



Doncaster Council

Report

Date: 20 April 2020

To the Mayor

COVID-19 pressures funding of £10.09m, Hardship Fund of £2.99m and the Mayors 10-point action plan

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision
The Mayor	All	Yes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. On 20 March central government confirmed that the Council will receive £10.09m as emergency funding to support the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The grant is un-ring-fenced though the government have provided detail as to how it should be spent.
2. A 10-point action plan has been prepared by the Council with a budget of £5m. The plan is designed to help the most vulnerable and those who support them. The £10.09m emergency funding will be used to meet the cost of the action plan and other activity identified below.
3. The government are providing a further £2.99m Hardship Fund. It is estimated that £0.24m will be used as prescribed by the Government i.e to support Local Council Tax Support Scheme. Which will enable the Council to use the balance of the grant to further assist the support arrangements during this emergency and to support those in need. Consequently the balance (an estimated £2.75m) will be added to the £10.09m emergency fund.

EXEMPT REPORT

4. Not applicable.

REASON FOR URGENCY

5. This decision is being taken under Special Urgency provisions to enable the Council to accept and utilise the £10.09m Emergency Covid Funding and the £2.99m Hardship Fund, to respond to the COVID 19 pandemic and deliver the Mayor's 10 point action plan. Delegation to the Chief Executive around the design and implementation of the programmes will enable the Council to respond quickly to the needs of individuals and communities and shape the delivery of services as required. This decision will ensure the Council can continue to deliver services and seek to safeguard the most vulnerable in our communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

6. It is recommended that the Mayor:-
 - Notes the receipt of £10.09m from the COVID-19 Pressures funding from central government and £2.99m being the Council's allocation from the Hardship Fund
 - Delegates to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Mayor future decision making regarding the design and implementation of the programmes to deliver the 10-point action plan.
 - Approves the addition of the balance of the £2.99m Hardship Fund to the £10.09m emergency funding as described below.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

7. The additional funding from the government will help support measures to provide support to vulnerable people across Doncaster.

BACKGROUND

Introduction

8. The 2019–20 coronavirus outbreak was confirmed to have spread to the United Kingdom on 31 January 2020 from China when the first two cases with the respiratory disease COVID-19. COVID-19 typically appears with about seven days of flu-like symptoms followed by some people progressing to symptoms of a viral pneumonia requiring admission to hospital.
9. The Government has issued orders requiring people to stay in their homes except for essential travel which has significantly impacted the UK's economy. The Council is faced with a significant challenge to ensure that arrangements are in place to support the most vulnerable within the community (children, adults and homeless), ensure the effective flow of patients from hospital to community and registration of deaths and funeral arrangements. In addition due to the lock down the council has provided community support to enable those being shielded and cocooned have the necessary access to food, medicines and food. It has also been important to ensure school and nursery provision is in place to enable key workers to keep on working. The impacts on the Council services have been far reaching and significant.

Emergency Funding

10. In order to respond to this challenges the on 20 March central government confirmed that the Council will receive £10.09m as emergency funding to support the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This forms part of a national package of £1.6bn for local government, with a further £1.3bn fund going to CCGs in the NHS.
11. This funding is un-ring-fenced and is intended to help local authorities address any pressures they are facing in response the COVID-19 pandemic, across all service areas.
 - In particular, the government expect Councils to use the funding to do the following;
 - Meet the increased demand for adult social care and enable councils to provide additional support to social care providers.
 - CCGs will separately be funding additional costs of discharging and keeping people out of hospital, including social care costs - commissioned by the local authority unless existing local arrangements suggest otherwise. It is essential that 'boundary issues' do not cause delays. Therefore, the government expect the local authorities to place an appropriate portion of the funding they choose to dedicate to adult social care from the £1.6bn into a pooled budget with the local CCG, to ensure that there is no risk of debates about which fund should pay.
 - Meet the cost of extra demand and higher business-as-usual costs of providing children's social care, including as a result of school closures and the need for increased accommodation to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The Government is continuing to pay funding to local authorities for the free early years entitlements during any periods of nursery, preschool or childminder closures, or where children cannot attend due to COVID-19.
 - Provide additional support for the homeless and rough sleepers, including where self-isolation is needed. This is in addition to the £3.2m emergency fund announced on 17 March to help rough sleepers, or those at risk of rough sleeping, to self-isolate.
 - Support those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, who have been asked to self-isolate in their homes for the duration of the pandemic. This funding is available to support initial costs incurred by LAs in their critical role in supporting those within the most clinically high-risk cohort who also have no reliable social network (i.e. who are both at high risk clinically and socially). The model for this support and the role local authorities will play in it has been discussed closely with the LGA and the 9 regional chief executives. The Council has developed the Community Hub model to support these arrangements in conjunction with friends and family, voluntary sector and community services.

