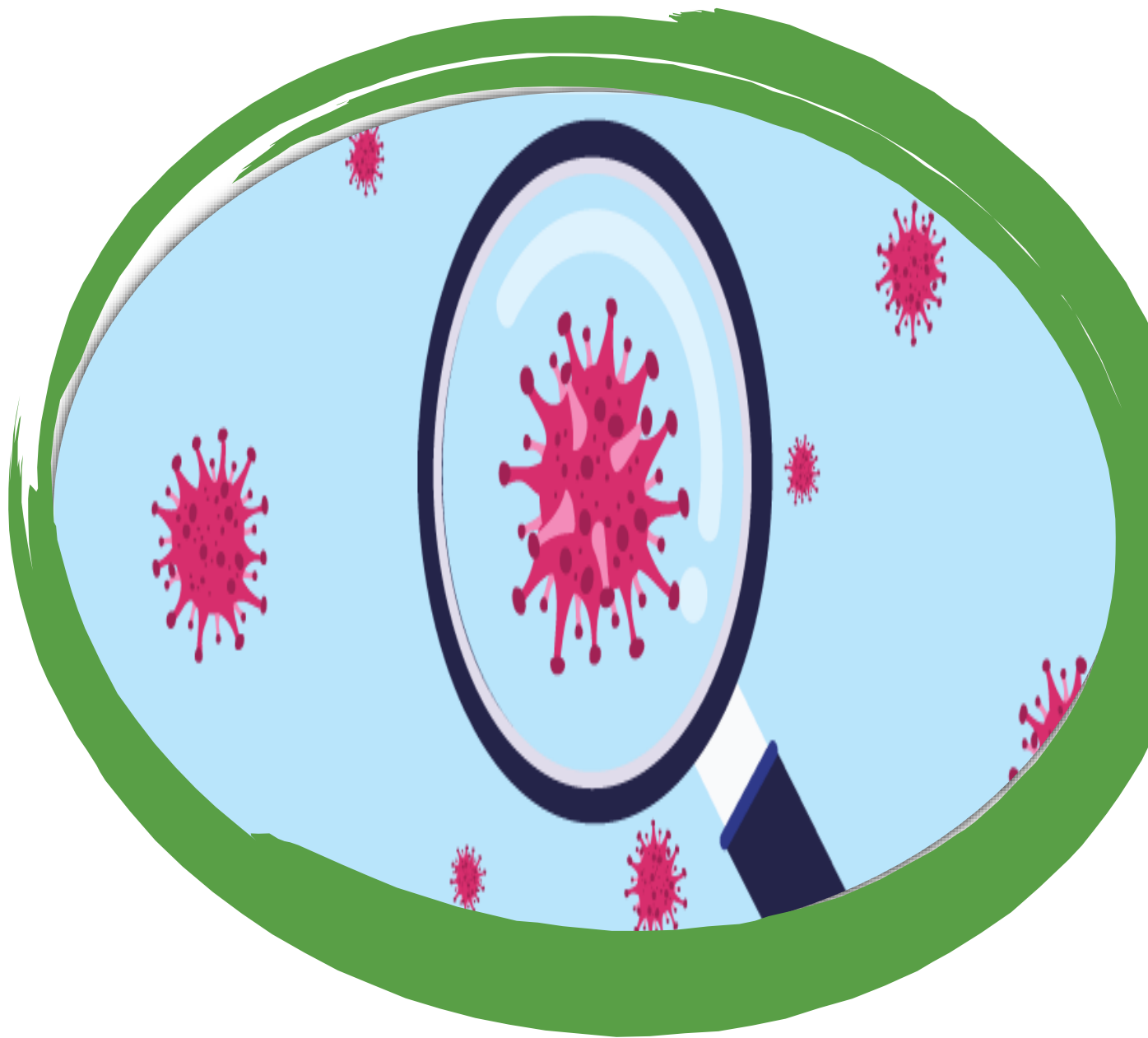


Response to Covid-19 in Milton Keynes Task and Finish Group

Final Report
December 2021



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Note on the Text

After the first reference, the “Response to Covid-19 in Milton Keynes Task and Finish Group” will be referred to as “the TFG” and Milton Keynes Council will be referred to as “the Council” throughout this report.

1. Introduction and Task and Finish Group Membership

The Response to Covid-19 in Milton Keynes Task and Finish Group was established in June 2020 by the Scrutiny Management Committee to provide an analysis of the response by Milton Keynes Council and its partners to the Covid-19 pandemic, assess what worked and what did not, understand the value of any lessons learned during the crisis and make recommendations on strategies and procedures the Council and its partners should consider putting in place so that it is in a position to provide a robust but flexible response to any such future emergencies.

The Terms of Reference for the TFG can be found at Annex A.

The original membership of the TFG during 2020/21 was on a 2:2:2 basis across the political parties as follows:

- Councillor J Ferrans (LD)
- Councillor D Hopkins (C) (Chair)
- Councillor H Minns (L)
- Councillor A Reilly (LD)
- Councillor E Wales (L)
- Councillor A Walker (C)

The membership of the Task and Finish Group was updated for the 2021/22 council year with Councillor A Cryer-Whitehead (L) replacing Councillor Wales.

Elizabeth Richardson has served as the Overview and Scrutiny Officer during the TFG's work.

The purpose of this report is to outline the work the TFG has carried out to scrutinise the response of the Council and its partner organisations to the current COVID-19 pandemic, to see whether there are lessons to be learned and to present a number of recommendations based on its findings. The report builds on the two previous interim reports which were presented to the Scrutiny Management Committee in September 2020 and to Cabinet in December 2020.

When the TFG first started meeting in the summer of 2020 it was hoped that the stringent lockdown measures taken nationally in the spring would have been sufficient to prevent a second wave of the virus spreading in the autumn. It is clear now that the predicted second wave, and a subsequent third wave, did happen, necessitating the TFG, with the approval of the Scrutiny Management Committee, to extend its work into the 2021/22 council year.

2. Foreword

I want to thank everyone who contributed to the Task and Finish Group's work over what has turned out to be a much longer period of time than first envisaged. The scale of the responses, and the honesty with which people shared both the hardships they'd experienced and their hopes for the future, was incredible. It has given the TFG a huge amount to think about in terms of the complex different ways that this pandemic has impacted us over 2020/2021 and how it is likely to affect us in the long-term.

Despite the success of the vaccine programme, Covid-19 remains prevalent both locally and nationally. Life has not yet returned to "normal" and perhaps it will never go back to what we knew before the start of the pandemic. We need to capture all that we have learnt, prepare for many months (possibly years) of recovery and reflect on how life in Milton Keynes may never be quite the same ever again.

Finally, can I thank the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive who offered detailed evidence (in writing and in person) to the TFG on four occasions, Elizabeth Richardson who as Committee Manager served to ensure I was just about on schedule as Chairman! ... and finally thank my fellow TFG members who worked with focus and diligence through what were often quite intense and fast-moving meetings.

On behalf of the Task and Finish Group, I commend this report to Cabinet and the wider Council.

Councillor D Hopkins
Chair
November 2021

3. Task and Finish Group Work Programme

The TFG met on 10 occasions during 2020 and 2021, hearing from a range of witnesses, from both the Council and its external partners and discussing with them their services or organisations response to the pandemic, what they thought the problems were, how they overcame them, lessons learned and what they would do differently in the future.

Many witnesses backed up their reports and presentations with written notes afterwards, which the TFG have found invaluable as reference points in compiling this report.

A schedule of the meetings and details of the subjects covered, together with the list of witnesses, is given below:

Date	Subject & Witness
15 July 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• View from the Administration: Councillor Peter Marland - Leader of the Council• Overview of Events and Management Action Plan: Michael Bracey – Chief Executive Milton Keynes Council• Response by Children’s Services: Mac Heath – Director of Children’s Services Milton Keynes Council• Communications and Local Support Centre: Sarah Gonsalves – Director of Policy, Insight & Communications
5 August 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local First Responders/Local Resilience Forum: Michael Osborne – Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Bucks & MK Fire & Rescue Service• Probation Service: Nicola Webb – Head of NPS for Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire• MKC Adult Services: Mick Hancock – Group Head of Commissioning; Sandra Rankin – Head of Service Older People's Housing and Community Support Linda Ellen – Head of Service MKC Simpson Care & Response Service• Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils (MKALC): Philip Ayles – on behalf of MKALC

Date	Subject & Witness
19 August 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MK Community Foundation: Ian Revell, CEO, • Community Action MK: Clare Walton, CEO
2 September 2020	Interim Report presented to Scrutiny Management Committee
15 October 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The opportunities and possible IT revolution Covid-19 has prompted: Martin Ferguson, Director of Policy & Research at SOCITM¹ • The work of Food Bank Xtra over the last 6 months: Sharon Bridglalsingh, Louisa Hobbs and Fola Komolafe • SEN provision during the Pandemic and the re-opening of schools in Milton Keynes: Mac Heath, Director of Children's Services
29 October 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update on progress across the Borough, possible future problems: Councillor Peter Marland - Leader of the Council • Continuing impact on service delivery and council staff, future working arrangements: Michael Bracey – Chief Executive Milton Keynes Council
3 November 2020	<i>Closed meeting to discuss format of the report and future work plan.</i>
7 December 2020	Second interim Report presented to Scrutiny Management Committee Planning Group
15 December 2020	Second interim Report presented to Cabinet
2 March 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Update: Councillor Peter Marland - Leader of the Council, and Michael Bracy - Chief Executive, Milton Keynes Council • Update from the community/voluntary sector: Ian Revell - CEO, MK Community Foundation and Clare Walton - CEO. Community Action MK • Impact of the pandemic on the level of domestic/child abuse in Milton Keynes: – Sue Burke, CE, MK-ACT
6 September 2021	Further update from the Voluntary Sector: Ian Revell -CEO, MK Community Foundation

¹ Society for Innovation, Technology and Modernisation

Date	Subject & Witness
4 October 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report from the Milton Keynes Arts and Heritage Alliance (AHA): Francesca Skelton – Chair MK AHA and David Foster – CE, The Parks Trust • Update on the Care Sector and Adult Services: Victoria Collins – Director, Adult Services • General Update: Michael Bracey, Chief Executive, Milton Keynes Council
1 November 2021	<i>Closed meeting to discuss format of the report and finalise last set of recommendations</i>
14 December 2021	Presentation of final report to Cabinet

In between meetings the TFG received and studied a large amount of background documentation in order to support its scrutiny of this subject.

During this period the Council’s permanent scrutiny committees also carried out a significant amount of work examining the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the council services within their remits. Where possible, the TFG has tried not to duplicate this work but has used the evidence and the outcomes from these meetings to inform its own work and the formulation of the recommendations in this report.

Outline details of the work done by the other scrutiny committees is set out in Annex B of this report.

In September of 2020 the TFG produced an interim report for the Scrutiny Management Committee detailing the work it had done so far and making a number of recommendations which were relevant at the time.

A second interim report was presented to the Scrutiny Management Committee Planning Group on 7 December and to Cabinet, together with the Recommendation Tracker document, to Cabinet on 15 December 2020.

