

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 19 NOVEMBER 2020

CLLR FOALE –PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR TRANSFORMATION & ENVIRONMENT

Update on Portfolio Holder Priorities in relation to COVID-19 Recovery.

Environmental Health and Community Safety	<p>Environmental Health and Community Safety (EHCS) is a wide ranging service covering a number of statutory functions including food safety, health and safety, pollution control, licensing, private sector housing, financial assistance, nuisance, public health, anti-social behaviour and community safety. In addition there are a number of corporate functions undertaken such as corporate health and safety, equalities and diversity, safeguarding and emergency planning.</p> <p>The focus of this scrutiny update is primarily on Covid-19 recovery, however the City is still in the emergency response phase of the pandemic, at the same time as trying to recover. We have therefore included incident response and the impacts of Covid-19 on service demand, as well as recovery.</p> <p>The EHCS Service has been at the forefront of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, leading on behalf of the Council on a multi-agency basis with respect to Emergency Planning, Outbreak Control, Monitoring, enforcement and compliance. Across the service demand is up by 13% this year so far.</p> <p>The service is working with Devon County Council, the University of Exeter, Exeter College, Public Health England, Exeter City Council and the Police in tracking positive cases constantly to be able to respond quickly, through regular meetings. Staff have worked hard during September and October in response to rising numbers in the city and continue to support local businesses meet the national restrictions. Since April, the service has responded to 300 complaints and requests for advice from business specifically relating to Covid-19 and conducted 250 compliance visits.</p> <p>The food safety inspection programme has been severely disrupted by the pandemic due to businesses being closed, needing to protect vulnerable client groups and officer resource being needed to concentrate on Covid-19 regulation compliance and health and safety enforcement. The service has followed emergency guidance issued by the Food Standards Agency and has prioritised new unrated premises and those business that pose a higher risk for inspection. However it is projected that the service will be approximately 300 food inspections behind schedule at the end of the financial year, which is a position mirrored by all local authorities across the country.</p> <p>Private Sector Housing work is up by 55% year on year, although proactive inspections will be paused again during the second lockdown (between June and End of October, around 230 proactive inspections of Houses in Multiple Occupation were</p>
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undertaken; much of this work taking longer due to controls in place to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

There has been an increased amount of case work on illegal evictions as a result of restrictions imposed by Coronavirus regulations.

Work around information provision to landlords and tenants has continued throughout, with four Covid-19 specific communications being sent out and the hosting of two live webinars on the subject (each attended by over 100 landlords). Virtual Renting Minefield events have been planned and are taking place the week beginning 16 November 2020, which will consist of ten presentations and a live webinar, all with Covid-19 specific information. At the time of writing this update over 175 private landlords were booked to partake with this number expected rise

Since the first lockdown, and continuing throughout the restrictions, work around noise nuisance has increased significantly and was up 85% on year to the end of October. It is important to note that this increase has been seen in all wards and is not a 'student' problem. In fact, much of the increase was seen over the months when students were not in the city in large numbers.

Partnership work with University of Exeter and the Police has continued involving staff from across the service. We continue the successful model that has been deployed since 2015 by working with our partners for the two-week period in September when students returned to the city. During this period we worked up to 1am every day with two officers on patrol. We visited over 150 active noise complaints out of hours, of which 40% were not student related.

Disabled Facilities Grants work has continued throughout the lockdown and restrictions. This important work adapting properties to prevent hospital and care service admissions has seen over £324,000 spent so far this year, including over 60 stairlifts fitted in 2020 (an increase of 130% on 2019 and 270% on 2018). In addition over £140,000 has been spent on other matters under the financial assistance policy which have seen hazards removed and fuel poverty reduced.

The Licensing Team have continued to issue licence applications and renewals, and following changes in legislation, have been able to hold remote committee hearings. Assisting with small business grants and providing advice to taxi operators to help them continue to operate, the Team continue to look at ways of facilitating businesses and minimising the impact of changes in licensing legislation. In addition changes have been approved by Licensing Committee in response to the revised Statutory Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Standards.

Work has continued in other key areas throughout such as proactive inspections of authorised processes, environmental

monitoring and statutory consultations. The pests control team have been particularly busy with demand upon their professional services currently up 22% this year.

It has been important for the service to support a strong Community Safety Partnership and ensure that the work and meetings of the partnership continue. The service has worked on a multi-agency basis to monitor key community safety data in the city which has included hate crime, domestic and sexual violence and abuse and anti-social behaviour. In response to such trends being identified, work has been conducted with other partners as appropriate.