- Meet pressures across other services, as a result of reduced income, rising costs or increased demand.

10-point action plan

12. In order to quickly respond to the COVID-19 emergency the Council sought to quickly consider and make arrangements to support help the vulnerable and those who support them, and those affected by the economic slowdown caused by the lockdown. The plan includes;

- Creating a £5m fund to support the Doncaster response to coronavirus.
- Three-month council tax holiday for people struggling financially.
- Three-month rent holiday for struggling council house tenants and encourage private landlords to support tenants who are in financial hardship.
- The Council will continue to offer free school meals in the community and provide a service to the children of key workers and looked after children in schools.
- The Council making quicker payments to its providers to help keep their businesses afloat, maintain service provision and boost their cash flow
- Buying as many goods and services as possible from local suppliers in order to support Doncaster businesses (current local spend is 70%) and work with local businesses to direct food supply chains to help meet community needs
- Redeploy Council staff flexibly and effectively where they are needed to support the emergency response
- Providing isolation packs to support people and families in need
- Offering local artists the opportunity through an art and culture fund to keep working
- Boosting funding for on the ground voluntary groups so they are in a better position to help and act quicker

13. The council tax and rent holidays referred to in the actions mean that taxpayers and tenants will be able to defer payment rather than a discount or rent-free period.

14. The funding for on the ground voluntary groups will be allocated a budget of £0.25m.

15. The provision of free school meals for infants during the Easter holidays has been estimated to cost £0.16m. More generally, free school meals will be funded through central government (including at Easter for benefits recipients). It is possible that additional funding will be provided by central government for infants free school meals at Easter.

16. Additional response activities include;

- Increasing capacity at Rose Hill crematorium for the storage of bodies,
- Increasing the Local Assistance Scheme budget to provide additional support to local people in financial hardship,
- Support to the social care sector – cash-flow and payments for additional costs,
- Support to Doncaster Culture and Leisure Trust which will be covered in detail by an additional Key Decision Rule 16 report
- Digital autopsies,
- Increased homelessness provision,
- Increased number and cost of children’s care placements

17. Adults Social Care providers of residential/nurse care, supporting living, home-care and extra-care will be given an additional payment as a means of mitigating cash-flow difficulties. The value of the payments will be based on their normal level of fees for between 4 and 7 weeks (depending on how far in arrears normal payments are made). The payment will total approximately £6m and will be reimbursed once the virus is under control.

18. These 10 point action plan and the additional activities referred to above will be funded from the £10.09 COVID-19 emergency funding. As additional activity is costed and put into action further budget allocations will be made and these will be reported as part of the quarterly finance and performance monitoring reports.

Hardship Fund

19. The 2020 budget included the announcement of a £500m Hardship Fund to deliver relief to Council tax payers. On 24 March the government provided guidance around how the funding should be used. The allocation for Doncaster is £2.99m. The grant will be paid to Councils “as soon as possible”. The Council will receive further funding for the government for the new burdens cost for delivering the support (a value has yet to be confirmed).