Although not formally presented to Cabinet due to the election period in the spring of 2021 until July 2021, a number of additional recommendations were circulated to the Chief Executive, the Leader of the Council and the voluntary groups involved, following the meeting held on 2 March 2021.

Documentation associated with all of the TFG’s meetings is available on the Council’s website at: [CMIS: Response to Covid-19 Pandemic in Milton Keynes Task and Finish Group](#)

Since the start of the pandemic meetings which would normally be held in public have been live streamed via the Council’s own YouTube channel. Recordings of these meetings are available via: [Milton Keynes Council YouTube Channel](#)

4. Acknowledgments, Thanks and Commendations

The TFG would like to thank all council officer colleagues and invited witnesses who assisted with preparing documents and presentations, giving up their time to speak at the meetings and their assistance in supplying supplementary information when requested to do so. It would also like to thank all those who provided written submissions as their contribution to the work of the Group.

In particular, the TFG is grateful for the diligence and patience of Elizabeth Richardson in managing the Group through the various stages of the review, which has been an intense period of work for all involved.

The TFG received a detailed response to its questions from the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council and would like to thank them and, in thanking both for their hard work and commitment during the pandemic emergency, ask them to pass on the TFG's thanks and congratulations to all council staff.

Special mention should be made of Sarah Gonsalves (Director of Policy, Insight and Communications) and her team, who started being involved in the Council's response to Covid-19 much earlier than everyone else, when they helped establish a quarantine centre for travellers returning to the UK from Wuhan in China in a conference centre at Kents Hill. One hundred and five Britons and 95 European citizens, together 13 staff and medics, arrived at RAF Brize Norton on 9 February 2020 and stayed in Milton Keynes for 14 days.

The TFG wishes to congratulate the team at the Council involved in the Looked After Children Service and in the safeguarding of children at risk, all those involved in the general care of children and all those working in sometimes difficult circumstances in schools and colleges across the borough.

The TFG congratulates the Adult Social Care Team for their outstanding efforts during the pandemic.

The TFG received evidence relating to the excellent work being undertaken by the Milton Keynes Food Bank(s) and offers its congratulations and thanks to all involved. The TFG would also like to commend the work of the local Community Fridges in Milton Keynes for their support to people in food poverty by providing both cooked meals on the premises and fresh produce to anyone and everyone, regardless of personal circumstances.

The Council's external partners, particularly the Community Foundation and Community Action MK and the voluntary organisations with which they liaise, should also be thanked for their efforts in managing the pandemic and the support they have provided to both the residents of Milton Keynes and the Council.

The TFG commends the partners who make up the Local Resilience Forum and thanks them for their continuing support.

The TFG noted the presentations received regarding Home Care provision and asks that the thanks of the TFG be passed on to all staff involved in delivering this essential service to some of the most vulnerable residents in Milton Keynes during this difficult time.

The Council should also be commended for its innovative initiative in establishing a network of Community Champions across the Borough who took important messages about Covid-19 to their local communities, some of which were hard to reach by other means.

Due to the restrictions imposed by the Government's lockdown measures and the continued need for social distancing between people not of the same household, this is the first Task and Finish Group to hold most of its meetings remotely, using modern technology to facilitate participation by both members of the Group and the witnesses giving evidence. The Group would like to thank all those involved in the technological aspects of running its meetings and making them a success.

Finally, the Group would like to thank Iain Stewart MP, Milton Keynes South for his comments, some of which have been incorporated in this report.

5. Recommendations

After each tranche of its work the TFG formulated a number of recommendations as follows:

- Initial recommendations presented in the Interim Report to the Scrutiny Management Committee on 2 September 2020;
- Additional Recommendations presented to Cabinet in the second Interim Report on 15 December 2020;
- Further Recommendations presented to Cabinet on 13 July 2021 as a referral document from the March 2021 meeting of TFG.

The full text of the above listed recommendations, together with information on how they were actioned and by whom, is included as **Annex D** of this report.

The Group's final tranche of recommendations, from the work done during the autumn of 2021, is presented below:

Social Recovery

Recommendation

Referral

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. That the Council learns from the experience of the past 20 months and adopts policies that ensure emergency accommodation and support is offered to rough sleepers on a stepped approach to enable them to move on and considers what additional work the Council can do to prevent/reduce the number of rough sleepers in the future. | <i>Cabinet /
Homelessness
Prevention</i> |
| 2. That the Council continues to work with key partners to prevent individuals in financial hardship from becoming homeless by providing early intervention, advice and support and encouraging people into employment where possible. | <i>Cabinet /
Homelessness
Prevention</i> |
| 3. That the Task and Finish Group welcomes the work being done to address Child Poverty by the Council working with partners in early years, education and youth provision, to address the disadvantages caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and improve outcomes for free school meal eligible children and their families across the borough. | <i>Cabinet /
Children's
Services</i> |
| 4. That the Council Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation and implements the changes set out in the Domestic Abuse Bill (2020), including contributing to the new Domestic Abuse Strategy, embedding new working practices and increasing the number of domestic abuse champions in the Borough. | <i>Cabinet /
Adult Services
/
Homelessness
prevention</i> |

Recommendation**Referral**

- | | |
|--|--|
| 5. That the Council works with partners to tackle loneliness and social isolation for all ages, including developing a cross-borough Good Neighbour Network, holding a series of community engagement events, developing a community asset register, piloting a 'phone buddies scheme, and exploring social prescribing. | <i>Cabinet /
Adult Services
/ Voluntary
sector</i> |
| 6. That the Council works with the Community Foundation to identify inequalities resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic and updates its recovery plan in light of the findings. | <i>Cabinet /
Community
Foundation</i> |
| 7. That a comprehensive suite of safeguarding training be provided for all staff and councillors in order to improve their understanding of different types of vulnerabilities and the reporting of concerns. | <i>Cabinet / HR</i> |
| 8. That given the significant rise in on-line fraud during the pandemic, more work is done to develop public education programmes so that local residents have the skills to identify and combat on-line fraud and grooming techniques and have the confidence to report incidences to the relevant authorities. | <i>Cabinet /
SaferMK</i> |

Community Recovery**Recommendation****Referral**

- | | |
|--|---|
| 9. That the challenges and opportunities currently faced by the Borough's voluntary and community sector and their services (including the Foodbank) and how best they can be supported in the future, be identified. | <i>Cabinet /
Voluntary
Sector</i> |
| 10. That working with the Community Foundation, the Council continues to support the Strategic Recovery Fund which helps community groups/organisations and so called 'seldom asked groups' specifically requiring funding to assist with their day-to-day running costs to aid recovery from the pandemic. | <i>Cabinet /
Community
Foundation</i> |
| 11. That the Council, Community Foundation and Community ActionMK work together to establish and maintain the local volunteer base / register. | <i>Council /
Voluntary
Sector</i> |
| 12. That the Council supports the development and promotion of a detailed Milton Keynes Community Service Directory to enable residents, community, parish and town councils and service providers to search for community groups, organisations and charities local to them and based on their local needs. | <i>Cabinet /
Community
Foundation</i> |

Recommendation**Referral**

- | | |
|--|--|
| 13. That, with advice from the Community Foundation, an asset-based Community Development Strategy that supports the building of strong, resilient and sustainable communities is developed and implemented. | <i>Cabinet /
Community
Foundation</i> |
| 14. That the Council and Community Foundation be encouraged to assist organisations to develop their business plans and the right skill set for their organisation to enable them to apply for appropriate support funding. . | <i>Voluntary
Sector</i> |
| 15. That continued engagement with local communities through community, town and parish councils and key partners in order to identify any key recovery issues and adapt the Milton Keynes Council Plan in the light of any issues that emerge, be maintained. | <i>Cabinet /
Customer
and
Community
Services</i> |

Arts, Heritage and Leisure Recovery**Recommendation****Referral**

- | | |
|--|---|
| 16. That work be done with sports facility and leisure centre providers across the Borough to ensure their recovery plans are robust and designed to increase the usage of those sports facilities and leisure centres to improve the health and wellbeing of our communities. | <i>Cabinet /
Leisure and
Community
Services</i> |
| 17. That the published statistics about infections and hospitalisations provide more analysis, and in an accessible format, of who is affected and the pattern of transmission. | <i>Public
Health?</i> |
| 18. That both the Council and the Community Foundation continue to provide funding to support small and large cultural organisations through recovery, with grants, rate relief etc. | <i>Council /
Community
Foundation</i> |
| 19. That local artists and freelance practitioners be supported and valued with internal commissioning to ensure we have the talent, skills and creativity in Milton Keynes to be the leading cultural city we aim to be (MK2050 Strategy). | <i>Council</i> |
| 20. That capital investment support be provided (perhaps match funding Arts Council England [ACE] applications) so that music venues and clubs etc which are in need of ventilation improvements and or expansion of facilities to improve distancing, can make the necessary alterations. | <i>Council /
Community
Foundation</i> |

Recommendation	Referral
21. That the Council continues to support the extension of licensed premises areas to allow outdoor / pavement hospitality to continue.	<i>Council</i>
22. That the necessary support is in place to enable cultural activities and projects that build confidence and reach into communities to reduce isolation can continue.	<i>Council / Community Foundation</i>

Business

Recommendation	Referral
23. That the Council's "Keeping In Touch" with business group reconvenes and meets with the Milton Keynes Business Community on a regular basis to reassure it that the Council is fully operational and that it's business as usual, even though the way in which some council services are accessed and delivered may have changed.	<i>Cabinet</i>
24. That the Council continues to discuss the needs of the business community with its representatives to ensure that it can access all available means of support from whatever source.	<i>Cabinet / Finance Dept</i>

Follow-Up

Recommendation	Referral
25. That the Task and Finish Group requests follow-up reports or updates on its previous recommendations as follows: <i>Recommendations made on 2 September 2020:</i>	
3b(i-iv) That feedback is provided on how the levelling up of access to reliable, high-speed broadband is to be achieved as the digital based healthcare, homeworking and other applications are only as robust as the weakest part of the network across the city.	<i>Cabinet</i>
3c(i) That a report be prepared on the provision and use of adapted technology for keeping older people in their own homes;	<i>Adult Services</i>
4a(ii) That these "readiness" recommendations be 4c(ii) implemented now as a precautionary measure;	<i>Cabinet</i>

Recommendation	Referral
4a(v) That although update provided was informative, it does not address the Task and Finish Group's recommendation that a corporate subscription to the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils be arranged so that vital, Covid-specific information from BALC can be widely disseminated.	Parish Liaison Team
4c That clarification is provided as to who would co-ordinate the work of volunteers should the need to mobilise them arise again the future:	Council / Community Foundation / Community Action MK
8a That this "readiness recommendation be implemented now as a precautionary measure	
26. That additional updates be provided on the implementation of any recommendations previously marked as "Noted" now that things are (for all intents and purposes) back to some form of normality.	All referrals
27. That the Task and Finish Group considers there is still further work which needs to be done to scrutinise and learn from the effects of the pandemic on Milton Keynes, and therefore requests that the Scrutiny Management Committee considers allocating some, or all the items listed below to appropriate scrutiny committees for the 2022/23 Work Programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the local Milton Keynes Council Risk Register – learning from national experience and national best practice; • Review local resilience planning – stress test plans and scenarios in the event of new variants etc; • Review planning issues / future expansion (Plan:MK2) considering lessons learned from the Covid-19 experience; • Review, assess and mitigate the possible impacts of future lockdowns; • Review the impact of Covid-19 on the social care sector in Milton Keynes; • Review the ongoing impacts on some communities where Covid fell disproportionately; • Review the long-term impact of the pandemic on local towns and communities within Milton Keynes; 	Scrutiny Management Committee

6. The Evidence

The TFG heard from a wide range of witnesses from various sectors of the community in Milton Keynes as set out in Section 3 of this report. Where possible the TFG provided witnesses in advance with a list of topics or questions it wanted them to address during their presentations. The witnesses found this helpful, and it meant that the evidence taking sessions were very focussed, providing the TFG with the insight it needed. Several of the witnesses then also provided additional, written responses after the meeting which, in its turn the TFG found helpful, particularly when it was formulating its recommendations. Written responses from witnesses are available to view on-line at: [CMIS: Response to Covid-19 Pandemic in Milton Keynes Task and Finish Group](#) .

