a rateable value of between £15,001 and less than £51,000) depending on their rateable value.

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- 6.5 The issuing of Cash Grants to businesses has been a key priority for the Council during the lockdown period. The Council worked across several service areas including Finance, Economy and Revenues and Benefits to deliver the grants and to ensure that businesses were advised correctly about the support available to them over the lockdown period. The service needed to mobilise and adapt systems and working procedures at pace to deliver funding and the payments started to be issued from 3 April 2020.
- 6.6 At 1 June 2020, the Council has supported 3,589 businesses with Small Business Grants and Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Cash Grants awarding £40.915m. A new discretionary Cash Grant scheme was launched on 28 May 2020 aimed at supporting those businesses not covered by the Small Business Grant and Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Grant schemes.
- 6.7 Business Rate Relief
- 6.8 The Government also introduced new Business Rate reliefs including the Expanded Retail Discount which effectively applies a 100% Business Rates holiday in 2020/21 to occupied properties wholly or mainly used as shops, restaurants, cafes, drinking establishments, cinemas and live music venues, for assembly and leisure or hotels, guest and boarding premises and self-catering accommodation.
- 6.9 The Government has announced a business rates holiday for nurseries in England for 2020/21. Those eligible for the relief are:
- occupied by providers on Ofsted's Early Years Register
 - wholly or mainly used for the provision of the Early Years Foundation Stage
- 6.10 Expanded Retail Discount and Nursery discount has been applied to Business Rates accounts giving eligible businesses a 100% payment holiday in 2020/21. This support has amounted to £24.864m. The Government is providing grant to compensate the Council for the reduction in the Business Rates income it will collect after applying the reliefs.

7 **The Transition from Lockdown to Recovery**

- 7.1 Building on the learning so far and the anticipated events to come, we are developing comprehensive recovery plans for all service areas. As we move from the immediate response to COVID-19 we will consider both transition and living with COVID-19 in an emerging new normality. We do this whilst we continue to respond to an ongoing critical incident where we are focused each day on saving the lives of Oldham's residents.
- 7.2 Our objectives and approach in Oldham are rooted in the Oldham Model, ensuring as we adapt to a changing world that we build Thriving Communities, an Inclusive Economy and work Co-operatively with each other. Our key objectives are:
- To continue to lead and support measures that manage demand on NHS services, particularly focusing on ensuring that those who are seriously unwell, through COVID-19 or other conditions, get the very best care.
 - To prioritise delivery of health, care services and other public services, including voluntary sector provision, to those who are most vulnerable or in need.
 - To implement measures, prior to and during a phased release of lockdown and beyond that prevent the spread of COVID-19 within health and care settings, places of work and in the community.

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- To maintain delivery of all essential public services and to continue to develop new models of public service delivery for each of the phases of recovery.
 - To encourage the residents of Oldham to adopt health seeking behaviours, accessing health and care services when they need them and taking steps in their own lives to promote physical and mental well-being.
 - Understanding and working together to address the economic impact of COVID-19 on the Oldham economy and its residents.
 - To maintain and build community resilience and promote social cohesion.
 - To maintain the trust and confidence of the community in the effectiveness of our multi agency response and to provide as much reassurance as possible.

7.3 Though COVID-19 will have significant impacts on our communities and our economy for years to come, we are committed to continuing to maximise the new ways of working that have developed, strengthening and developing the relationships that have formed between the public sector, partner organisations and Oldham's communities.

7.4 Detailed work is currently being undertaken to fully understand the impact that COVID-19 will have on Oldham. This work will be brought back to Council in due course.

8 Consultation

8.1 N/A

9 Financial Implications

9.1 The finances of the Council have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The financial pressures have been experienced since March but especially since the lockdown was announced on 23 March 2020. This has required the Council to incur additional expenditure to support the residents of Oldham during these extraordinary times. The Council has also lost income from fees and charges including commercial income from its investments and trading activities. The Government has provided some general funding to support the Council as well as some grants for specific initiatives.

General Grant Funding

9.2 The Council has received £14.272m (allocated and paid in two instalments) of general resources to support the financial pressures and this funding has increased the net revenue budget of the Council. In the main this grant is expected to meet the additional costs of Adult Social Care, but it is also to be used to support financial pressures such as:

- a) The increased costs of Children's Social Care.
- b) Increased costs from Homelessness.
- c) Preventative support to those residents deemed at high risk from COVID-19 - the 1.5 citizens that the Government has written to that are deemed to be particularly high risk if they catch the virus.
- d) Other areas within the Council where there is reduced income, rising costs or increased demand.

Without additional support from Government the Council is likely to have an in-year funding shortfall, however, it is expected that further general grant funding will be received from Government. The position is being closely monitored.

9.3 Clearly, a major area of increased spending is in relation to Adult Social Care with a package of support for care homes having been agreed as a priority issue. This is financed by the general Government funding. In addition, Oldham CCG has access to a £1.3bn national fund to support accelerated discharges from hospital as a result of COVID-19. Costs are claimed in arrears and this includes certain costs initially borne by the Council which are then recharged to the CCG. A detailed recording system has been put into place by the Finance Service in order to ensure that all appropriate costs can be charged to the funds provided by the Government or the CCG.