20. On the 27th March 2020 a Key Decision Rule 16 Special Urgency was taken by Mayor Ros Jones – “Approval of the Award of Additional Council Tax Support – Covid-19 Hardship Fund 2020/2021” It identifies that an estimated £0.24m will be used for Council Tax Support which will enable to the balance of the grant to further assist those in need. This balance (an estimated £2.75m) will be added to the £10.09m emergency fund.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

21. Not to take action unless funded from existing service budgets.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

22. Use of the £10.09m of emergency fund and £2.99m Hardship Fund will enable the Council to take actions in support of COVID-19 and to provide help to the vulnerable and those who support them, and those affected by the economic slowdown caused by the lockdown.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

23.

	Outcomes	Implications
	<p>Doncaster Working: Our vision is for more people to be able to pursue their ambitions through work that gives them and Doncaster a brighter and prosperous future;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better access to good fulfilling work • Doncaster businesses are supported to flourish • Inward Investment 	
	<p>Doncaster Living: Our vision is for Doncaster's people to live in a borough that is vibrant and full of opportunity, where people enjoy spending time;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The town centres are the beating heart of Doncaster • More people can live in a good quality, affordable home • Healthy and Vibrant Communities through Physical Activity and Sport • Everyone takes responsibility for keeping Doncaster Clean • Building on our cultural, artistic and sporting heritage 	<p>Planned actions will improve the quality of life of local residents.</p>
	<p>Doncaster Learning: Our vision is for learning that prepares all children, young people and adults for a life that is fulfilling;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every child has life-changing learning experiences within and beyond school • Many more great teachers work in Doncaster Schools that are good or better • Learning in Doncaster prepares young people for the world of work 	

	<p>Doncaster Caring: Our vision is for a borough that cares together for its most vulnerable residents;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have the best start in life • Vulnerable families and individuals have support from someone they trust • Older people can live well and independently in their own homes 	<p>Planned actions are targeted at the most vulnerable residents</p>
	<p>Connected Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A modern, efficient and flexible workforce • Modern, accessible customer interactions • Operating within our resources and delivering value for money • A co-ordinated, whole person, whole life focus on the needs and aspirations of residents • Building community resilience and self-reliance by connecting community assets and strengths • Working with our partners and residents to provide effective leadership and governance 	

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

24. The council is responding to this unprecedented situation in order to support people appropriately and to save lives. We are supporting communities and the most vulnerable by shielding and supporting them in their homes. This is required to prevent as many deaths as possible and to reduce the burden on the NHS and in particular hospital provision.
25. The UK was put into lockdown on 23 March in an unprecedented step to attempt to limit the spread of coronavirus. This has required the Council to undertake a broad range of preventative measures, respond to emerging implications and government requirements as well as change its operating models very quickly. The Council has responded to the emerging risks at pace and pragmatically. However there are risks and mistakes will occur. We are endeavoring to manage these through a tight governance and regularised reporting structured through regular SITREP reports. These are in turn reported through a coordinated series of meetings within the business continuity framework within the Council and matters escalated to Local Resilience Forum. This forum is a multidisciplinary arrangement to support cross boundary coordination of activities and receives and provides communications updates.
26. Given the significance of resources provided by the Government to support the COVID-19 measures the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government have introduced monthly management accounts and cash flow

forecasting reporting. We had already preempted this requirement and will incorporate known risks within our existing quarterly finance and performance report.

27. There is a risk that the payment of approximately £6m to adult social care providers will not be reimbursed (for example due to business failure). However, this risk is thought to be outweighed by the risks created by not making the payment and businesses failing as a result of cash-flow difficulties.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [SRF Date 16 April 2020]