Below is a summary of some of the key issues discussed at each meeting.

15 July 2020

View from the Administration

Councillor Marland reported that Milton Keynes had been affected by the pandemic for longer than the 17 weeks since lockdown as it had been designated an isolation centre for travellers returning on special flights from Wuhan in China in February.

Due to the way in which the Council's system of delegated decisions worked it had been possible to maintain a process of open and transparent decision making, even in emergency situations. He had had regular, weekly calls with the leaders of both opposition groups to keep them up to date and share with them information of a sensitive nature, which was not generally available, enabling the opposition leaders to understand the decisions being made and the necessity for them.

Councillor Marland stressed the point that this was not a political emergency and information needed to be shared across all three political groups. He was also meeting regularly with the local MPs.

Overview of Events and Management Action Plan

The Chief Executive had prepared an extensive PowerPoint presentation setting out events and how they had affected Milton Keynes up to this point in time. He also provided a written response to the questions and themes the TFG had asked him to address in advance of the meeting. Both these documents are available on the Council's website via the link to CMIS given above.

Response by Children's Services

The Director of Children's Services reported that there was real concern about whether all children would return to school as planned by the Government in September 2020. Children's Services were working on how to re-socialise children

during the summer break so that they were ready for school in September. They would also be working to encourage parents, who might be reluctant to send their children back to school, that this would be in the children's best interests.

Schools in Milton Keynes had stayed open to provide support for the children of key workers and those who might be vulnerable in other settings during the pandemic. The TFG heard that attendance locally was about 16%, which was higher than the current national average.

Communications and Local Support Centre

The Director of Policy, Insight and Communications reported on the number and type of communications that the Council had made since the start of the pandemic across all media platforms, together with the number of people who had read them. She also explained how communications were changing as lockdown eased and provided details of publication dates for key Covid-19 documentation produced by the Council such as the [MKC Local Outbreak Plan](#). Finally, she detailed the extent and range of the Council's communications with the local Parish and Town Councils. Her written report is also available on CMIS.

5 August 2020

Local First Responders / Local Resilience Forum

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer from the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service (BMKFRS) reported to the Committee on behalf of the Local Resilience Forum. He advised that response capability remained relatively unaffected, although prevention and protection activity had been scaled back consistent with the requirements of social-distancing, support for the shielding programme and maintaining sound infection prevention and control measures. Partnership activities were refreshed to ensure those at most risk received the necessary and appropriate support.

A number of operational committees had been established as part of the Local Resilience Forum, including Strategic Coordination Groups, Tactical Coordination Groups, a Community Hubs Working Group, a Media Advisory Cell and a Finance and Legal sub-group as part of the ongoing recovery effort. A task and finish group, which was being chaired by BMKFRS had recently been formed to develop an exercise to explore the possible consequences of Local Outbreak Plan activation.

Probation Service

The National Probation Service had issued guidance to local Probation Delivery Units, Approved Premises and its staff in Courts, to ensure that the guidance issued by Public Health England / Wales in relation to suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19 and to limit the spread of the virus, were being followed. Plans had also been put in place to release additional staff, if required, to the front line if they had been working elsewhere.

A range of 'Exceptional Delivery Models' had been developed, which could be used to cover all aspects of probation work where it was not possible to deliver services as normal due to staffing levels. The underlying principles of the contingency plans were to prioritise the safety of probation staff and service users and to maintain a focus upon public protection. This included prioritising cases which were assessed as high or very high risk of serious harm, domestic abuse and safeguarding both children and adult cases. In line with government guidance, the Probation Service was also ensuring it adhered to social distancing measures wherever possible and adopting different methods of supervising offenders as appropriate.

Response by Adult Services

The Team from Adult Services reported that in Milton Keynes they had been able to continue to provide services although the way in which many of these were being delivered had had to change, but vulnerable people continued to receive the support and care they needed.

At the beginning of the pandemic Adult Services identified that care homes were likely to need additional support due to the vulnerabilities of their residents. The Council provided the 47 care homes in Milton Keynes with both practical and financial support, including reliable supplies of PPE as other supply chains collapsed.

All building-based day centres were closed in March 2020 as part of the Government's lockdown to mitigate the risk from COVID-19. However, these closures had had a significant impact on service users and carers who relied on this form of support. Council teams, alongside other providers, kept in touch with vulnerable people who were accessing day services prior to the lockdown and, where needed, staff have commissioned additional support at home and in supported living.

Home care services had continued to operate largely as normal since March 2020. Initial concerns about the supply of PPE and staff sickness levels were managed well and therefore the disruption to service users had been minimal.

The TFG welcomed the information that a [Milton Keynes Borough Care Home Support Plan](#) (as required by Central Government) was in place.

Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils (MKALC)

The MKALC representative reported that parish councils felt that some communications from the Council could have been more timely. Parish councils knew their local areas and were ready and willing to help the Council get its messages about Covid-19 out to local residents provided they received the information from the Council. He also said providing parish councils with regular information on the number of cases in their areas would be useful so that parishes could ramp up their local alerts to residents.

Town and parish councils had lost income from the closure of community centres, sports grounds and swimming pools; more information on where to go for help and support or how to apply for any relevant grants would have been welcome.

A lot of useful information specifically for town and parish councils was coming from the Buckinghamshire Association of Local Councils but not all local parish councils were members.

19 August 2020

MK Community Foundation

Many organisations had taken time to adapt to new ways of working, and a few had closed down due to the high numbers of staff shielding. The Community Foundation and Community Action worked to signpost people to other services. The Community Foundation took the lead in raising money to grant-fund the additional support needed by residents, and the transformation of services required by many voluntary organisations. So far £423,000 had been awarded in grants as part of the Foundation's Covid-19 Emergency Appeal Fund. A list of grants given is available on the Community Foundation's website at: [Community Foundation Grants Funded Through Covid-19 Emergency Appeal](#)

Detailed case studies of some of the awards made are also available on the Community Foundation's website at: [Emergency Appeal Case Studies](#)

Community Action MK

Over the four months since March 2020 the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in Milton Keynes had provided essential support to the most vulnerable people in local communities. The sector had adapted and changed its practices in response to intelligence and information gathered at grassroots. No one asked for, or indeed commissioned this response, it happened because the sector believed in the importance of communities and its collective mission to support people when they need it.

The Pandemic had amplified the vital role of volunteering and the need for community support. Milton Keynes Council (and indeed the NHS) needed to work with the Voluntary Sector as an equal and strategic partner.

Local VCS organisations had shifted their service delivery model overnight from bringing people together to keeping people apart whilst remaining connected, despite significant reductions in their incomes.

15 October 2020

Covid-19 Led IT Revolution

The TFG noted that had the pandemic hit two years earlier, residents and businesses in many rural (and urban 'not spot' areas) would have found it far more challenging to stay at home and stay safe, access key services, shopping and

entertainment without the progress in the provision of connectivity that had been achieved across the Borough. However, it recognised that there were still 'not spots' and inconsistent levels of broadband connectivity across the Borough and requested that the Broadband Stakeholder Group refocused its efforts on addressing these issues working in partnership with technology providers.

Foodbank Xtra

Foodbank Xtra was a temporary project established in March 2020 as a partnership between Milton Keynes Foodbank and the Council to meet the emergency food needs of local residents caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. It was anticipated that this partnership will now continue until at least March 2021. The day to day running of the partnership was overseen by a weekly Operations Group Meeting, attended by representatives of both organisations.

Before the pandemic Milton Keynes Foodbank issued approximately 250 food parcels per week. During the peak of the current crisis, this rose to an estimated 200 parcels per day, but is now down to an average of 550 per week. Apart from a small team of full-time staff, Foodbank Xtra has been operated by a mixture of regular foodbank volunteers, volunteer council staff and councillors, who have undertaken many of the home deliveries.

SEN Provision and Re-opening Schools in Milton Keynes

The TFG received a PowerPoint presentation from the Director of Children's Services which covered a wide range of topics, including: the recent Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services, social care demand, support for schools and settings, the current situation in schools in relation to Covid-19 and the number of pupils impacted, the impact of the pandemic on the special needs sector and the challenges and practice approaches needed, supplementary schools, Home to School Transport, distance learning, mental health awareness, supporting children with challenging behaviour, home education, support for return and recovery, and progress on the construction of new schools.

He also reported that there had been a marked increase in referrals to the Children's Social Services Team, almost doubling between August and October 2020. He estimated that there had been a 10% increase in the number of referrals which needed a significant officer safeguarding response. Some of the cases coming forward were very complex and challenging. There was concern that issues which before the pandemic, might have been flagged up by midwives or health visitors, were not being picked up as during lockdown they had had to change the way interacted with service users.

29 October 2020

Update on Progress across the Borough

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Peter Marland, reported that the current position, with different parts of the country being in different tiers with different restrictions, with people being unclear as to what was required of them, was proving to be a much more complex situation to manage. Milton Keynes was in Tier 1 and although local authorities could request to go into a higher tier if cases of Covid-19 were rising locally, he was reluctant to do that as there was no clear exit strategy for authorities to revert back to a lower tier.

He said he thought the future looked far more uncertain now than it had in July. There were widening inequalities developing in society, particularly in education and employment for the under-25s with the effects likely to last for up to 5 years.

Continuing Impact on Service Delivery, Council Staff and Future Working Arrangements

The Chief Executive reported that in general terms, progress since July had been good, but during the last few weeks, with the rise in local cases, this was getting more challenging. However, partnership working was continuing, even when the pressure had eased over the summer, and the good working relationships established in the spring were being maintained.

He also thought that the current rise in cases in Milton Keynes was possibly lower than it could have been as the town didn't yet have a university, so there had been no influx of young people from all over the country. On the other hand, over half of the resident population in Milton Keynes was under 35 and this may be why, despite the rise in cases, admissions to the hospital remained very low.

2 March 2021

Chief Executive and Leader of the Council

The meeting noted the updates provided by the Chief Executive on the previously agreed recommendations produced by the Task & Finish Group during 2020.