The Community Safety Partnership held a virtual conference on hate crime and preventing radicalisation coinciding with Hate Crime Awareness Week 2020 on 13 October 2020. The event included two speakers (one ex right wing extremist, one ex Islamic extremist) discussing the methods used by extremist groups to groom vulnerable young people. A wide range of professionals, elected members and voluntary took part in the event.

Following a government award of a £58,516 Compliance and Enforcement Grant, work has been conducted to draw up a plan to deploy Safer City Ambassadors. We will be seeking to deploy 4 such Ambassadors from the start of December to act as a visible presence on the High Street and Neighbourhood Shopping Areas with the aim of providing guidance and support to businesses and the general public through engagement education and encouragement on Covid-19 requirements, with the aim of creating a safe and welcoming city. It is important to highlight that in line with government guidance, the deployment of Safer City Ambassadors in the City will be to engage, educate and encourage and they will not have any enforcement responsibilities. Business related compliance work will continued to be dealt with be experienced Environmental Health personnel.

During lockdown expertise from the Business Regulation Team has been drawn upon to assist with the ongoing need to produce consistent risk assessments for implementation across all council services. Exeter City Council risk assessments have been completed for the following work areas:

- Office workers
- Visiting Officers
- Outdoor Workers
- MRF
- Occupational Therapy

- Corn Exchange
- Custom House
- Matford Centre & Sunday Market
- Guildhall
- RAMM
- Topsham Ferry

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourist Information Centre • Red Coat Guides • Underground Passages <p>The implementation of these risk assessments has also involved the review of a number of existing risk assessments in work areas where there is a risk of transmission of the virus.</p> <p>There has been a high demand for assistance on health and safety related issues across the council during the lockdown and reopening of customer facing services. The Principal Health and Safety Officer post was advertised and interviews were held. The post was offered to a candidate who subsequently withdrew, consequently an existing member of staff from another team has been seconded into the team as a Health & Safety Officer to meet demand and provide resilience.</p> <p>A significant amount of work has been done to support the opening of the Leisure Centres. This has involved health and safety training of Centre Managers, assistance with the production of day to day risk assessments, pre-opening inspection of the facilities and assistance with equipment moves to ensure this was carried out in a safe manner. The COVID-19 risk assessment has been completed and there is supplemental work around consultation and implementation as services reopen. Due to the recent lockdown this gives an opportunity to provide further training to those members of staff who have not been furloughed and to carry out building compliance issues such as the fire and legionella risk assessments.</p> <p>An internal track and trace system was set up to enable the Corporate Health & Safety Team to provide advice and assistance to Managers. We continue to provide advice in conjunction with HR on the issues relating to self-isolation of staff and mitigating measures to ensure that spread of the virus is minimised.</p> <p>The Exeter Safety Advisory Group continues to meet to ensure a consistent multi-agency approach to any planned events. Unfortunately most planned events have been cancelled at a late stage following lockdown announcements, although there has been ongoing support to provide event organisers with clear information on restrictions.</p>
<p>Car Parking</p>	<p>Car Parks have remained largely open during the COVID period. Social distancing reminders, one way systems at pinch-points such as pay-stations and cashless payment options have all ensured sites remain safe and operational.</p> <p>Mary Arches Street was closed for a number of months as the adjacent Guildhall and Harlequins car parks could easily cope with the number of customers wishing to park. As demand grew then Mary Arches was re-opened.</p>

Income projections were reviewed in the light of the initial lockdown announcement and a revised emergency budget adopted. These projections were based on achieving a reduced percentage of income across the four quarters of the financial year; 5% of original budgeted Q1 income, 30% of Q2, 70% of Q3 and 90% of Qtr4.

Performance was better than predicted as indicated in the table below:-

Month	Original Budget	Emergency Budget	Actual Income	% of Original
April	633,545	31,677	6,747	1%
May	665,000	33,250	21,117	3%
June	678,064	33,903	128,915	19%
Qtr 1 Total	1,976,609	98,830	156,779	8%
July	736,796	221,039	397,700	54%
August	755,362	226,609	479,134	63%
September	708,283	212,485	462,917	65%
Qtr 2 Total	2,200,441	660,133	1,339,751	61%
October	721,048	504,734	517,666	72%

Projections for the remainder of the year are now being reviewed following the second lockdown. In addition, the longer term assumption that car park income will return to 90% once we are out of a pandemic situation may be optimistic given the expected rise in people working from home and our own ambitions to reduce car use in the city. A sustained return to 75% during 2021/22, which might be a reasonable estimate based on the 72% achieved in October, would result in a £2.1M reduction in pre-COVID budgeted annual car park income. Options are currently being worked through to bring income back up towards previous levels.