

## WRS Board: 19<sup>th</sup> November 2020

### Information Report: Covid Activity Costings

**Recommendation** | **Members are asked to note the report.**

**Background**

At the October 2020 meeting several members thanked officers for all of the hard work they were doing and suggested that they would like to see additional funding being made available to support the service. The Head of Service explained that the WRS Management Team was giving active consideration to bidding to the Chief Executives for additional resources but that a paper would be brought forward to outline current spending levels on Covid related activity.

**Report**

When the first lockdown commenced at the end of March 2020, it quickly became clear that local authorities were going to incur significant additional costs for work related to controlling the pandemic. The Secretary of State made an announcement declaring that both Environmental Health Officers and Trading Standards Officers would be responsible for enforcement of the business closure and control provisions that required some businesses to close, others to operate by delivery only and moved many hospitality businesses towards takeaway only activities.

Our host authority immediately asked all of its services to record all Covid related activity in order that estimates of cost could be given to central government, in order that support payments might match the actual costs. WRS officers are already required to record the time taken on the majority of their activities, so it was a relatively simple exercise to add some additional coding into our time recording system and to ask officers to use these to record how much time is spent on these activities.

Because we have our fee earner model for charging out our officers for commercial activities it is a very straight forward exercise to convert the figures to a monetary amount that reflects the full cost of the officer undertaking the activities.

The table at appendix A contains the monthly totals, starting in April 2020 for the cost of undertaking Covid related activities on behalf of the six councils and the cost of the team embedded in the Local Outbreak Response Team. Given the nature of the pandemic, we have not sought to allocate these costs geographically to individual partners. This would go against the "One Worcestershire" approach that all seven councils in the County have taken towards tackling the pandemic.



Members will note that these amounts are not insubstantial. The service has been fortunate that the Food Standards Agency opted to put a moratorium on routine food hygiene inspection at the beginning of the pandemic. This has allowed the vast majority of staff resource that would otherwise have been dedicated to food related work to be put into pandemic response.

However, as members will see from this month's activity report, the Summer saw the usual spike in nuisance complaints and at a level equal to or beyond 2018/19. It was certainly much busier than last summer, showing that 2019/20 was simply a blip in the normal levels of nuisance activity. If anything, this summer was exacerbated by more people being at home during the day time with the furlough scheme and working from home being the norm. Limitations of opening for pubs probably led to fewer complaints relating to the night time economy but other alleged nuisances made up for this.

As the economy has re-opened, the service being in essence an economic regulator, so the pressures have grown on the service and its staff. Balancing business as usual activity has become more difficult and additional agency staffing resource has been brought in to support the efforts. This will be funded by the monies due from the County Council to cover the cost our officers who form part of the Local Outbreak Response Team. These pressures will only grow as numbers of cases rise and it is almost certain that more capacity will be required for the service to both deliver pandemic controls and respond to what we all refer to as "business as usual" activities.

The Community Environmental Health team has been re-organised to deliver both Covid controls and an embedded unit within the Local Outbreak Response team. The table below shows how this has been done:

<b>Area of Work</b>	<b>No FTE allocated</b>
<b>Covid Compliance Activities</b>	6.8FTE
<b>Local Outbreak Response Team</b>	3FTE, soon increasing to 4.6FTE
<b>Nuisance and other Business as usual complaints</b>	6FTE
<b>Capacity brought in to support BAU activity</b>	3FTE, soon to be 5FTE

Originally 3 members of the Technical Services team were moved into Community Environmental Health to help deal with capacity issues. They have had to move back into Technical Services to deliver income generation activities.

Work in the Local Outbreak Response team is being funded by monies from the County Council that government has already provided for the disease response. This is covering the cost of the additional capacity brought in to deal with business as usual activities. The County Council is currently awaiting confirmation from Government on further funding bids to provide additional capacity for backwards contact tracing within the Local Outbreak Response Team, for delivery by WRS, and also for dealing with referrals from the national contact tracing system to deal with those people who have a positive test but have not responded to calls from the national system. This is known as "lost to follow up." WRS will pick up this work along with district colleagues to deliver this service aspect, including door knocking where local telephone calls do not lead to a response.



As members will know, WRS has been entrusted with delivering the project referred to nationally as Covid marshals and locally as Covid Advisors. The district councils have pooled this funding for WRS to deliver this advisory work but the funding is also earmarked for additional enforcement work. A proportion of the funding can be used to cover the cost of things like out-of-hours enforcement, so we avoid being short of capacity during the week and additional capacity generally. Work has commenced on recruiting this team and the first deployments will have taken place over the weekend of 7<sup>th</sup>/ 8<sup>th</sup> November.

This report should serve as a reminder to partners that, although many areas of local government are striving to move into Recovery phase, this service remains an embedded part of the Response phase and will be for the medium term. The service will do its best to contribute to the Recovery phase as it did during last year's winter flooding events but members need to be aware that many balls are currently being juggled by the service and we are doing our best not to drop any.

**Contact Point**

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**Appendix A: Table of expenditure on Covid related activities Apr- Oct 2020**

April	£29,482.46
May	£ 20,527.24
June	£30,878.62
July	£37,353.87
August	£21,684.53
September	£27,110.66
October	£36,144.21
<b>Total</b>	<b>£203,181.88</b>