The TFG noted that the Council was continuing to support the local NHS and Primary Care service with the rollout of the Covid-19 vaccination programme and that Saxon Court had now come on stream. The vaccination programme continued to progress well and was expected to meet the target of offering the vaccine to the first four priority groups within the scheduled timeframe. There had been good feedback about the mass vaccination centres in Milton Keynes. Initial logistical teething problems with parking and the flow of people at some centres had been resolved (with the assistance of MKC Highways department) and the sites were operating at a high-level of throughput.

The TFG heard that given the current lockdown restrictions, the Council had continued to ensure businesses could access available grants and financial support

as quickly as possible. Looking ahead to when lockdown restrictions were lifted, there was evidence from recent reports (including the Centre for Cities) that Milton Keynes would be well placed to recover quickly in comparison to other parts of the UK.

Community & Voluntary Sector

The TFG noted that given the significant pressures faced by the community, voluntary and charitable sectors in Milton Keynes as a result of increased demand and reduced income, it was critical to ensure available resources were channelled to these sectors to support this way of working.

The TFG noted the reports relating to actions and reflections from the Community Foundation in terms of the:

- emergency response appeal;
- recovery response appeal;
- case studies and current projects/next steps;
- lessons learnt.

Domestic Abuse

The TFG noted the fundamental urgency to increase awareness of and to increase reporting of Domestic Abuse across Milton Keynes. It was vital that the “business as usual” message was communicated to victims, perpetrators and the public in general. This was to prevent perpetrators from pushing the boundaries and encourage victims to report and seek help. As victims may be unable to report, in the event of a second lockdown, the role of neighbours, community members, and bystanders was very important.

Mental Health

The TFG noted the concern that a number of categories had been subjected to severe stress which was affecting their mental health. In particular:

- Many of the staff who had been carrying out extremely stressful duties with high workloads since the pandemic began were likely to suffer stress reactions as the pressure reduced;
- The many households which were overcrowded had been confined to a home under conditions which had aggravated stress. In many cases these also contained seriously vulnerable people, with the impossibility of isolation within the home adding to the worry;
- Children and young people had faced severe disruption to their education, combined with worry about forthcoming exams and a total lack of control over events – conditions which maximise stress;
- Those who had been shielding had suffered severe isolation, and sometimes deprivation in other ways, and would need to regain their confidence in interacting with the community as restrictions were lifted.

6 September 2021

Voluntary Sector

The TFG welcomed the work being done by the MK Community Foundation to provide sustainable funding through the COVID-19 MK Recovery Fund to support the Voluntary, Community and Charitable Sector (VCCS) in Milton Keynes.

During the emergency phase of the grant programme, the Community Foundation had supported over 175 grants to the value of £1,000,000 at an average of £5,200 per grant, reaching approximately 214,000 individual beneficiaries (often multiple interventions with same people).

New (present) Recovery Fund had been set up with £50k from Milton Keynes Council and £250k from the Community Foundation, which was writing to groups to encourage applications, based on the fund criteria.

Despite the support of the Community Foundation for many and varied causes during the pandemic there had been both a perceived and real impact on inequalities, with funding of BAME communities still below the required level. This was currently at 12% of Community Foundation Funding, which recognised that it had much more to do, working on all 9 protected characteristics. The CEO of the Community Foundation commented that he thought that maybe it could have connected more with the various diverse communities in Milton Keynes, but the outreach work it was now doing in diversity will place it in a much better position for any future emergency requirements in the VCCS sector. However, despite the challenging circumstances of the pandemic, the sector had adapted and was able to deliver vital services in a new way.

The Community Foundation was now carrying out further analysis of communities' needs as part of their strategic plan research.

4 October 2021

Heritage, Culture and Leisure

The TFG heard from Francesca Skelton, Chair of the Milton Keynes Arts and Heritage Alliance (MK AHA) and David Foster, Chief Executive of The Parks Trust. They explained that the impact of Covid on arts and heritage and leisure organisations in Milton Keynes had been immediate and severe and continued to be challenging. Their report covered both positive and negative aspects of the pandemic, how organisations had coped with the challenges of the last 18 months, the changes they had made to survive, plans for the future and the return of audience/visitor confidence in the heritage, cultural and leisure offer in Milton Keynes.

The TFG was pleased to note that so far, all the organisations which were members of the MK AHA had survived the pandemic and were still operational.

Care Services

The Council's Adult Care Service reported on the progress made in handling the Covid-19 pandemic and what may need to be done in the future, since their previous presentations to the Task and Finish Group during 2020.

Update from the Chief Executive

The Chief Executive commented on the progress being made against the TFG's previous recommendations (see Annex D), praised the Council's staff for the hard work which they had done over the past 18 months, and advised that they were continuing to ensure that the residents of Milton Keynes continued to receive the services they expected from the Council.

The TFG asked him, on behalf of all the Milton Keynes ward councillors, to convey their thanks to the staff for their all their hard work during the pandemic.

1 November 2021

The TFG considered the draft report, made a number of changes and agreed the wording of the final tranche of recommendations.

25 November 2021

Following a request to the local MPs for their thoughts on the effect of the pandemic on Milton Keynes, the Group received a letter from Iain Stewart, MP for Milton Keynes South. Mr Stewart raised a number of "lessons learned" points which have been included in the appropriate section of this report. He highlighted the backlog of work in the health service, particularly with cancer and mental health services but thought that with the provision of additional funding from the Government, Milton Keynes University Hospital will deal with this work efficiently. Finally, Mr Stewart also expressed his confidence in the local Milton Keynes economy to bounce back quickly from the effects of the pandemic.

A link to Mr Stewart's letter is included in Annex E: Background Papers

Additional Research

The TFG noted that research from Public Health England, The Health Foundation, The Office of the Children's Commissioner for England, The British Medical Journal and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine shows that during the pandemic there have been national increases in:

- poor mental health as a result of social isolation;
- weight gain due to lack of physical activity and consuming convenience foods high in calories, salt and sugar;
- food insecurities, not able to access healthy food in a reliable way;
- unemployment and the number of those living in relative and absolute poverty due to furlough or being made redundant as a direct result of COVID-19;

- domestic abuse related incidents and crime, children having adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and the number of children in need;
- the use of smoking, alcohol and drugs and spending money on gambling across all age groups;
- youth violence and those in contact with the criminal justice system;
- staff turnover in the health and social care sector;
- the number of people with no fixed abode, or who had become homeless as a result of COVID-19;
- the use of online gaming and chat rooms and the associated risks around grooming.

Additionally, there were also decreases in:

- immunisations across all age groups which will lead to higher incidences of infectious diseases and local outbreaks e.g. measles, and may impact the outcomes across the winter season e.g. excess winter deaths;
- the number of women breastfeeding;
- the overall 'school readiness' of children in the borough;
- access to healthcare for non-COVID-19 related reasons;
- the health-related quality of life for those living with long term conditions, and the elderly.

The TFG also heard evidence that care home operators had seen their insurance premiums soar during 2020/21 and 2021/22 (sometimes by a factor of ten). Care England warned that the situation was an "an absolutely enormous threat" to the future of the sector.

7. Lessons Learned

The overall conclusion of the TFG is that, on the whole, the emergency had been handled well locally, both by the Council and generally by most of its partners/contractors. However, there were a number of specific instances where witnesses felt things could have been handled better:

- At one stage there were more volunteers and organisations wanting to help than there were things for them to do as there appeared to be little overall co-ordination of the volunteers. This led to confusion amongst both potential volunteers and recipients as to which organisations were reliable and safe or which were scams, and where the help was needed, which was a cause of frustration and disillusionment for many.
- Good practice and innovation needed to be recognised, commended, celebrated and shared. In particular, the Council's co-ordination of PPE appears to have been innovative and national-leading and should be shared.
- The establishment of good communications and developing efficient working relationships between the Council and its external partners is vital in the management of a crisis of this magnitude.
- Communications between the Council and colleagues in parish and town councils need to be regular, consistent and a two-way process.
- In future, the Council needs to be more aware of, and maintain better contact with, organisations and service providers on the periphery of its remit and with which it does not often engage.
- Co-ordination of the use of furlough or redeployment of staff with service contractors is essential to ensure that services to residents can continue to be delivered to the best possible extent.
- The pandemic has triggered a seismic shift in how the Council and its partners are delivering local services, creating a range of both new opportunities and challenges for councils. The Cabinet should review the [SOCITM - Covid-19 Digital ICT Impact Survey Report](#) and the user feedback, as it considers which "new normal" to return to, always taking into account that not all residents have access to good internet provision, or the funds to pay for it.
- Evidence suggests that the distribution by the Council of government funding to support local businesses could have been done in a timelier manner. Due to this delay the Council could have lost access to further government funding, although the issue was resolved in the designated timescale.
- Central Government needs to improve its communications with local authorities, as there were times when there was a delay in important information being passed on. Iain Stewart MP, Milton Keynes South, has conveyed his concerns on this matter to the Department for Health and Social Care.

8. Future Risks

As part of its work the Group has identified a number of potential risk areas for Milton Keynes Council and its partners going forward:

- There remains a risk that the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's financial position will be far greater than ultimately the amount of support that can be provided by the Government.
- The impact on the economy of Milton Keynes – the risk in particular to the business sector and the tension between public acceptability versus economic reality.
- The impact of Covid-19 on sustaining health and care services in the community – specifically the challenge of continuing to respond to Covid-19 whilst ensuring safe healthcare services for those without Covid-19.
- The unquantified impact of Covid-19 (the hidden harm as it were!). In effect, the risks relating to individuals and families from (as some examples) domestic abuse, mental health issues, poverty, harm and educational gaps.
- The continuing emergence of new variants of the Covid-19 virus, such as the current omicron variant, leading to further waves of infection and the pressures that these could impose on health and care services, education, the economy, and the many other aspects of life in Milton Keynes investigated by the Group during its work.

Annex A: Terms of Reference

1. To review the Council's response to the Covid-19 Pandemic and identify lessons that can inform the Council's response to any future major emergencies, epidemics and pandemics.
2. To understand whether the Council's actions in dealing with the pandemic were the right ones; what worked, what didn't, what could be improved.
3. To make recommendations to assist the Council in developing a blueprint that can be carried forward to provide an effective response when dealing with any future emergencies / epidemics / pandemics or disasters.
4. To provide public reassurance that in any similar, future crisis the Council has the right plans in place to support and assist the residents of Milton Keynes.
5. To review relationships between the Council, parish/town councils, other support services such as community groups, charities and Central Government, to ensure that those who need help during the Covid-19 crisis are receiving the right assistance, but without duplication of effort.

These were approved by the TFG at its first meeting on 15 July 2020.