9.4 It is expected that Council Tax and Business Rates income will be lower than anticipated. As highlighted in the following paragraphs, Government has provided some support, but there is still likely to be a cash shortfall in year. The impact will be closely monitored. The budgetary impact will arise in 2021/22 rather than 2020/21.

Specific Grant Funding

9.5 The Council has been notified of specific grant funding which will provide financial support for initiatives and issues outlined above:

- a) Track, Test and Trace Funding Grant - As highlighted at paragraph 3.15, Local Authorities are central to supporting the new test and trace service across England. The Government is providing a new funding package of £300m. The individual Council funding allocations have not yet been announced but will provide support for the work the Council is doing.
- b) Infection Control Fund Grant – In order to support the work of care homes (as outlined in paragraph 3.25), the Council has received an allocation of £2.017m for infection control. This has been paid in recognition that many care providers are facing challenges and that care homes have been particularly susceptible to outbreaks of COVID-19. The funding is being paid in 2 equal instalments and has been allocated according to the number of care home beds in each area, with an adjustment to reflect the costs of operating in each area. There is clear guidance as to how the funding can be used and also detailed monitoring and reporting requirements.
- c) Hardship Grant - A report agreed by Cabinet on 23 April outlined the way in which the Council would use the Government grant of £3.015m. As outlined in Section 5, this will provide help with Council Tax payments for working age claimants of Council Tax Reduction (CTR) up to a maximum of £150 and other residents facing financial hardship.
- d) Small Business Grant Fund (SBGF) and Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund (RHLGF) - The Council received £54.738m to support the payment of the small business grants and the retail, hospitality and leisure grants as outlined at paragraph 6.3. At 1 June 2020, 3,589 grants had been paid at a value of £40.915m. The Government has issued guidance on a discretionary grant scheme which will use £2.501m of the £54.738m. The local scheme became operational on 27 May 2020 and will remain open for applications until 12 June 2020. There will be a reconciliation process and any balance of the £54.738m after the SBGF, RHLGF and discretionary grant payments have been made, will be returned to the Government.

Other Government Financial Support

9.5 The Government will provide financial support to the Council as it will be required to pay the increase in the Local Housing Allowance. This will be through increased payments of Housing Benefit Subsidy grant. This will be claimed in arrears.

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- 9.7 The Government has also introduced new Business Rate reliefs including the Expanded Retail Discount and Nursery Discount schemes. This effectively applies a 100% Business Rates holiday in 2020/21. The Government is providing grant to compensate the Council for the reduction in the Business Rates income it will collect after applying the reliefs. The grant to be received by the Council is £24.864m.

Additional Support from Council Resources

- 9.8 Cabinet, at its meeting on 23 April 2020, agreed to utilise up to £2.359m of Council reserves to supplement the unringfenced general Government grant (now £14.173m). This Council resource can be used to finance increased expenditure pressures but also, for example, offset reductions in parking charges and general fees and charges and introduce other measures to support the Oldham economy including businesses not eligible to take advantage of Government assistance schemes.

10 **Legal Services Comments**

- 10.1 There are no direct legal issues arising from the report, however, Central Government has issued emergency legislation and guidance in relation to many functions affected by the pandemic and it is important that such functions comply with or have regard to such provisions or guidance to ensure that the Council is acting lawfully. Further, the Council is required to maintain its decision-making processes, ensure good governance and that appropriate health and safety risk assessments are in place and operational to avoid legal challenge. (Colin Brittain)

11. **Co-operative Agenda**

- 11.1 As a Co-operative Council, Oldham is committed to tackling the impact of COVID-19, protecting our most vulnerable residents and communities. We are putting the voice of the resident at the heart of our response, ensuring the voice of lives experience and the people impacted by COVID-19 shapes our approach to mitigation and recover. (Jonathan Downs – Corporate Policy Lead)

12 **Human Resources Comments**

- 12.1 N/A

13 **Risk Assessments**

- 13.1 N/A

14 **IT Implications**

- 14.1 N/A

15 **Property Implications**

- 15.1 N/A

16 **Procurement Implications**

- 16.1 N/A

17 **Environmental and Health & Safety Implications**

- 17.1 N/A

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- 18 **Equality, community cohesion and crime implications**
- 18.1 The response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, and the emergency legislation powers introduced to tackle it, has had a significant impact on Oldham’s communities.
- 18.2 The analysis and data are still developing, but there are increasing reports that some groups are being hit harder by the pandemic than others. For example, in addition to the impact on older and disabled people, it is being reported that the illness affects ethnic minority communities more severely.
- 18.3 In Oldham we are committed to minimising the impact of COVID-19 across our communities. The steps we are taking to tackle the pandemic and the subsequent recovery planning, aim to support people, especially those groups with protected characteristics who are often most impacted.
- 18.4 To support this approach we have established an Advisory Group, made up of council, community and partnership representatives, to support Oldham Council and the wider partnership with its commitment to integrate Equality and Diversity throughout its Covid-19 response and subsequent recovery planning.
- 19 **Equality Impact Assessment Completed?**
- 19.1 Yes
- 20 **Key Decision**
- 20.1 No
- 21 **Key Decision Reference**
- 21.1 N/A
- 22 **Background Papers**
- 22.1 N/A
- 23 **Appendices**
- 23.1 N/A