28. The Council may use its power under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 which provides the Council with the general power of competence, allowing them to do anything which a person, may generally do.
29. S111 Local Government Act 1972 states that a local authority shall have power to do anything (whether or not involving the expenditure, borrowing or lending of money or the acquisition or disposal of any property or rights) which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions.
30. The proposals contained within this report will assist the Council in ensuring it meets its normal statutory duties across a wide range of services including provision for vulnerable children and adults under the Children Act 1989 and the Care Act 2014 respectively, in addition to new statutory duties and requirements under emergency legislation such as the Coronavirus Act 2020. Although the grants received from central government that underpin these proposals are not ring fenced, they must be used in accordance with any associated government guidance.
31. In implementing the proposals, the Council must ensure it complies with its own Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules. Financial Procedure Rule E.10 confirms any external funding received by the Council after the budget for the year has been approved is classed as a corporate resource unless otherwise determined by the Chief Financial Officer. Therefore, the proposals set out in this report are entirely consistent with the Financial Procedures Rules.
32. Some of the proposals outlined within the report will require further legal advice and governance, particularly in relation to procurement, changes to existing contractual arrangements and the proposed community grants scheme
33. In accordance with S114 Local Government Finance Act 1988, the Council's S151 Officer has a legal duty to issue a report if it appears to her that the expenditure of the authority incurred (including expenditure it proposes to incur) in a financial year is likely to exceed the resources (including sums borrowed) available to it to meet that expenditure.
34. This decision is being taken in accordance with the Council's Access to Information Rule 16, Special Urgency. The potential negative affect on service delivery and impact on residents of any delay in taking this decision would mean that it would not be practical to provide the 28 days' notice normally required for a key decision, or to wait for the end of the Call In

period before implementation. The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee has confirmed she is in agreement with the reasons for urgency

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [RI 27 March 2020]

35. Doncaster's share of the COVID-19- Support Grant and the Hardship Fund is £10.09m and £2.99m respectively. Neither of these grants are ring-fenced, meaning there is no restriction on how the council spends the money, however Government has issued guidance on how it expects the money to be spent.
36. The Council's 10-point action plan includes creating a £5m fund to support the Doncaster response to COVID-19 and a number of other initiatives that will have a cost. It is proposed to use the COVID-19 Support grant to fund these measures.
37. Although the council tax and rent holidays do not have a cost to the council – they are a delay in payment – it is likely that there will be a higher level of write-offs of debt. Any loss in council tax will be a cost to the council and any loss of rent a cost to the Housing Revenue Account.
38. The actions in the plan need to be carefully managed to ensure costs are contained within the £5m budget.
39. Responding to this emergency and working at pace there will be a need to take decisions to be taken quickly. In the main these will be operational and delegated to officers to take within the existing FPR's and CPR's provide the framework. Where Key decisions are required these are currently being taken by the Mayor following discussion with Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (Rule 16). These will then be reported and also incorporated into the quarterly finance and performance report.
40. Given these challenging circumstances should the financial position deteriorate beyond resource being allocated the Director of Corporate Resources and currently acting S151 will use the appropriate mechanisms to escalate these matters to the Mayor and Cabinet in order to address these challenges and seek remedial action.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS [KG 27 March 2020]

41. There are no specific HR implications associated with the preferred approach as it is anticipated that the administration of the schemes will be managed within existing resources. If alternative approaches are adopted and this requires significant manual intervention, additional resources may be required.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS [PW 27 March 2020]

42. There are no specific technology implications associated with this report.

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS [LR 27 March 2020]

43. The health implications of COVID-19 are going to be huge and will

particularly affect the most vulnerable people across the borough. The financial pressures on families will inevitably create wider issues around mental health and feelings of social isolation and therefore any financial support to reduce the impact of financial hardship is essential in the immediate crisis and also into the recovery phase beyond. There will be wider support measures in place around the community and public mental health aspects but the financial assistance will support those who need it most and therefore reduce the impact of further inequalities across marginalised groups.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS [MS 27 March 2020]

44. We are aware as a Council that we have responsibility under Public Sector Equality duty to ensure due regard is shown to communities and individuals with protected characteristics. Each part of the action plan should be considered in light of this responsibility and detail is developed and before it is implemented.

CONSULTATION

45. Numerous senior officers have been consulted including the Chief Executive and Director of Adults, Health and Wellbeing.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

46. None

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

n/a

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