Annex B: Scrutiny Elsewhere

Budget & Resources Scrutiny Committee:

8 July 2020:

- Overview of the Council's Current Financial Position in Relation to its Response to Covid-19
- Report on the Work of the Corporate Portfolio Board and Capital Programme Boards

20 October 2020:

- Impact on Council Finances Due to Reduction in Income
- Asset Rationalisation of Operational Property

9 March 2021:

- Smarter Working at Milton Keynes Council
- Update on Income Streams affected by Covid-19

14 September 2021:

- Update on Collection Fund Income and Debt Collection 2020/21 and 2021/22

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee:

14 July 2020:

- The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Children and Young People's Services

2 December 2020:

- Covid-19 Update

10 February 2021:

- Covid-19 Update
- Impact of Covid-19 on Skills and Learning

15 July 2021:

- Covid-19 Update

9 September 2021:

- Covid-19 and Youth Offending Service Update

Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee:

21 July 2020:

- Anti-Social Behaviour – Performance Data
- Impact of Covid-19 on the Council's Homelessness Service
- Impact of Covid-19 on the Council's Repairs and Planned Investment Works

Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee:

24 June 2020:

- Covid-19 Public Health Update
- The Impact of Covid-19 on Care Homes
- The Impact of Covid-19 on Carers and Day Care Services

30 September 2020:

- Covid-19 Public Health Update
- “Starting Well” – Has Covid-19 Impacted on the Health and Wellbeing Strategy?
- Winter Planning

16 December 2020:

- Covid-19 Public Health Update
- Mental Health and Wellbeing – Access to Services (Impact of Covid-19)

11 March 2021:

- Covid-19 Update

23 June 2021:

- Covid-19 Update

29 September 2021:

- Covid-19 Update
- Winter 2021/22 Planning

Strategic Placemaking Scrutiny Committee:

9 July 2020:

- Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Public Realm Services

14 October 2020:

- The New Normal

13 January 2021:

- The New Normal

Scrutiny Management Committee

6 October 2020:

- Interim Report of the Response to Covid-19 Task and Finish Group

Health and Wellbeing Board:

29 July 2020:

Although not a Scrutiny Committee, the Health and Wellbeing Board met on 29 July 2020, receiving reports on the following Covid-19 related issues:

- System-wide Response to Covid-19;
- Local Outbreak Control Plan; and
- Seasonal Influenza Plan

Annex C: Government Funding

The Government awarded two types of funding to the Council, money to compensate the Council for loss of income or extra costs incurred arising directly from Covid-19 and 'passported' money to be passed on to businesses, with specific criteria to be met. None of this, therefore was 'extra' money to be spent on council services. It simply aimed to restore the budget to the planned level. In some cases, only partial funding was awarded, so that the Council's finances suffered a considerable cut. Some parts of that cut will continue into the next 2-3 financial years, unless the Government continues to recompense local authorities.

Throughout the pandemic the Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee has been monitoring the effect of Covid-19 on the Council's budget and the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

Below is a headline breakdown of the additional government funding received by the Council (as at 31 March 2021):

Specific Grant Funding COVID-19

Grant	Allocation £m	Commitment
Test and Trace Service Support Grant	1.065	Part allocated, remainder in progress - Expenditure for mitigation against management of local outbreaks
Reopening High Streets Safely Fund	0.239	To support the safe opening of high streets and other commercial areas <i>Fully allocated and spent on measures to re- open high streets</i>
Emergency Active Travel Fund	0.913	To support safe walking and cycling interventions <i>Fully allocated within the Capital Programme</i>
Food & Essential Supplies	0.268	To help those who are struggling to afford food and other essentials <i>Fully committed to Foodbank Xtra and support for community food groups</i>
Home to School Transport	0.653	To boost transport capacity for dedicated school and college services <i>Fully committed funding to boost transport capacity on Home to School Transport</i>
Local Authority Compliance and Enforcement Grant	0.135	Covid-19 related compliance and enforcement activities <i>Fully committed</i>

Contain Outbreak Management Fund	6.447	To support proactive containment and intervention measures <i>In progress</i>
Rough Sleeping Contingency Fund	0.026	Fully committed
Wellbeing for Education Funding	0.043	Fully committed
Community Testing Funding	0.139	Fully committed
Clinically Extremely Vulnerable	0.759	Fully committed
Next Steps Accommodation	0.634	Fully committed
Rough Sleepers - Cold Weather Fund	0.090	Fully committed
Travel Demand Management	0.100	Fully committed
Protect Plus fund	0.067	Fully committed
Support for High Streets (Welcome Back Fund)	0.239	Fully committed
LA Framework / Practical Support for Those Self Isolating	0.059	Fully committed
Total	11.876	

Passported Funding

Grant	Allocation £m	Commitment
Hardship Fund	2.322	Fully committed
Business Support Grant	77.596	Fully committed
Digital Platform	0.014	Fully committed
Workforce Capacity Fund	0.454	In progress
Lateral Flow Device Testing Fund (Rapid Testing)	0.497	In progress
COVID-19 Winter Grant Scheme	0.722	In progress
BID Resilience fund	0.051	Fully committed
Infection Control Fund - Round 1	4.147	Fully committed
Bus Services Support Grant	0.873	Fully committed
Schools COVID-19 Catch-up Payments	0.982	Fully committed
Schools COVID-19 Exceptional Costs	0.310	Fully committed
Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme	0.617	In progress
Total	88.585	

Annex D: Progress Against Previous Recommendations

Presented in the Interim Report to the Scrutiny Management Committee on 2 September 2020

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
1. MKC Staff, Councillors and Other Resources		
<p>a) <u>Staff Wellbeing</u></p> <p>The TFG recommends that a follow-up review of any significant issues identified as a result of the recent staff survey be undertaken to capture the experiences and learnings of all Council staff (wellbeing, support and communications) during the pandemic and which would also focus on the positive and negative impacts of home working (and the return to the workplace) and redeployment during the crisis.</p>	Chief Executive & CLT	<p>Information and resources to help staff working from home and generally during the pandemic. Most staff through the survey said they knew where to go to get help. It also identified that not all staff knew or would contact a Health Champion, so more work is being done there to promote that. Health Champions have been promoting the work they do, locally and in teams.</p> <p>We have put messages out in One Council and through manager/staff networks. One to one meeting between managers and colleagues provides a space to raise any health and wellbeing issues.</p> <p>We have also undertaken risk assessments for all those in the clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) and clinically vulnerable (CV) group. These are monitored and were updated at the start of this latest lockdown.</p>
<p>b) <u>Management of the Foodbank</u></p> <p>That medium-term plans for possible further expansion of the Foodbank, and its medium-term location, management and staffing at the current, or an expanded level, should now be made.</p>	Foodbank Management Team c/o Director Law and Governance	<p>Good progress is being made to ensure Foodbank can continue to operate in a safe way by finding replacement accommodation for Saxon Court. This goes hand in hand with expanding the Council's partnership with other charities including Baby Basics as part of its XTRA service.</p>

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
<p>c) <u>MKC Outbreak Control Plan</u></p> <p>i. That the TFG believes the steps described in the Council's Outbreak Control Plan are critical to reducing the spread of any infection and ultimately saving lives. This will only be achieved through the co-ordinated efforts of a range of organisations across local and national government, the NHS, Public Health England, businesses and employers, voluntary organisations and other community partners, and most importantly with the support of Milton Keynes residents;</p>	Cabinet	<p>The Council continues to work closely with core partners. A three times a week multi-agency co-ordinating group chaired by the Chief Executive has been running since the autumn (2020). The group has recently (from 15 February 2021) dropped down to once a week. Attendance and engagement have been good.</p> <p>More broadly, we have continued to work hard to engage with residents, through enhanced campaigning work which has had good reach. In total, residents saw our digital COVID-19 prevention material more than 2.3m times, and 30,000 people sought clinical advice or booked a test as a result. Our Make Space outdoor advertising campaign reached residents around 700,000 times.</p>
<p>ii. That the Council monitors closely the neighbouring outbreaks in Northampton, Bedford and Luton and that the Cabinet reports weekly through a virtual press conference highlighting the situation in such high-risk places, locations, communities and healthcare settings as have been identified.</p>	Council	<p>The Leader has continued his weekly public briefings, highlight any key issues.</p>
<p>d) <u>Procurement & PPE (PPE Hub)</u></p> <p>That the Cabinet formalises the existing arrangements for the Milton Keynes central PPE store hub for <u>all care providers</u>, schools, council staff and contractors (including waste contractors) and other(s) as identified (e.g. dentists), considers its medium term resourcing and continues to build up stocks to be charged at cost only. This to be via a same day, on-line ordering, delivery process.</p>	Cabinet	<p>Noted. Progress has been made on improving the co-ordination of PPE supplies within the council and on guidance on PPE use. Supply lines are functioning well, and so individual organisations do not face any issues with regard to PPE. Additional funding is being made available via government grants to care providers. We are now offering PPE for informal carers. The DHSC PPE portal, established last year, has extended the availability of free PPE to CQC registered care providers until end of June 2021.</p>

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
2. Finance		
<p>a) <u>Financial Impact upon the Council and Ongoing Risks</u></p> <p><i>The TFG asked that if social distancing is likely to be the 'new normal' whilst lockdown eases, what does this mean for:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Workplaces, businesses and schools?</i> • <i>Public transport and other forms of transport?</i> • <i>Planning and in particular the design of public and private spaces (e.g. widening pavements and any changes to enable more cycling) and the redrafting of strategic documents such as Plan:MK2 and MK2050?</i> • <i>The enforcement of the new reality?</i> 		
<i>The TFG recommends therefore:</i>		
That the Cabinet assesses the likely level of the impact on strategic documents of long-term continuing recurrences of similar diseases, combined with the legal necessity to update the documents, and determine an appropriate review schedule.	Cabinet	Noted. We are waiting to understand more about the medium to long term impact of COVID-19 and the difference the vaccination programme will have. It does not feel the right time to look at things like MK2050 until we have more clarity.
<p>b) <u>Management of Grant Funding eg Infection Control Grant</u></p> <p>That Cabinet produces a detailed audit of Covid-19 related central government grant funding, how the funding was utilised, what shortfalls still exist in terms of unavoidable Covid-19 related expenditure and proposals for addressing such a shortfall through representations to Central Government.</p>		
	Cabinet	Noted. We are reporting expenditure as required by the appropriate government departments and in line with our normal MKC procedures. All funding is being utilised in an appropriate way for the purposes for which it was intended.

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
3. <i>Communications, Social Media and the Web</i>		
<p>a) <u>Communications with Residents</u></p> <p>That in the event of an impending lockdown:</p> <p>i. The Council liaises in advance with the business sector, voluntary sector, and parish councils, encouraging them to get their organisations “lockdown ready” – with homeworking, flexible working plans, services on-line, online contact points, delegated authority, etc; and</p>	Council – Comms Team?	<p>Completed. The Council has continued to engage with organisations like parish councils and businesses through special events and meetings. Monthly ‘Keeping in Touch’ meetings are held with the Business Community, where the impact of the latest restrictions, public health workplace matters and updates on financial grants are given. In addition, focused sessions with key city centre organisations take place in advance of lockdowns being implemented and easing. To date there have been 35,500 unique visits to a page on our website where we offer free downloadable artwork for safety materials such as posters and floor stickers, and printed versions have also been shared.</p>
<p>ii. The Council prepares, in advance, a leaflet or other publication to be distributed to every household, business and other organisation with basic details of where to go for assistance and information in the event of any further lockdowns, either local or national, advising them to get their local support networks in place, and seeks the assistance of local community, parish and town councils in the speedy distribution of such literature at the start of any lockdown.</p>	Council – Comms Team	<p>Completed. A special edition of our resident magazine was produced in the summer which addressed these points, with 110,000 copies printed. It is noted that some homes in the rural north of the borough did not receive the magazine and this has been reported.</p>
<p>b) <u>Broadband, IT infrastructure and Connectivity</u></p> <p>i. That the Cabinet prepares a list of broadband ‘not spots’ and low take-up areas in Milton Keynes and that this list be regularly updated so that these areas can be targeted rapidly with paper updates, rather than residents having to rely on poor social media communications</p>	Cabinet	<p>Noted.</p>

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
ii. That the Cabinet establishes a specific communications process in agreement with community, parish and town councils to ensure that vital information is passed on in a timely manner, the message is consistent and received by all parish and town councils simultaneously.	Cabinet	Noted. We have been grateful for the support of community, parish and town councils in sharing messages and have undertaken some specific location work, for example highly visible banners outside schools, and material in playgrounds.
iii. That the Cabinet works with parish and town councils and local businesses to establish and publicise a network of noticeboards, shops etc, where key notices can be displayed in the event of lockdown, paying particular attention to the low access or take-up areas.	Cabinet	Noted.
iv. That the aspiration to achieve equality of provision across the entire Borough should become a major priority for the remainder of 2020/21 and beyond, investigate the possibility of low-cost reasonable speed packages for those on low budgets, and that the Cabinet allocates sufficient resources to achieve that ambition.	Cabinet	Noted.
c) <u>IT and Video at Home – IT in the Homes of Elderly and Those Isolating – Community Care</u> <i>The TFG heard evidence suggesting that many older residents prefer to stay in their own homes and communities until it is impossible for them to do so any longer, rather than move into residential care. Most older people enjoy being in their home surroundings and view residential care with suspicion, especially following the recent, highly publicised consequences of the pandemic.</i>		
<i>The TFG recommends therefore:</i>		
i. That the Council investigates ways in which the provision of the most recent ICT designed to extend the time older residents can spend at home should be commissioned and a report delivered to the Scrutiny Management Committee by February 2021.	Council – Adult Service	Noted. Report not progressed. This point seems to be about adaptive technology. If there are specific questions, they can be addressed to the service area.

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
ii. That residents be trained in the use of the internet for general services, communications etc, if not already proficient.	Council - Adult Services	Noted. Some work is being taken with residents in sheltered housing to improve their access to video calling.
4. Partnership Working		
a) <u>Broader Parish Relationship</u> <i>The TFG recognises that parish and community councils are both providers of key services and facilities in their areas, and repositories of local knowledge about their areas. However, the TFG understands that formal parish decision-making processes will often be too slow if an emergency occurs.</i>		
<i>The Council should, therefore, in advance of any likely lockdown:</i>		
i. Request that each parish set up a standing working group with the brief to respond informally to urgent information or requests for assistance in the event of a lockdown, and ensure that the Council has the contact details of the working group chair and of the Parish Clerk;	Council – Parish Liaison Team	Noted. There was insufficient time to progress this because of the November lockdown.
ii. Request that parishes ensure that the Clerk has sufficient delegated powers in the event of a lockdown or significant restrictions affecting the services and facilities they provide to act quickly to protect the community and their staff and contractors in the event of a local spike in cases and to provide whatever assistance the working group agrees;	Council – Parish Liaison Team	Noted. There was insufficient time to progress this because of the November lockdown.
iii. Encourage parishes to sign up to the email alert service for updates on restrictions, grants and other funding, voluntary organisation responses, etc;	Council – Parish Liaison Team	Completed. We have good levels of sign up for our e-alert service with 24,750 unique individuals and 148,500 subscriptions, including 25 parish clerks. In total around 70,000 people now follow us across e-alerts and social media.

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
iv. Include parish and ward councillors in discussion of local arrangements in preparation for, or in the event of, a local lockdown; and	Council – Parish Liaison Team	Completed. We have held engagement meeting with the Chief Executive and clerks/managers where there has been an opportunity to ask questions about local preparations. The last session was held on 20 January 2021.
v. Encourage those parishes not already members, to join the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils in order to access customised advice to parish councils on government legislation, funding, etc. and recommends that the Council arranges a borough subscription to access BALC material in an editable form adding MK only contacts where appropriate.	Council – Parish Liaison Team	Noted. This is perhaps something councillors could help with to encourage parish councillors to consider them to take up membership. The contribution MKC made to BMKALC for 2020/21, goes towards the expenses of the ‘county officer’ who delivers the training.
b) <u>Resilience Forum</u> That the Cabinet publishes weekly a Recovery Timeline and statistical bulletin to show how Covid-19 is affecting Milton Keynes.	Cabinet	Completed. COVID-19 information has been incorporated into Councillors <i>Weekly News</i> .
c) <u>Co-ordinating the Volunteer Response</u> That in the event of an impending lockdown, the Council: i. Liaises with the voluntary sector to establish an organisation with a “brand image” to co-ordinate community support, and to prepare an emergency fund; and	Council – third sector liaison	Noted. Not progressed due to there being insufficient time because of the November lockdown.
ii. Liaises with the voluntary sector to establish a mechanism to communicate appeals to existing voluntary groups for experienced help with any additional support that may be required.	Council – third sector liaison	Noted. There was insufficient time to progress this because of the November lockdown.

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
<p>d) <u>Working with Contractors</u></p> <p>That the Council needs to negotiate now with its contractors to agree which services should continue, if at all possible, in the event of local or widespread lockdowns in future, to ensure that vital workers are not furloughed.</p>	<p>Council – all services</p>	<p>Noted. Key services had discussions and plans were in place, some alternative deployments were agreed (for example parking enforcement contractors delivering recycling sacks). Review of key contracts to ensure that resilience, contingency and redeployment clauses are in place and agreed.</p>
<p>5. Adult Services and Health</p>		
<p>a) <u>Safeguarding</u></p> <p>i. That Cabinet earmarks sufficient budget, contingency reserve and other (non-financial) resources to cover an expected 30% rise in demand for both children and adult safeguarding services due to Covid-19.</p>	<p>Cabinet</p>	<p>Noted.</p>
<p>ii. That the TFG is aware of the ongoing safeguarding issues and recommends that councillors (and officer colleagues) take time to read the excellent Safeguarding in Challenging Times: Keeping Yourself Safe When Receiving Voluntary Support and also view a 3 minute safeguarding awareness video for volunteers produced by Waltham Forest LBC: Waltham Forest LBC - Safeguarding Awareness Video</p> <p>Councillors may also find the following video about safeguarding adults, produced by VODA (North Tyneside Voluntary Organisations Development Agency) helpful: Safeguarding Adults</p>	<p>All Councillors & officer colleagues involved in safeguarding both adults and children</p>	<p>Noted.</p>

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
<p>b) <u>Day Care Services</u></p> <p>That the actions recommended by the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee in relation to support for Day Care Services be further strengthened by stipulating that <u>Cabinet</u> be invited to send the letter to the local MPs.</p>	Cabinet	Noted.
<p>c) <u>Public Health</u></p> <p>The TFG recommends that the Cabinet monitor the potential long-term public health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic associated with the identified national trends at a local level.</p>	Cabinet	Noted. This will be kept under review as the national evidence emerges.
<p>d) <u>Test and Trace Information Control</u></p> <p>That the Council co-operates fully with every opportunity to localise the test and trace service to improve its effectiveness, and, if necessary and legal, draw on councillors' contacts to improve it.</p>	Council – Public Health Team	Noted. We are now in an 'enhanced partnership' with Test and Trace service, receiving those more difficult cases and undertaking tracking work. A MK/Bedford/Central Bedfordshire team is in place.
6. Care Homes		
<p>a) <u>Family Contact</u></p> <p>That consideration be given to putting in place appropriate arrangements, such as the provision of suitable PPE, and Covid-19 testing of visitors, to allow one, consistent family member of dementia residents in the Council's care to visit on a regular basis to provide continuity and reassurance in their lives.</p>	Council – Adult Services	Noted. The government guidance on visiting has been regularly updated to reflect the status of the pandemic. The latest guidance is that one person per resident will be permitted to visit indoors from 8 March 2021, with appropriate precautions in place.

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
<p>b) <u>Care Home Support</u></p> <p>That the Council and its partners recognise and follow the best national discharge from hospital practices, particularly in relation to those who require safe accommodation when discharged to home (or care home) settings but are unable to immediately do so due to infection risk to other household or care home members.</p>	Council – Adult Services	<p>Noted. Very regular contact and close working with the hospital has been underway and has ensured discharge arrangements are as smooth as possible. Our practice in this area is good and reflects best national practice.</p>
<p>The TFG recommends that specific areas of action be prioritised as follows:</p>		
<p>i. continued development and issuing to providers of regularly updated health and infection control guidance, possibly in the form of easy to use action cards, be maintained;</p>	Council – Adult Services	<p>Noted. We have continued to liaise regularly with care home providers. Guidance is issued as it becomes available. A fortnightly MKC bulletin is also circulated picking up on key issues such as testing, vaccinations, advice and guidance etc.</p>
<p>ii. procurement, storage and distribution of PPE stock be continued and that an online request system (Recommendation 1(d) above) be developed;</p>	Council – Adult Services	<p>Noted.</p>
<p>iii. the Council examines the possibility of developing its own localised testing process (if appropriate and more efficient) for symptomatic residents to enable large scale testing for all residents and staff in all care homes (be they Covid-19 positive or not);</p>	Council – Public Health Team	<p>Completed. The test centre opened on 13 January. Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.30 to 4.30 with later night openings (to 7pm) on Tuesday and Thursday. Since opening (up to 18 February) we have recorded 4,979 keyworker visits.</p>
<p>iv. proactive roll-out of Infection Prevention and Control training to all care homes be continued;</p>	Council – Adult Services / Public Health	<p>Noted. No issues identified.</p>
<p>v. a roll out of iPads / other social media devices to all care homes in Milton Keynes to enable GP consultations and the use of technology to reduce social isolation and retain close family contacts be implemented;</p>	Council – Adult Services	<p>Noted. No issues identified. Some devices being purchased for sheltered housing schemes.</p>

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
vi. the proactive support for the mental health and wellbeing of care home managers and staff – and for those employed in supporting the care sector within the Council be continued;	Council – Adult Services	Noted. We would expect all employers to put arrangements in place. In MKC we have invested in additional capacity around employee support. Further resources identified to support staff through our occupational health and employee assistance programme providers. We have also been working with PHE colleagues to develop a training and information programme to support staff, particularly around mental wellbeing which includes online training and 121 support.
vii. as the care home market will, inevitably, be different to its pre Covid-19 form that modelling be undertaken to project future demand. Care Home managers had also highlighted the need to build up a reserve of “on call” staff against future possible spikes in cases;	Council – Adult Services	Noted. This is a piece of longer-term work.
viii. that Cabinet considers whether the long recovery times some patients are experiencing have any implications for services – for example (if they prove to be infectious during this time) isolation support, PPE supplies and ongoing testing; and	Cabinet	Noted.
ix. that Cabinet adds its voice to the call for the Government to underwrite the risk in relation to the soaring cost of Covid-19 insurance premiums for care homes, particularly in relation to visitors;	Cabinet	Noted.
7. Children’s Services		
a) <u>Education</u> <i>Central Government’s expectation is for a return to full-time educational provision for all school aged children from September (2020). The TFG recognises that some children will find returning to school difficult, such as those who had attendance issues prior to the pandemic, and it is conceivable that there will be increased absence levels following the summer holidays.</i>		

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
i. That the Council's education and welfare service supports all schools to address pupil attendance issues, that it monitors attendance and provides appropriate support to ensure full attendance;	Council – Children's Services	Completed – Challenge is taking place, but almost as soon as these recommendations were agreed we entered another lockdown. However as of 8 March attendance at schools will again become mandatory and the service will be focusing on supporting schools to encourage and support families to get children back into school by breaking down any barriers to attendance before considering any more punitive measures which may ordinarily be used.
ii. That the TFG notes the need for all educational settings to complete risk assessments before reopening in September and recommends that the Council's educational support team offers assistance to any school which requests it in preparing such an assessment prior to the start of the new term;	Council – Children's Services	Noted. Support through public health and school support colleagues was on offer. Schools are now being supported to review and update assessments where appropriate following the announcement that all schools will reopen to all children on 8 March.
iii. That the TFG notes the need for all educational settings to complete risk assessments before reopening in September and recommends that the Council's educational support team offers assistance to any school which requests it in preparing such an assessment prior to the start of the new term;	Council – Children's Services	Noted. Support through public health and school support colleagues was on offer.
iv. That the TFG noted the focus nationally and locally upon those children entitled to Free School Meals and welcomes the provision of holiday lunch boxes via Children's Centres but recommends that the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee examines the broader issues connected with the provision of school meals (and/or vouchers) to those entitled during school holidays.	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee	Noted.

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
<p>b) <u>Home to School Transport</u></p> <p>The TFG received evidence regarding the reduced capacity of home to school transport vehicles due to the constraints of social distancing and recommends that the Cabinet write to the two MPs for Milton Keynes highlighting this issue to Central Government and the considerable financial challenges this could place on the Council from September onwards.</p>	Cabinet	<p>Noted. Some additional government funding for home to school travel has been provided.</p>
<p>c) <u>Looked After Children</u></p> <p>That the Council adopts the principles contained in the statement by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health <i>Looked After Children Services in Covid-19 Pandemic Recovery Plans</i></p>	Council – Children’s Services	<p>Noted.</p>
<p>d) <u>Child Poverty Commission</u></p> <p>The TFG takes this one stage further in that it has received evidence with regards to the impact on poverty (food banks, unemployment, homelessness) as furlough ends and recommends that the findings of the Commission be funded by Cabinet in full as a priority.</p>	Cabinet	<p>Noted. Refer to proposed budget.</p>

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
8. Social Cohesion, Community Action and Support for the Voluntary Sector		
<p>a) <u>Support to Vulnerable Residents</u></p> <p>That Cabinet authorises the Council's Communications Team to engage with residents who may need assistance in the event of any future lockdown, encouraging them to set up plans for any personal networks sooner, rather than later, so that they are best prepared if the situation changes quickly.</p>	Cabinet	Completed. A special edition of our resident magazine was produced in the summer which addressed these points. It is noted that some homes in the rural north of the borough did not receive the magazine and this has been reported.
<p>b) <u>Resilience of the Community Sector and Social Cohesion</u></p> <p>The TFG notes the community resilience shown across Milton Keynes during the emergency and how communities (in whatever form) took responsibility for their local wellbeing and therefore recommends that the Council examines ways in which it might build upon these positive local relationships, capturing best practise to be duplicated elsewhere.</p> <p>The TFG noted that Recommendation 3(a)i should help to ensure that timely preparations are made.</p>	Council – third Sector Liaison	Noted. This is being taken forward on a number of fronts, including more keep in touch opportunities for the council and community sector. The LGA is providing access to case studies and learning from elsewhere. An example where we have adopted best practice is the Community Champions Scheme, where we now have a network of around 500 engaged local residents playing an active part in sharing education and preventative messages. This scheme was first launched in Newham.
<p>c) <u>Impact of Covid-19 on the BAME Community in Milton Keynes</u></p> <p><i>The TFG received evidence suggesting that the higher risks of Covid-19 for BAME communities poses questions about whether the Council's (and its partners') intelligence sufficiently accounts for the diverse needs of our many multi-cultural communities.</i></p>		
<p>That the Cabinet provides resources to help scope and fund a fully resourced local BAME infrastructure organisation akin to National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) to include a local community-led research and knowledge hub.</p>	Cabinet	Noted.

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
<p>d) <u>Support for the Charitable Sector</u></p> <p>The TFG noted the impact of Covid-19 on the Financial resilience of some charities and recommends that Cabinet reflects on its policies with regard to its support for the charitable sector through grant assistance and assistance in kind.</p>	Cabinet	<p>Noted. £50k was approved in the Covid recovery plan for a community organisation support fund. This financial support has been provided via the MK Community Foundation which has capacity to provide help if needed.</p>
<p>e) <u>Voluntary Sector Restart Support</u></p> <p>That the Council extends its support for restart assistance (similar to that currently offered to businesses) to Voluntary Sector organisations and parish councils where they are restarting services.</p>	Council – Third Sector Liaison / Parish Liaison	<p>Noted. £100k was approved in the Covid recovery plan for the VCSE restructure fund. This financial support has been provided via the MK Community Foundation which has capacity to provide help if needed.</p> <p>Additionally, via the MK Community Foundation, £157k Coronavirus Emergency Assistant Grant for Food and Essential Supplies Funding was to be distributed to VSOs and parishes to meet immediate needs for food and essentials for people struggling due to COVID-19.</p>
9. Environmental Issues		
<p><u>Play Areas</u></p> <p><i>The TFG noted that play areas could be a significant source of breaches of social distancing, and that the message that they were closed was slow to get into the public domain among a number of competing priorities.</i></p>		
<p>It therefore recommends that the Council should design a standard closure notice and request help from parishes in closing the play areas promptly in the case of lockdown.</p>	Council – Environmental Service	<p>Noted. As the Government didn't close play areas on the latest lockdown, no closure notices were required. However, fresh signage was produced reflecting the new play area restrictions set by Government.</p>

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
10. Underlying Data		
<i>The TFG noted that the situation remains fast moving; some data will become available to inform actions but acknowledges that the Council's data analysis function is under severe pressure.</i>		
It therefore recommends that the Council creates an additional central data analysis post, for a minimum of 12 months, and with a budget to purchase access to such ongoing or specific data sources as are deemed to be useful, to provide as clear an overall picture as possible, and specific analyses as services require, of how the health and economic situation is evolving.	Council – Corporate Information Team	Noted.

Additional Recommendations – November 2020

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
Recovery Plan		
<i>The TFG commented on the report of the actions taken by the Council and the subsequent recovery plan and makes the following recommendations:</i>		
a) <u>Domestic Abuse</u> That mindful of the drop in referrals for domestic abuse during the first lockdown and the subsequent increase, the Council does everything in its power to get the message out that help is still available, contacts known persons at risk during lockdown and prepares for increased demand after lockdown.	Council – Domestic Abuse Support Team	Noted. Communications work has been ongoing, and the strategy group has been meeting. Work is underway to further understand the impact. A strategy action plan has been developed and priorities are being progressed. For example, we have introduced 'sanctuary housing'. We continue to work closely with partners to publicise available support.

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
<p>g) <u>Service Delivery</u></p> <p>That the Cabinet reviews the SOCITM - Covid-19 Digital ICT Impact Survey Report and the user feedback, as it considers what “new normal” to return to, always taking into account that not all residents have access to good internet provision, or the funds to pay for it.</p>	Cabinet	Noted.

Further Recommendations – March 2021 – Presented to Cabinet on 13 July 2021

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
<i>Update from Chief Executive & Leader of the Council</i>		
<p>1. That a meeting of the Broadband Stakeholder Group be convened by the lead Cabinet member (Cllr Middleton) at the earliest opportunity, to which the suppliers of broadband services across Milton Keynes be invited to submit their plans to achieve this ambition in <u>every part</u> of the Borough and that a roadmap with tight timescales be prepared, showing just when and how those targets will be achieved.</p>	<p>Cllr Middleton / Broadband Stakeholder Group</p>	<p>The prospects for further coverage of gigabit capable fibre and other technology broadband were discussed at the last meeting of the MK Broadband Stakeholder Group (BSG) on 13 May 2021.</p> <p>Overall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 99.1% of homes and businesses in Milton Keynes can obtain “Superfast” broadband speeds in excess of 30 Mbps. • 88.6% can already obtain Gigabit capable, or “Ultrafast” broadband. • At the lower end of the broadband speeds currently available 0.02% of homes and businesses can only receive sub-2 Mbps and 0.36% sub 10 Mbps. <p>The remaining premises in these low-speed categories tend to be in the rural areas of the Borough and thus it is costly to provide fibre network connections. This means that it is unlikely that the most remote premises will be a commercially viable option for companies such as Openreach, City Fibre or Virgin Media with connection costs running at tens of thousand pounds each.</p> <p>In an attempt to provide gigabit capable connections to more premises across the UK the Government recently announced its “Project Gigabit” programme. Milton Keynes is in the Lot 12 Project Gigabit procurement area which we expect to go to tender in March 2022 with deployment planned to start in Summer 2023. The first stage of the Lot 12 procurement will be a study known as an Open Market Review (OMR). The OMR is issued centrally by the UK</p>

	<p>Government and asks suppliers to identify their current deployment plans in the Lot 12 Area, which also includes parts of Hertfordshire, Central Beds/Bedford and Northamptonshire. The OMR information is commercially sensitive so cannot be circulated to the public, but the Council will be provided with details of supplier plans for consideration and evaluation during 2022.</p> <p>As this type of information on suppliers' future plans is commercially sensitive it is unlikely that they would provide their future plans for consideration by the Task and Finish Group as a separate exercise. However, a confidential report could be compiled for the Task and Finish Group once the results of the Project Gigabit OMR are known which would outline any new planned deployments in Milton Keynes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the meantime, the Council continues to offer guidance to residents on obtaining better broadband through the "My Local Broadband" Inbox and is working with the UK Government to further develop the coverage of Project Gigabit and the current Gigabit Voucher Scheme. <p>Several suppliers also now provide discounted broadband contracts to residents who are in receipt of certain benefits which may enable more residents to obtain better broadband speeds at reduced cost. More information on the discounted contracts currently available from BT is shown here.</p>
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Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
<p>2. That the Cabinet, through the Director of Partnerships and Communications, commissions Borough-wide research designed to establish local residents' insights/hopes/concerns as Milton Keynes emerges from the pandemic, with particular emphasis on the concerns of the young, of minority groups and of those with disabilities. The outcome of this research to assist the Borough in the design and format of its long-term recovery plan.</p>	<p>Cabinet / Director of Partnerships and Communications</p>	<p>There has been a lot of national research undertaken which provides insights that the council will be able to take advantage of.</p> <p>For example: https://www.health.org.uk/publications/long-reads/generation-covid-19 and https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/back-in-lockdown-report.pdf and https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/research-policies-reports/2021-facing-the-future-employment-prospects-for-young-people-</p> <p>This will be complemented by local research if necessary. Cabinet will consider how the recommendation can assist in the delivery of the long-term aims in the Council Plan and HWB Strategy to reduce inequalities and promote inclusion."</p>
<p>3. That Covid Vaccine Champions be identified by the Cabinet among community leaders/ influencers across Milton Keynes and that they be fully supported in a vaccine take-up campaign among these (often harder to reach) groups.</p>	<p>Cabinet / Director of Partnerships and Communications?/ Public Health Team?</p>	<p>The Council has been working with community leaders and influencers to support the vaccine take-up amongst different communities in MK. We have also engaged the Covid Champions to promote the uptake of the vaccine, for example Covid Champions have successfully supported pop-up stalls in MK promoting the vaccine to MK residents. This work has focused on harder to reach groups at locations like MK Market. https://twitter.com/mkcouncil/status/1381938654537469960?form=MY01SV&OCID=MY01SV</p>

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
<i>Community & Voluntary Sector</i>		
<p>1. That working with partners through the Community Foundation and Community Action:MK, the Cabinet focuses funding and support on the building of community capacity, supporting the growth of social networks and social action and thus focusing on bringing all sectors together in projects that deliver on local priorities. Funding should also be focused on “training the trainers” programmes to deliver maximum coverage and benefits across the whole Borough.</p>	Cabinet / Voluntary Sector Partners?	<p>The co-ordination of the community and voluntary sector in relation to health and wellbeing is being taken forward by a new Alliance that has been formed. Importantly this development is sector-led. Other structures, like the one that supports MK Together (responsible for safeguarding and community safety) are being adjusted to recognise the new Alliance.</p>
<p>2. That the Council works with its partners to develop new funds for 2021/2022 focusing (through a Corporate membership initiative) on tackling Child Poverty and converting the outstanding Covid response into a Friends Scheme to provide on-going support.</p>	Cabinet / Voluntary Sector Partners?	<p>The responsible cabinet member is engaging with the sector to identify further opportunities for improving co-operation and collaboration.</p>
<p>3. That working with partners, the Council reviews and, if necessary, changes systems and processes to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplify and speed up change systems and processes to allow for a swifter turnaround of applications for funding; • Work with organisations so that they are better prepared for funding (due diligence process, creation of bank accounts and governance for authorisation is clear and agreed in advance); • Improve partnership working across the plethora of organisations operating in Milton Keynes to avoid duplication and waste (especially on the distribution of food). 	Cabinet / Voluntary Sector Partners?	<p>New funds to tackle child poverty have been identified and are being rolled out in 2021/22, including: Summer of Play (enhanced for children on free school meals) and targeted activities over the autumn half term (£1,350M including government grant, development of the Xtra Support Hub and a pilot childcare deposit programme for people on low income</p>

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
<i>Domestic Abuse</i>		
1. That the Cabinet undertakes a community awareness campaign (in conjunction with its partners, including Thames Valley Police and the Community /Voluntary Sector) to encourage community members to report domestic abuse in their neighbourhood and repeats this as a priority at the start of any future lockdown.	Cabinet (Cllr Townsend – Community Safety) / SaferMK Community Partnership	A communication plan is now in place as part of the Domestic Abuse Strategy that includes a number of awareness raising campaigns.
2. That resources and funding should be reviewed and if possible increased to support the work of domestic abuse charities in Milton Keynes.	Cabinet	The Domestic Abuse Strategy has a very clear action plan, and this will be subject to ongoing review, including the funding for particular programmes of work e.g. the perpetrator programme. The Domestic Abuse Partnership Board meets regularly to oversee work being undertaken. This board has representation from across the system including MK ACT, MKC, MKUH, TVP and BLMK CCG. The levels of funding Milton Keynes Council provides is high compared to many other areas.
3. That the Children and Families Service makes training available to all councillors and community leaders on recognising the signs of domestic abuse.	Children & Families Service / Group Head	Training session booked for 26 October 2021.
4. That the Cabinet contacts the MPs for Milton Keynes asking them to do all they can to work with and take briefings from locally based experts on domestic abuse with the aim of working together to ensure that all take full advantage of this once in a generation opportunity to transform the response to domestic abuse nationally and in particular across Milton Keynes.	Cabinet / Leader of the Council	The Domestic Abuse Partnership Board will share the Domestic Abuse Strategy and Action Plan with the local Members of Parliament and will offer to meet with them to discuss domestic abuse issues in Milton Keynes.

Recommendation	Referral for Action	Progress
<i>Mental Health</i>		
<p>1. That the Cabinet embed and prioritise support for improved mental health and wellbeing within the community, voluntary and charitable sectors, working in tandem with NHS services.</p>	<p>Cabinet / Local Mental Health Service providers / CCG?</p>	<p>The Cabinet and the Council continues to recognise the importance of mental health and wellbeing. Mental Health is a priority for the Health and Wellbeing Board and children and young people's mental health is now a priority for the MK Care Alliance. This will provide an opportunity for collaboration and integrated working across the whole system of services and support.</p>
<p>2. That the Council continues working with the NHS and its voluntary organisation partners, together with line-managers, housing and education staff, to increase the supply of such services, to identify and assess those at particular risk.</p>	<p>Public Health Team? Local Mental Health Service providers / CCG? / Voluntary Sector Partners</p>	<p>The Council recognises the importance of mental health services. It continues to work with the NHS and its voluntary organisations to increase the supply of services and identify those at risk.</p> <p>The Council has commissioned the Oxwell Survey to work with secondary schools to gain a deeper understanding of the mental health and wellbeing of young people in MK. This will help prioritise activities and interventions.</p> <p>The CNWL mental health support team for schools has also secured additional resources.</p> <p>For young people with the very highest level of need, the BLMK health system has been awarded £17,379,204 of additional funding over the next 3 years to establish a mental health in-patient unit for children and young people in Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes. BLMK have also been awarded £700k over the next 3 years for eating disorders to enhance core services and day care provision.</p> <p>The Council, and our partners in the NHS continues to invest in promoting and protecting the mental health and wellbeing of all our employees through workplace initiatives like the MK Council Health Champions scheme.</p>

Annex E: List of Background Papers

- [MKC Covid-19 Events Overview Presentation](#)
- [MKC Management Action Plan](#)
- [MKC Local Outbreak Plan](#)
- [Milton Keynes Borough Care Home Support Plan](#)
- [Strategic Recovery Framework for Milton Keynes](#)
- [Covid-19 Economic Recovery Action Plan](#)
- [Reopening Our High Streets Safely](#)
- Health and Wellbeing Board on 29/07/20: [MK System-Wide Response to Covid-19](#) and [MK System-Wide Response to Covid-19 - Agency Letters](#)
- [National Association of Local Councils Covid-19 Case Studies](#)
- [SOCITM - Covid-19 Digital ICT Impact Survey Report](#)
- The TFG also noted that the British Medical Journal has stated that 10% of those from care homes with Covid-19 were suffering serious, ongoing illness/symptoms for 13 weeks or more and that this is highlighted in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) report [Impact of Coronavirus in Care Homes](#)
- [MK Community Foundation - Impact Report \(fliphtml5.com\)](#)
- [Letter from Iain Stewart MP, Milton Keynes South](#)

Scrutiny – An Explanation

As Milton Keynes Council has a Cabinet (Executive) system it is required by law to have a Scrutiny function to support and scrutinise its executive decision-making arrangements.

Scrutiny committees and scrutiny task and finish groups are not “decision making” bodies but are bodies which monitor and influence the decision makers. The committees and task and finish groups are made up of non-Cabinet members, and are designed to support the work of the Council in the following ways:

- assisting the executive in research, policy review and development and thus helping drive improvements in public services;
- reviewing and scrutinising decisions to be taken, or ones which have been taken by the Cabinet and officers, also known as acting as a “critical friend”, challenging policy and decision makers;
- considering the Council’s performance;
- reviewing the work of external organisations operating in the Borough to ensure that the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working; and
- enabling the voice and concerns of the public to be heard and listened to.

Each scrutiny committee or task and finish group has its own terms of reference. The scrutiny committees / task and finish groups consider issues by receiving information in a number of ways including by receiving presentations and taking evidence from councillors, Council officers and external witnesses or partners to develop an understanding of proposals or practices. As scrutiny committees and scrutiny task and finish groups have no decision-making powers, they can present their recommendations to the Cabinet, full Council, Council officers, or external partners. The committees will often request a formal response and progress report on the implementation of recommendations that they have provided to various parties.

Attending Meetings of Scrutiny Committees / Task and Finish Groups

Meetings of scrutiny committees and task and finish groups are held in public and are generally open for everyone to attend. Due to the current Covid-19 Pandemic it is not possible for members of the public to attend meetings in person. Meetings are now being conducted remotely, via MS Teams and live streamed on the Council’s own YouTube website.

Members of the public wishing to speak on an agenda item at a particular meeting should let us know by 18:45 on the day of the meeting so that the Chair can be advised in advance, either by calling 01908 691691 (ask for the Scrutiny Team in Democratic

Services) or by emailing meetings@milton-keynes.gov.uk . A link to join the meeting via MS Teams will be sent to you before the meeting.

The Chair of the meeting will try and make the meeting as informal as possible, but, by their nature, local authority meetings must retain a degree of formality, with the meeting being controlled by the Chair.

If you are to speak on an agenda item, you will be able to speak when the item is considered. The Chair of the meeting will call out your name when it's your turn if you have given prior notice.

When asked to speak, please give your name and let us know if you are representing any organisation or speaking in your own right.

The maximum time you will have to speak is 3 minutes. If there are lots of people wanting to speak, then the Chair might reduce the time per person to one or two minutes to enable everyone to have their say. Please try not to repeat what has been said before.

If you have been invited to give evidence to the scrutiny committee or task and finish group as a witness, you will have been contacted by one of the Council's scrutiny officers who will have briefed you on what the committee or task and finish group would like you give evidence and what to expect at the meeting. You will be allowed sufficient time to speak to give your evidence. You will not be limited to 3 minutes.

On occasion there may be specific issues that the meeting must consider in private so all but members of the committee / task and finish group and key officers will be asked to leave.

If you want to speak on a matter that is not scheduled to be discussed by a scrutiny committee or task and finish group then please either call or email the address above and we will contact you to discuss how best to take this forward.

Dates for the Council's public meetings, together with the papers for the meetings, are available on the Council's website at:

[Committee Management Information System \(CMIS\)](#)

If you have any questions about the scrutiny process please send them either to: meetings@milton-keynes.gov.uk or The Scrutiny Team, Democratic Services, Milton Keynes Council, Civic Offices, 1 Saxon Gate East, Milton Keynes, MK9 3EJ. Alternatively call 01908 691691 and ask for the Scrutiny Team in Democratic Services.

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